RECONSTRUCTING THE PARTICIPANTS' TREATMENTS OF 'INTERCULTURALITY': VARIATIONS IN DATA AND METHODOLOGIES

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Abstract

This commentary reviews the five studies of intercultural communication in this special issue by comparing the nature of data analyzed and analytical procedures adopted. The data span from Africa, Asia, to North America, where different cultural, national, or ethnic groups were engaged in different types of social activities; their diversity illustrates how the participants' ascription of, and resistance towards, their cultural, national, or ethnic identities reflect unique features of the sociohistorical contexts and the nature of their activities. In order to investigate such distinct treatments of interculturality, the researchers seek an analytical lens in the frameworks of 'interactional sociolinguistics' (Goffman 1974, 1981; Gumperz 1982, 1992) and 'membership categorization analysis' (Sacks 1972, 1992). The meta-methodological reflection considers the selection of focal phenomena as well as the use of ethnographic information and the researchers' own membership knowledge in the process of interpretation, and addresses the issues concerning how to attain an "emic" perspective of cultural difference and sameness.

Keywords: Intercultural communication; Identities; Interactional sociolinguistics; Membership categorization analysis.

1. Introduction

The rapid progress of globalization and the increased number of diasporas and expatriates in every corner of the world have made 'intercultural' interactions relatively mundane occurrences in workplaces, academia, and entertainment. This change can be seen in altered perspectives towards 'interculturality' among interactional participants, as well as researchers who examine this topic. Rather than viewing 'cultural difference' as a static, essentialized condition that can become a source of misunderstanding, the current special issue organized by Christina Higgins presents a collection of studies that investigate the dynamic processes through which interculturality is constructed, maintained, resisted, or transcended in a variety of interactional contexts by a variety of participants who can be, but need not be, identified by their cultural, national, or ethnic affiliations. In this sense, the current issue follows the direction presented by the 1994 special issue of *Pragmatics* on '*Critical perspectives on intercultural communication*' edited by Michael Meeuwis. As a researcher who has struggled with this theme over the years, I cherish this new special issue as a welcome addition to our ongoing quest, as it introduces data from areas, activities, and populations that have been underrepresented, and offers fresh insights that advance our understanding of the ways in which interculturality is treated by the participants when they engage in talk-in-interaction. Thus, I feel flattered to have been provided with this opportunity to add my two cents to

this truly special issue. In an attempt to complement Higgins's introductory remarks highlighting some common threads found across the articles in the issue, in this commentary, I would like to explore the diversities among these studies concerning their data and analytical procedures, and thereby enhance our appreciation of the participants' as well as the researchers' diverse treatments of interculturality in interaction.

First, the following section will discuss how the participants' treatments of interculturality differ from one study to another. The data analyzed in these articles were collected in different parts of the world, including Africa, Asia, and North America, where different cultural, national, or ethnic groups were engaged in very different types of social activities. Such variations found among the data, including their socio-historical contexts and nature of activities, consequently bring about different significances and functions of the participants' ascription and resistance of their cultural, national, or ethnic identities. Each data set analyzed exhibits its own unique combination of features of participants, settings, and activities, while it also shares some features with data analyzed in another article. The intricate overlaps found among the data analyzed in these studies make the comparisons of their findings valuable; it uncovers what particular features of interactions may most significantly contribute to the ways in which the interculturality is made relevant or irrelevant through the course of interaction for that particular occasion.

Subsequently, the analytical procedures adopted in these articles will be compared. While these researchers can be characterized as advocates of 'inductive analysis of cultural difference through the interpretive analysis of interactions' (Higgins, this issue), their approaches differ from one to another. Even among the researchers who identify their analytical framework to be 'interactional sociolinguistics' (Goffman 1974, 1981; Gumperz 1982, 1992), some differences are found in the ways in which the framework is applied to the data. The same can be said for those who adopted the framework of 'membership categorization analysis' (Sacks 1972, 1992). By comparing their analytical procedures, including the focal phenomena examined in their analyses as well as the ethnographic information used for their analyses, I hope to engage the reader in the meta-methodological reflection of what it means to take "a more emic view of cultural difference and cultural sameness" (Higgins, this issue).

2. Socio-historical contexts, activities and situated identities

The studies included in this special issue demonstrate the participants' differing treatments of, or orientation towards, interculturality during the interactions examined. In some data, the participants' memberships in different cultural, national or ethnic groups are used as a resource for, or are foregrounded in, their accomplishment of the primary activities observed in the data, whereas in others, such identities are treated as irrelevant. These differences, at least partially, reflect the nature of activities that the participants are engaged in and the competing 'situated identities' (Zimmerman 1998) that are invoked by these activities. Further, these differences may stem from the differences in the participants' ethnic identities that are visibly displayed by their appearance in some cases, and therefore can be more readily introduced as a topic of interaction, than in the cases in which there are no observable physical differences that point to ethnic diversity. This section will review the five studies concerning the nature

of the data (see Table 1, which appears on the next page, for the overview), by examining how activities and situated identities, as well as other contextual factors, might affect the participants' treatments of interculturality.

