

---

---

---

# *Cultus*

THE JOURNAL OF INTERCULTURAL  
MEDIATION AND COMMUNICATION

---

IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION 2010, Volume 3

Iconesoft Edizioni  
Terni - Italy

---

Registrazione al Tribunale di Terni  
n. 11 del 24.09.2007

Direttore Responsabile Agostino Quero  
Editore Iconesoft Edizioni  
Finito di stampare da Tipografia Vighi & Rizzoli - Bologna  
nel mese di dicembre 2010  
ISSN 2035-3111

© *Iconesoft Edizioni – Gruppo Eurosan Italia srl*  
*via Garibaldi 89 – 05100 Terni*

La realizzazione di questo volume è stata resa possibile grazie al  
contributo dei *Monti dei Paschi di Siena* in collaborazione con  
*l'Università del Salento*



---

# CULTUS

*the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*

2010, Volume 3

IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION

*Editors*

*David Katan*

*University of Salento and University of Trieste*

*Elena Manca*

*University of Salento*

*Cinzia Spinzi*

*University of Bologna*

ICONESOFT EDIZIONI

TERNI

---

# CULTUS

*the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*

## Editorial Board

Michael Agar

*Ethknoworks LLC and University of Maryland, College Park, USA*

Patrick Boylan

*University of Roma 3 and SIETAR*

Andrew Chesterman

*University of Helsinki, Finland*

Delia Chiaro

*University of Bologna (SSLMIT), Forlì, Italy*

Nigel Ewington

*WorldWork Ltd, Cambridge, England*

Maria Grazia Guido

*University of Salento, Italy*

Raffaella Merlini

*University of Macerata, Italy*

Robert O'Dowd

*IALIC and University of León, Spain.*

Anthony Pym

*Intercultural Studies Group, Universidad Rovira I Virgili, Tarragona, Spain*

Helen Spencer-Oatey

*University of Warwick, England*

---

Federica Scarpa  
*University of Trieste*

Christopher Taylor  
*AICLU and University of Trieste, Italy*

David Trickey  
*TCO s.r.l., International Diversity Management, Bologna, Italy*

Margherita Ulrych  
*University of Milan, Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Italy*



---

## Table of Contents

Foreword	8
To be or to be perceived? Identity and Integration: an Introduction <i>Cinzia Spinzi</i>	9
A conversation on cultural identity and integration <i>Milton Bennett interviewed by Patrick Boylan</i>	17
A Bourdieusian Perspective on Identity and its Role in Second Language Acquisition <i>Niamh Kelly</i>	45
<i>Habitus</i> , self-identity, and positioning: The multifarious nature of study abroad <i>Jane Jackson</i>	65
Subliminal Messaging in Multimodal Newspaper Editing The case of the 2008 US Presidential Election on the Front Pages of the <i>New York Times</i> and the <i>Washington Post</i> <i>Anna Bianco</i>	79
MEDIATING Italy: the construction of Silvio Berlusconi's identity <i>M. Cristina Caimotto</i>	99
Negotiating LBGT identities in Italy: an intercultural perspective <i>Franco Zappettini</i>	115
Hofstede's cultural dimensions: Italian national identity in ELF usage <i>Costanza Cucchi</i>	137
Notes on contributors	159
Guidelines for contributors	163

---

## FOREWORD

Welcome to issue 3 of *Cultus, the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*. This volume focuses on *Identity and Integration* and forms the leitmotif for Patrick Boylan's interview with the interculturalist Milton Bennett. More than just an interview it is an exchange of points of view, an animated conversation full of practical examples, personal contributions and experience which support the theoretical frameworks discussed.

Apart from the opening interview, this issue offers a range of contributions, which we have grouped into a Bordieusian view of "Second Language Acquisition", manipulation by and through the media in "Identity and the Media"; and finally, Hofstede's theory is put to the test in determining the extent to which cultural values play a part in "Identity and Integration".

As ever, we wish to express our gratitude to the members of our editorial board who have all acted as referees for the numerous proposals submitted to our journal, and we would also like to thank those colleagues not on the editorial board who also kindly accepted to referee papers submitted for this issue.