Among the five studies, Cutler's can be considered the one in which the difference between the participants' ethnic identities is most explicitly highlighted. Her data consist of televised MC battles between a White performer and three Black performers. In MC battles, which are 'part of a long oral and musical tradition in the African American community and are closely related to other types of ritual insults such as playing the dozens, snaps, sounds, etc.' (Labov (1972), cited by Cutler), the performers compete by insulting each other with spontaneous rhymes for one minute at a time. Cutler describes how a relatively small number of Whites who participate in the MC battle, where 'Blackness is normative and Whiteness is marked,' must face the challenge that they 'are forced to see themselves through the eyes of Black people' and 'must try to measure up to the standards of authenticity, achievement and knowledge established by the collective of individual who lead the Hip-Hop Nation.'

The long history of racial issues in the US and the reversed minority-majority balance observed in the hip-hop tradition originating in the African American community provide important macro contexts that are indexed by some phenomena observed in the data (e.g., use or non-use of Black English or the term *nigga*), but they are not the only contexts that explain what is observed in the data. The main purpose of this activity, i.e. to insult the opponents as effectively as they can in front of the audience, who serve as judges, also constitutes a significant local context that affects the participants' conduct. As an outsider to this particular culture, I am not familiar with the set-ups of the event, but I understand that unless the competitors have extensive knowledge of their opponents' background ahead of time (and the information has been shared by the audience as well), the easiest way for them to come up with intelligible and effective insults in a short time is to comment on a visibly notable, physical feature of the other party - this must be particularly true for the first round, I presume. One of the most obvious visual features in the case of battles between White and Black competitors is the difference in their skin colors, and thus, their Whiteness versus Blackness seems to be an almost inevitable topic to be raised due to the nature of activity as well.

Table 1. Overview of the data analyzed

	Settings	Cultural, national, or ethnic identities	Primary activities	Situated identities
Cutler	Televised MC Battle held in New York	African American & White American (Visible difference)	• Verbal dueling based on their performance skills that include insulting the other party	• MC • Competitors
Ryoo	Beauty supply store in a mid-western city in the US	Korean immigrants & African American (Visible difference)	• Buying and selling hair care products • Soliciting a radio advertisement	• Shopkeepers & customers • Shopkeepers & advertising sales person
Axelson	MA thesis project at a university in the US	American (East coaster/Midwesterner), Guatemalan, & Japanese (Visible difference)	• Discussing ideas for the project	• Graduate students • Team leaders & team members
Zimmerman	Dinner party/ Workplace in Japan	Japanese and Korean (Non-visible difference)[1]	• Chatting over dinner • Off-task talk during work	• Friends • Colleagues
Higgins	Newspaper office in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania	Ethnically diverse Tanzanians (Non-visible difference)	• Off-task talk during work • Getting back to work	• Co-workers • Journalists

In this article, Cutler focuses on the co-construction of Whiteness, and examines the challenges faced by the White competitor, Eyedea, who has successfully won battles over his Black opponents, and his techniques, which combine the incorporation of hip-hop language and African American English and the adoption of a stance that references

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[1] What I mean by "non-visible difference" is not definitive, but rather relative to the other cases. That is, the visible differences in these cases are subtler than the cases of Blacks versus Whites (Cutler's data) or Blacks versus Asians (Ryoo's data). Some members of these ethnic groups (i.e., Japanese, Korean, or different ethnic groups in Tanzania) may claim that they can tell these groups apart based only on appearance, but their judgment does not always seem accurate.

his Whiteness. The interculturality discussed here is primarily based on the division of White versus Black. However, if we take the perspectives explored in the studies by Ryoo and Higgins, we can also recognize the relevance of other categories being brought up in the course of a battle, including references to New York, Detroit, etc., which are recognized as legitimate places of origin for hip-hop artists, versus those from Minneapolis-St. Paul, i.e., Eyedea's home base, which is not. And of course, by using the common language of hip-hop and demonstrating the shared knowledge of subcultures and celebrities referenced in the rhymes, the competitors (and the audience who watch and can appreciate the battles) can be viewed as co-constructing their shared membership to this hip-hop culture.

Although the data analyzed by Ryoo also involve African American participants and cultural items that are closely associated with them, they show a quite different type of realization of the interculturality than what is observed in Cutler's. According to Jacobs-Huey (2004), cited by Ryoo, 'Hair for African Americans has been closely associated with their racial and ethnic identity, and the unique hair styles and texture of African American hair have long been considered an expression of their culture and heritage.' In the beauty supply store owned by Korean immigrants, however, the situated identities of shopkeepers and customers become more salient than their ethnic identities when they are engaging in the primary activities of buying and selling, or questioning and answering concerning the products. African Americans who come to the shop do not contest or cling onto their ownership of unique styles and texture of African American hairs, but rather, they rely on the shopkeepers' expertise for the appropriate selection of items for purchase.

This sort of mismatch between the participants' cultural/ethnic origins and their expertise in the subject matters that are strongly associated with a particular ethnic group is indeed a fairly common phenomenon (as shown in Zimmerman's data as well). Not all members of an ethnic group are experts in matters typically associated with their group; moreover, there are those who have extended knowledge in, and experiences with, matters associated with groups other than their own. For example, I, for one, often find myself guilty of such ignorance concerning my own cultural heritage in interaction with my non-Japanese colleagues who are experts in Japanese studies. The comparison of Cutler's study and Ryoo's study, thus, clarifies further the specificity of Cutler's data. Namely, in the situation where African American competitors, as experts of the hip-hop culture rooted in their community, are performing in a televised show that warrants insulting the other party, the reference to their Blackness in contrast with the opponent's Whiteness becomes something to be used as a resource for the battle as well as something to be defended through the battle.

It is not the case, however, that the participants' ethnic identities are unnoticed, or treated as irrelevant, throughout Ryoo's data. Obviously, in shopping for products that are uniquely designed for African Americans, the customers are making their ethnic identities relevant for the service encounter talk. But what Ryoo emphasizes is the fact that the shopkeepers' ethnic identity is not foregrounded in the interaction as much as their identity as experts of the products, and hence, the interaction is not treated as 'intercultural' but rather as a service encounter. On the other hand, Ryoo also presents two cases in the latter half of the paper, in which the shop owner's ethnic identity is made relevant by himself, or by the other party. The first case involves the reversal of seller-buyer relationship where the customer begins to sell a radio ad to the shop owner, while the second case involves small talk inserted in the talk about products. In both

cases, the relevance of the shop owner's professional identity is momentarily kept on hold while his ethnic identity becomes more salient. What is noticeable in both cases is that the categorization invoked is not that of 'Koreans,' a specific national group to which the shop owner belongs, but a broadly defined category of 'East Asians' who share similar physical appearances. In the first case, it is the shop owner who places himself in that category by introducing the names of Chinese and Chinese-American celebrities as his and his son's fake names. In a way that is similar to the cases observed in Cutler's study, the participants' membership to a particular group is referenced by the names of well-known figures representing the group. The purpose of using this tactic in this case, however, is to conceal his true identity by making a joke. Introducing names that can be recognized, and considered passable as his and his son's fake names by his African American co-participant is more crucial than introducing some fake Korean names which may not be recognized by the co-participants. In the second case, on the other hand, the association of the shop owner's appearance and the category 'Asian' (rather than 'Korean') is made by the customer, and is brought into their interaction when the shop owner refers to his 'best friend.' On this occasion, the shop owner corrects the co-participant's inaccurate conjecture by clearly identifying himself as a Korean, not a Japanese.[2] As discussed later in this section, this issue of how narrowly or broadly one defines cultural, national, and ethnic categorizations to refer to one's own membership at a given moment comes up in Zimmerman's and Higgins's studies as well.

Like Cutler and Ryoo, Axelson also studies interactions in which the differences in the participants' physical appearances suggest that their affiliations with different ethnic groups are apparent. Unlike the other participants in the data analyzed in these three studies, however, the Japanese participant in Axelson's data, Hideki, is a relatively new member of the broadly defined speech community of American English. We do not know how long the Korean participants in Ryoo's data had been in the US, but given that they are described as 'immigrants' who manage a store, their experiences in the US could be considerably more than those of Hideki's. Julio, another non-native participant in Axelson's data, 'had spent considerable time in the US and was married to an American,' as well. His lack of extensive experience in the US makes Hideki not only an ethnically distinct member, but also a non-native speaker of English who had not yet developed a sound proficiency of spoken English nor an extensive knowledge of a set of culturally specific practices for his academic context.

Hideki's level of oral proficiency and his limited experience in the US, however, is not the only cause of his non-participation or marginalization. Judging from the transcripts provided in Ryoo's study, the Korean participants in her data might not have very advanced oral proficiency in English either, but their knowledge of products and situated identity of being sellers help them to actively engage in interaction (cf. Zuengler and Bent 1991). In a recent study, Sunaoshi (2005) also introduces interactions between Japanese technical supporters and American workers observed on the production floor in a Japanese owned die company in the US. Despite their low English proficiency and brief experience with living in the US, the Japanese participants manage to accomplish their tasks thanks to their technical knowledge, situated identity of being

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[2] As I will touch upon later, the shop owner's clarification of his identity as Korean, as opposed to Japanese, might be partly due to the historical and political contexts between the two nations. Whether or not to make such a link between the microanalysis of interaction and the macro context depends on what kind of framework a researcher chooses to employ, as discussed in the next section.

an instructor, as well as the availability of non-verbal resources including the display of physical objects that are topics of interaction. The nature of the group thesis project studied by Axelson, on the other hand, does not provide Hideki with such advantages as a socially warranted differential status or concrete objects such as beauty supplies or equipments and materials to work with. According to Axelson, Hideki does have a good amount of experience and knowledge that can be shared to improve the quality of the project, and the interview data reveal that the other participants acknowledge this fact as well. However, the information and opinions that Hideki can contribute to the group project may not be viewed as essential for the accomplishment of the project, in contrast to those that the Korean participants in Ryoo's data or the Japanese participants in Sunaoshi's data have for the respective tasks of buying-selling or instructing techniques. Another comparison can be made between the data analyzed by Axelson and those studied by Mori (2003) and Mori and Hayashi (2006). Although all of these studies involve American and Japanese university students who can be viewed as having fairly equal statuses, the data analyzed by Mori (2003) and Mori and Hayashi (2006) consist of interactions taking place at a weekly conversation table where the primary purposes of interaction are language practices and cultural exchanges. This objective supports the Japanese students' active participation in the activity. In contrast, in the data analyzed by Axelson, the accomplishment of the thesis project is the most significant matter in hand, and the cultural exchange, though it might be viewed as desirable, tends to be treated as secondary. Thus, along with Hideki's limited English proficiency and limited experience in the community, neither the primary purpose of the activity that involves complex abstract ideas nor the situated identities invoked by the activity seem to provide favorable conditions that encourage his active participation. In other words, what seems to matter most in this case is not necessarily his affiliation with a particular cultural or ethnic group, but rather his inability to become, and be treated as, a full participant in this community of American graduate students (cf. Lave and Wenger 1991).

The data analyzed by Zimmerman present an interesting contrast with Axelson's as they involve international students studying abroad in Japan. Unlike Hideki in Axelson's data, however, the Korean students studying in Japan are characterized as "highly advanced learners of Japanese," and seem to be have been part of the community for some time, not only studying but also engaging in part-time work. Further, unlike the Korean immigrant shopkeepers in Ryoo's data, these Korean students are living in Japan, where their distinct national, ethnic identities are not revealed just from their appearances. It is also notable that the two neighboring countries, Korea and Japan, are perceived to share certain similarities in their cultural practices. Indeed, the topics of conversations demonstrated in Zimmerman's data appear to indicate the participants' orientations to their concerns with the differences and similarities between these two East Asian cultures.

What also distinguishes Zimmerman's data from those of the other three studies discussed so far is the fact that there are no particular situated identities related to the accomplishment of activities (such as competitors, buyers and sellers, group members working on a joint project) invoked in the interactions. Rather, Zimmerman's analysis reveals how the participants' selection of topics during mundane interaction and their contributions to the development of talk on the selected topics may or may not invoke their cultural and ethnic identities. The difference between Zimmerman's first excerpt and the latter two can be described with regard to the contextual features such as a

dinner party versus workplace, or talk among friends versus talk among colleagues who belong to different generations. However, another notable difference is the statuses of the participants' knowledge regarding each other's culture. That is, in the former, the difference in the participants' knowledge concerning what kind of *kimuchi,* Korean pickled vegetables, is served in Korean restaurants, and how it is served, formulate the overall participation structure of the Korean informers and the Japanese unknowing recipients of new information. On the other hand, in the latter excerpts, the Japanese participants who have traveled to Korea inform their Korean co-participants of their observations of cultural differences in packaging of sweets and snacks and the conducting of a wake, to which the Korean co-participants can present their agreement or disagreement as people who have also experienced both cultures.

Cases like the latter prompt an interesting question as to how the difference in the participants' nationalities would matter for the interaction - couldn't all the participants be categorized as those who have experienced both cultures and are in the position of making observations of their differences from a 'third' place (cf. Bhabha 1994; Kramsch 1993), rather than being divided into two parties based on their nationalities? This is precisely the kind of question that the participants seem to face in such situations. The cultural differences can be discussed without attaching any evaluative judgment determining which is better or worse. By constructing a description of difference that insinuates prejudice or superiority, or by interpreting the other party's description of difference as negative, the participants may end up instantiating difference. On the other hand, by describing the differences in more objective terms and interpreting the others' statements as such, the participants may be able to treat themselves as members of a transcultural community who objectively appreciate the differences between the two cultures. The macro social-historical contexts surrounding these Japanese and Korean participants, which Zimmerman does not (perhaps purposefully) mention in this article, tend to provide researchers with interpretive frameworks that emphasize unhappy divisions and conflicts between these two nationalities.[3] However, instead of starting the investigation with such assumptions, Zimmerman explicates how the participants work out their differences and similarities in their mundane conversations while aligning or disaligning with each other.

Like Zimmerman's study, Higgins's study also examines how sameness and difference are highlighted in interactions among the members of a community that can be defined based on the participants' nationality as Tanzanians, or their professional identity as journalists. Her analysis of the first excerpt conveys that the participants' construct their togetherness not only because of their shared national or professional identities, but also because of their shared negative stance towards the population of Tanzanians who uncritically accept, or even relish, Westernization. Although Higgins's data were collected in a workplace, i.e., a newspaper office, this particular excerpt does not present any notable features that associate this interaction with the professional activities or identities associated with the setting. That is, this sort of conversation criticizing soccer players, rappers, or youths in general can take place anywhere outside of the office space. In the second excerpt, however, the participants make a transition from the earlier 'off-task' talk back to the work-related talk concerning the availability

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[3] See Tai (1996), for instance, for a different approach taken in the study of interactions between Japanese and Taiwanese residents in Japan, where the difference between the ethnic groups is also not apparent and the latter attempts to pass as a native on occasions.

of a computer in the office space. In this new sequence, in which one of the members, Mosi, is criticized for his continuous use of an office computer for the purpose other than writing stories, the primary task required of the journalists, different sets of categorizations are invoked, including the attribution of Mosi's seemingly stubborn and hostile attitude to his membership in a particular ethnic group within Tanzania. Mosi, however, denies the relevance of his membership to the ethnic group by re-attributing that particular attitude to his membership in the younger generation instead.

What is observed in Higgins's data in a way resonates the findings reported by Cutler in that the participants develop a critique of the other party based on the other's membership to a cultural or ethnic group different from their own. Higgins's data also contrast with those of Ryoo's in that the 'on-task' talk, or the transition into the 'on task' phase, is where the ethnification manifests in Higgins's data, while the 'off-task' talk is where the interculturality becomes salient in Ryoo's data.

In summary, these articles introduce a wide variety of contexts in which the participants from a variety of cultural, national, or ethnic backgrounds interact with each other. Among them, we can detect similarities as well as differences in 1) how the participants treat the interculturality as relevant or irrelevant at a given moment of interaction; 2) how they define and co-construct their cultural difference and sameness through interactions; and 3) how their membership in different cultural, national, ethnic groups can serve as a resource, or an obstacle, for the accomplishment of primary activities. The range of data and findings presented in this special issue reminds us of the fact that 'intercultural interaction' cannot, and should not, be understood as a monolithic entity. Rather, interculturality is something that is realized in a specific manner at each moment, during each activity, and by each set of participants. The current issue successfully demonstrates the diversity and uniqueness observed in mundane and professional interactions in the era of globalization, and the collection compellingly encourages additional studies that investigate how interculturality is, or is not, manifested in other types of interactions and among other types of participants.

3. Analytical procedures for reconstructing the participants' perspectives

As mentioned repeatedly throughout this special issue, what the authors of these articles aim to accomplish is to account for how the participants' memberships in different cultural, national, and ethnic groups are, or are not, brought bear on in the course of interaction. Such an approach to the study of interculturality, which follows the work of Antaki and Widdicombe (1998), Day (1994, 1998), Koole and ten Thije (2001), Meeuwis (1994), Mori (2003), Nishizaka (1995, 1999), Sarangi (1994), Shea (1994), among others, sharply contrasts with other traditions in which cultural differences are assumed to be given factors that account for various phenomena observed in interactions - typically misunderstandings. The objective granted, the issue is how to go about reconstructing each participant's perspectives at each moment of interaction, while not misinterpreting or over-interpreting his or her intentions, as well as not under-analyzing observable features of his or her verbal and non-verbal conduct.

As summarized in Table 2, below, these authors state that they employ either 'interactional sociolinguistics' (IS) (e.g. Gumperz 1982, 1992) or 'membership categorization analysis' (MCA) (e.g. Sacks 1972, 1992). These two frameworks share some origin in sociology, most notably the work of Goffman, one of the pioneering

researchers who initiated the systematic study of everyday life and prompted the subsequent accomplishment of empirical investigation of the relationship between interaction, context, and culture. However, IS and MCA also differ in their aims and focuses.

IS, which was first developed primarily by Gumperz, an anthropological linguist, and his colleagues and students, aims to demonstrate how the interactional participants use the combination of symbolic signs that convey information and indexical signs that evoke the relevance of particular contextual features and situated inferences, to achieve their communicative intents and to interpret those of the others. Indexical signs called 'contextualization cues' include code-switching, phonetic enunciation, prosody and other suprasegmental signs, whereas contextual features evoked by such signs include those of the interactional setting where they are interacting, an activity that they are engaging in, an action that they are performing at the moment, or the situated identities of the participants, among others. As acknowledged by Axelson (this issue), IS, as an approach to the study of intercultural communication, has been criticized for its "overemphas[is] [on] the explanatory power of 'contextualization cues' in relation to understanding 'culture'" (Sarangi 1994: 411), its 'obscure [treatment of] discriminatory social attitudes and practices which unfairly marginalize NNSs' (Shea 1994: 357) and its 'limit[ed] scope of explanations and causes to what materializes at the surface levels of the immediate interactional structure" (Meeuwis 1994: 403). However, the studies in this issue that adopt IS attempt to respond to these critiques by not assuming the existence of culturally distinct interpretive practices as an exclusive account and by taking other factors that shape the interaction into consideration.

MCA, on the other hand, was originally conceptualized by Sacks (1972, 1992), a student of Goffman as well as Garfinkel (1967), as a part of ethnomethodological tradition, and has been further developed by his followers, who are primarily sociologists. MCA's focus is on how membership categorizations (i.e., how members of society are categorized (e.g., babies)), membership categorization devices (i.e., how a category is considered tightly related to another category (e.g., babies and mothers)), and category-bound activities (i.e., how an activity is expected to be bound to a particular category of members (e.g., crying and babies)) are used, invoked, and inferred by the participants engaging in interaction. Through the examination of these elements, MCA attempts to uncover 'the underlying rules of inference observed in naturally occurring interaction' (Lepper 2000: 15), or the 'presumed commonsense knowledge of social structures' which members of society are oriented to in accomplishing social activities and actions in interaction (Hester and Eglin 1997: 134). Given that the instigator of MCA, Sacks, also built the foundations of conversation analysis (CA), which aims at the discovery of social orders and members' competence through the meticulous observation of the ways in which conversational turns and sequences are organized, it appears that his original intention was to conceive both the sequential and categorizational aspects of social interaction inform each other. However, since Sacks's passing in 1975, the developments of these two forms of inquiry have taken noticeably separate paths followed by different sets of researchers (cf. Hester and Eglin 1997), while some still attempt to combine the two (e.g. Halkowski 1990; Marlaire and Maynard 1990; Maynard and Zimmerman 1984; Schegloff 2005).

Table 2. Overview of the analytical procedures employed

	Analytical Frameworks	Focal Features analyzed	Ethnographic/ Contextual Information
Cutler (video)	Interactional socio-linguistics (Goffman)	· Phonological features representing Black and White versions of English · Address term/discourse marker (*nigga, cat, Black*) · References to Whiteness and Blackness	· Literature review of historical developments and ground rules of the MC Battle · American cultural literacy
Higgins (video)	Membership categorization analysis (Sacks)	· References to category bound activities · Alternational codeswitching versus insertional codeswitching · References to one of the participant's ethnic identity	· Descriptions of the participants' educational, professional, and linguistic backgrounds and their job requirements
Ryoo (video/ audio)	Ethnographic approach to discourse analysis in the framework of interactional sociolinguistics (Goffman, Gumperz)	· Laymen's terms and experts' terms used to describe beauty supplies · References to Asian-ness	· Interviews with the participants · Observation notes
Zimmerman (audio)	Membership categorization analysis (Sacks)	· References to cultural differences and the demonstration of the participants' expertise in their own or the others' culture	· Descriptions of the participants' backgrounds including their language proficiency and relationship with each other
Axelson (audio/ video)	Critical interactional sociolinguistics (↔ 'traditional interactional sociolinguistics' (Gumperz))	· Use of vocatives · Participation patterns	· Descriptions of the contexts of the activities and the participants' backgrounds · Interviews with the participants (with or without playbacks of the recorded interactions)

To sum up, both of these two frameworks explore the participants' sense-making process and their identities referenced, indexed, or invoked in the process, but they tend to focus on different parts of the participants' knowledge or competence that come into effect in the process, namely those concerning indexical signs versus those concerning social structures and categorizations. The researchers featured in this special issue, however, appear to take rather eclectic or inclusive approaches in their studies, by bringing in both of these perspectives despite their stated association with one framework or the other.

For instance, Cutler, who identifies her framework as IS, examines how different varieties of English are used to index the speakers' affiliation with a certain ethnic group or their membership in hip hop culture. But she also pays attention to the ways in which the participants categorize each other in the MC battle through their references to each other's Whiteness or Blackness, or activities bound to respective categories. Higgins, on the other hand, elaborates on her use of MCA in explicating how different sets of membership categories and category-bound activities come into effect for highlighting the sameness or difference among the Tanzanian journalists. But she also refers to the transition from insertional codeswitching to alternational codeswitching, which corresponds to the shift in categorizations. Her description of features of these different types of codeswitching and their effects in evoking the relevance of different contextual features corresponds to a common approach taken in IS. These two studies, thus, can be considered similar in that they both try to account for linguistic features as well as categorizations that are utilized for creating the relevance or irrelevance of interculturality.

Likewise, Ryoo and Zimmerman can be seen as similar in their analytical focuses despite the difference in their stated frameworks of IS (Ryoo) and MCA (Zimmerman). In both studies, the participants' references to matters that can be associated with their respective ethnic identities and their demonstration of expert knowledge regarding those matters are highlighted in their analysis more than other linguistic and paralinguistic features of the participants' talk that can serve as contextualization cues. The analysis of focal phenomena helps the authors develop coherent and convincing arguments with regard to the relevance or irrelevance of the interculturality in the interactions studied. However, the examination of other features of talk might have led to some further discoveries of dynamic processes of indexing the participants' identities. For instance, the use of address terms such as 'baby,' 'beautiful lady,' 'sweetie,' 'sir,' etc. observed in Ryoo's data caught my attention. By applying the kind of analysis shown in Cutler's study to Ryoo's data, we may be able to uncover other sorts of contextualization operating in these interactions between Korean shopkeepers and African American customers.

Unlike the four studies mentioned so far, Axelson does not refer to membership categorizations or related notions in her analysis, but rather she focuses her attention to the use of vocatives as a contextualization cue and examines their functions concerning the initiation and solicitation of Hideki's participation. What also distinguishes Axelson's study from the rest is her extensive and explicit use of ethnographic interviews that she conducted with the participants.[4] Responding to the aforementioned

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[4] Ryoo also conducted interviews with the participants to gain information regarding the products or the relationships among the participants. Higgins (2004), which is the basis of her article in this volume,

critique of IS raised by Shea (1994), Axelson describes what is going on in interaction by triangulating her interpretation of the recorded interaction with the results of her interviews and detailed description of the aim and structure of this thesis project for which the participants were collaborating. By doing so, she attempts to examine the data bringing in some critical perspectives to account for how stereotyping and marginalization of minority members might be co-constructed by the participants.

To sum up, some studies focus on the use of particular kinds of contextualizations cues, while others explicate the use of membership categorizations, or combine both of these elements in their investigation. Viewed from the perspective of a person who received training in CA, however, what seems to be under-analyzed in all these studies are the detailed manners in which each turn is constructed and placed with respect to the development of a particular sequence. Further, even though many of these studies claim that they video-recorded the interactions examined, the explication of visual information available in the video is close to none in their analysis. For instance, in Axelson's study that examines the participation patterns of Hideki and the other members, the visual information must have provided critical further information regarding the management of each member's participation. Various functions accomplished by the use of the vocatives described in Axelson's study could be accomplished by the use of other resources including gaze directions, posture shifts, seating arrangements, or the nomination of particular topics that enables tacit addressing aimed at a participant whose identity is tied to the topic (cf. Goodwin 1981; Lerner 1993, 2003; Mori 2003). The analysis of alternative methods used for the same effect, including the use of non-verbal means, should enhance our understanding of a range of resources available for the participants to make their own contributions to the interaction as well as to interpret the others' contributions.

Another aspect that I find little explored in these studies is the researchers' introspection of their own interpretive processes. How much do researchers rely on their own commonsense knowledge and competence when they conduct an interpretive analysis? Do the knowledge and competence of the researchers that aided their interpretation during their analytical process duplicate those of the participants that aided their own interpretation during the actual interaction? If these two sets of knowledge and competence diverge, how should the researchers fill the gap? These are critical questions that concern both the practitioners of IS and those of MCA since any researcher needs to rely on his or her own commonsense knowledge and competence, at least when he or she takes the initial stab at the data. In fact, Gumperz (1999: 463) describes the process that he goes through to interpret a particular excerpt of interaction by saying, 'my interpretations relied on my ability to retrieve the background knowledge necessary to construct possible scenarios or environments, or in some instances to intertextually recall specific expressions in terms of which the speakers' words made sense.' Even for CA, which is generally considered to encourage researchers to stick closely to the meticulous observation of what is hearable and visible

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also discusses ethnographic interview procedures that she employed in her research. However, their ways of incorporating the information gained through the interview seem different than Axelson's approach. That is, Ryoo and Higgins use the information regarding the participants, activities, and contexts gained through the interviews as something that can assist them to understand what is going on in recorded interaction. Axelson, on the other hand, makes more explicit connections between what she sees in the recorded interactions with what the participants said about the relationship among themselves, and she uses the latter as a part of supporting evidence for constructing her analysis.

in recorded data and to discourage them from bringing external information into the analysis, the commonsense knowledge of the analysts as members of the culture where interactions analyzed take place is considered essential for its analytical process (e.g. Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998; ten Have 1999). Schegloff, interviewed by Wong and Olsher (2000: 115) on CA's potentials in the study of interactions involving nonnative speakers, also affirms this idea by saying, 'I basically think that people ought to work on materials in a language and culture that they're native members of, so that all the native intuitions, whatever those are, are mobilized.' In addition, a gap in the commonsense knowledge and competence may exist not only between the participants and the researchers, but also between the researchers and the audience who reads the research reports in journals such as this one, an audience which consists of members of an international academic community coming from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and interacting primarily in English. This, too, presents a common challenge for researchers of interactions, especially those who work with languages other than English.

In order to illustrate these issues, I would like to end this section by discussing several alternative interpretations of the following excerpt analyzed by Day (1998) (and re-introduced by Higgins in this issue), which have been offered to me by people who read his article. In this segment of interaction, the three colleagues in a Swedish company, Lars, Rita, and Xi, are discussing their plan for an upcoming party. The original conversation was conducted in Swedish, but what is introduced here is its English translation provided by Day (1998):

(1) Party planning (Day 1998: 162)

	51	L:	don't we have something that, one can eat
	52		that, China or
	53	R:	Chinese food is really pretty good
→	54	X:	ha ha ( ) it doesn't matter, I'll eat anything
	55	R:	ah (that's [what I that)
	56	L:	[yeah, but this concerns everyone,
	57		doesn't it?

To provide a succinct summary, Day (1998) describes what is going on in this excerpt in terms of Lars's making the ethnic identity of Xi, the Chinese participant, relevant by suggesting Chinese food for the upcoming party, and Xi's dismissing the relevance of the ethnic category by rejecting the suggestion.

When this article was discussed in a graduate seminar I taught, one student, who happens to be a Chinese herself, raised an objection to this account offered by Day. According to her interpretation, Xi might not have taken this suggestion of Chinese food as being particularly relevant to her. Rather, she was simply saying that she could eat anything, including Chinese, or she was suggesting that she would prefer to leave the decision up to the others. This interpretation still supports the idea that Xi dismisses the relevance of her ethnicity for the decision-making, but differs from Day's account, since Day claims that Lars' response to Xi's turn indicates that Lars took Xi's response as her not wanting Chinese food.

When I shared this episode of seminar discussion with my American husband, he offered yet another interpretation of this excerpt. According to him, Xi's ethnicity

might not have been a reason for Lars's suggestion to start with. And like the Chinese graduate student, he thinks that Xi was saying 'literally' that anything would be fine with her. His account for Lars' turn in lines 56-57 was that Lars was frustrated with Xi's 'typically Asian,' noncommittal response of 'anything would be fine' or 'either way' at the time of joint decision-making.[5]

All these interpretations appear to reflect at least partially the interpreters' own past experience with similar circumstances. Or to put it differently, the interpretive process was aided by their application of their own knowledge, experience, and expectations of how one would or should behave in such a circumstance, which may or may not be affected by their cultural backgrounds. As discussed above, the initial observation of the data may be naturally aided by the interpreters' own experience and knowledge, and this may lead to different interpretations of the participants' intents. While all of these interpretations sound plausible to a certain degree, it cannot be that all these interpretations, which in some ways contradict each other, explain what these participants actually experienced. From such an initial stage of interpretation, then, one needs to inquire how he or she arrived at such an interpretation and why that particular interpretation can be the one that represents the participants' own view, and presents evidence in support of its affirmation beyond reasonable doubt. How and where, then, can such evidence be gathered?

One common approach is to interview the participants to obtain more information for developing interpretations, or to confirm the accuracy of already developed interpretations, as demonstrated by Axelson and, to a lesser degree, by Ryoo in this issue. Especially for researchers working with data that involve culture and language other than their own, the commonsense knowledge and competence that they may not share with the participants of interaction needs to be compensated by working closely with native informants as suggested by Moerman (1988). While the interview approach can provide some critical additional information not shown in the recorded data available, some caution must be exercised in incorporating the participants' or other native informants' accounts delivered during such an interview. That is, the participants themselves may not remember what exactly were in their mind at each moment of interaction, or the other native informants, who are supposedly the members of the same community as the participants, may impose their own belief, which may or may not be shared by the participants. Further, the researchers' questions may alter their understanding of the event, depending on the ways in which the questions are formulated. Indeed, such an interview itself constitutes another occasion of what can be perceived as 'intercultural interaction' where the difference in linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the researchers and those of the participants may affect the ways in which the information is conveyed, or rather, co-constructed.

Another approach is to explicate, in as much detail as possible, various observable features of the participants' verbal and nonverbal behaviors that point to a particular interpretation of the data. In the aforementioned interview, Schegloff also shares an episode in which his close examination of Korean data presented by a student from Korea led him to speculate about the existence of a particular cultural practice, which is relevant to the ways in which the participants interact with each other in the

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[5] What led him to this interpretation might be his own judgment developed through extensive experience in interacting with his Asian wife and her friends and relatives, or his exposure to "how-to" books and articles referring to such a stereotype, i.e., the exact kind of argument that this special issue attempts to question.

data. The speculation became available through the systematic observation of data aided by CA techniques, despite his lack of knowledge concerning Korean language and culture. The viability of the speculation was later confirmed by the student, who is a native of the culture.

Coming back to the excerpt introduced by Day, the key element of his interpretation of the data is the categorization of Xi as a member of the Chinese ethnic group via the suggestion of Chinese food. In the English version of the transcript, which is the only material accessible for the audience who are not familiar with Swedish, however, the precise manners of delivery of each turn which might have led Day to arrive at this conclusion are not available. The detailed explication of particular features of turns, including not only linguistic formulations, but also prosody, manners of laughter, facial expressions, gaze directions, gestures, postures, and other non-verbal conduct accompanying each turn, would have perhaps provided further evidence that confirms the ethnification and its dismissal discussed by Day and convinced the readers who do not have much knowledge of Swedish.

Another piece of information critical for the account presented by Day appears to be how exotic or unusual it is for people in Sweden, or more specifically, for the participants in this interaction to eat Chinese food. For my student and my husband, who are living in an American university town filled with various ethnic food restaurants, eating Chinese might not be considered an activity as exclusively bound to the particular ethnic group as Day seems to imply in his analysis. For them, Chinese food may appear to be an ordinary option for their daily cuisine and may seem a reasonable option for a party regardless of the presence or absence of Chinese people at the planning or at the party. And if so, it is not because Xi may be taken as Chinese that put her into the position of providing an acceptance or rejection of Lars's suggestion, but it is because she has not yet expressed her response to the suggestion that makes her taking a turn relevant in that situation. It might be the case, however, that in Sweden, or among this group of coworkers, it is rather unusual to select Chinese food for a party, and if so, the relevance of Xi's ethnic identity seems to matter more for what is going on the interaction.[6] Namely, how some of the categorizations and category-bound activities are defined, applied, and interpreted in interaction may differ from one community to another, and such a difference can make it rather challenging for an analyst or the reader to simply rely on his or her commonsense to understand what is going on in an interaction. Indeed, Schegloff (1992: xlii) warns against "an unelaborated invocation of some vernacularly based assertion (i.e., that some activity was bound to some category) as an element of an account on the investigator's authority, without deriving from it any analytic pay-off other than the claimed account for the data which motivates its introduction in the first place.' That is, in Schegloff's view, the relevance of categories and category-bound activities has to be always supported by other observable features of the participants' conduct and the sequential development of interaction.

To sum up, this special issue showcases different analytical procedures employed by researchers of 'intercultural' interactions, especially those representing IS and MCA. Aiming at the common goal of reconstructing the participants' perspectives, the challenges faced by these researchers include how to fill a potential gap between the

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[6] In fact, it makes an interesting exercise to see what kind of interpretation one may draw if 'Chinese food' is changed to 'Italian food' in the transcript, or if the third participant's name is changed from 'Xi' to 'Giovanna.'

participants' and the researchers' knowledge and competence that influence their respective interpretations and how to present the data and analysis in a manner accessible to the audience who also may not share the same kinds of membership knowledge.

4. Conclusion

This commentary reviewed the five studies included in this special issue by comparing the nature of data analyzed and analytical procedures adopted. The comparison of these studies, I hope, has yielded a clearer grasp of diverse factors affecting the construction of interculturality in interaction and its effects; I also hope it has enhanced the appreciation of common challenges faced by the researchers of this sort of data. While the special issue focuses on, and highlights, how the relevance or irrelevance of the participants' cultural, national, and ethnic identities is treated in interaction, it must not be forgotten that this special attention to the issue of interculturality reflects the researchers' analytic interests, and that there are other considerations that affect the participants' conduct, as shown in some of the excerpts introduced in the issue. An analytical focus is necessary for researchers to develop consistent arguments in their research reports, but the selected attention can also hinder the researchers from appreciating the totality of interaction experienced by the participants. Managing the balance between these two competing agendas, I think, is what needs to be pursued in an inductive, interpretive analysis of the emic view.

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