*The Editors*



---

# To be or to be perceived? Identity and Integration: an Introduction.

*Cinzia Spinzi*

## 1. Framing the issue

The last few years have witnessed an important growth in research on identity which has by now “attained a remarkable centrality within the human and social sciences” (Du Gay et al., 2000: 1). So, one may wonder why another collection of studies on the same topic. Firstly, it still remains “an extremely complex construct” (De Fina, 2003: 15) which fundamentally alters with time, culture and ideology (Caldas-Coulthard et al. 2009); secondly, any attempt to define it fails not only because of its composite nature but also because it is an ever-changing construct, not forgetting the tensions that emerge from ‘subjective and projected identities’ (see Lemke, 2008: 20). The shift today is from the essentialist approach to identity, as a relatively stable sense of self internal to an individual (see Erikson, 1968), to a more shared social-constructivist perspective. This latter orientation looks at identity in terms of process or better of results from negotiations between individuals, and highlights the importance of social action (Berger et al. 1967; De Fina, 2003). For Riley, the meeting between actors or, as he calls it, “the ability to establish intersubjectivity”, is even “a necessary condition for the formation of identity” (2007: 33). This view acquires crucial importance in a globalized world where migrations and new technologies require interaction across cultures.

In the 1960s, media scholar Marshall McLuhan (1962) coined the phrase ‘global village’, to encompass the idea, revolutionary at that time, of a shrinking world, where an event in one part of the world may be experienced in another part in real time. This implies a continuous coming into contact with the unfamiliar, with an alien (Bourdiesian) *field*, yielding more and more uncertain identities. Indeed, in order to be successful, intercultural communication requires adaptation and accommodation to new external stimuli, raising the question of assimilation (or otherwise) of the values of the other by claiming or not

---

other identities. Stated differently, does intercultural interaction necessitate a shift in identity and accordingly, does it imply the co-existence of multiple identities?

Against such a complex backdrop, the interview opening this volume sets out to determine if a Bourdieusian transformation or new identity construction is a necessary process when training or communicating interculturally. These and many more questions are posed to the interculturalist Milton Bennett by a provocative Patrick Boylan, starting with the crucial issue, related to Bennett's personal experiences, of mutually constitutive identities. Interacting and integrating with three different audiences in his long career, training company executives, graduates and teaching secondary school students, he has experienced three different social and professional roles whilst, at the same time, remaining centred as himself.

By taking distance from what he calls Bourdieu's relativist approach, Bennett holds the view that reality is not a finite product, but interaction with it implies an on-going activity of attempting to define those realities, and only the subjective *emergent quality* of the negotiation with the real world may be described, not the phenomenon itself. Adopting this view, we cannot exempt ourselves from creating our own *sense of affiliation* according to the different roles and situations we are embedded in, construing what he names *multiple repertoires*. The real problem is how to maintain these *repertoires*. But does this mean –as Boylan counterattacks– that people can construct an identity which is consonant with a culture they do not accept? This question initiates a stimulating discussion around the category of *empathy* followed by that of *integration*.

Unsuccessful intercultural communication is often associated to cultural differences which lead people to either deny others' cultural values or to deny one's own. But, in order to achieve integration, communicators should become sensitive not only to the values of others but also become more critically aware about how their own culture conditions them cognitively, and to relate successfully with both. As Bennett puts it, 'integration', which is the ultimate goal, requires a multi-stepped process which develops his well-known cline from *denial* to *integration* through *defence*, *minimization*, *acceptance*, and *adaptation* (see *Cultus 2* for a review and critique). This linear continuum sees people moving from a lack of perception of cultural differences to a feeling of hostility, through the acknowledgment of these differences, to their recognition

---

and thus empathy until complete integration. It means passing from an initial ethnocentric position to an ethnorelative stage.

Any source of inner tensions, in the process of integration in an alien culture, may be solved by embracing the *emergent quality* of the transaction with the unacceptable cultural event which may take place. Against Boylan's remark about the risks one might incur by adopting this view, Bennett defends his position by stressing the non-mutually exclusive character of cultural values. A further practical slant is given in the last part of the interview, which contains a number of examples of current political and social events that are analysed (albeit briefly) giving us a more tangible idea of the previous theoretical premises.

## 2. Second Language Acquisition

If Bennett distances himself from Bourdieu's deterministic view by stressing individual freedom in determining identity, the French sociologist provides the framework to the two studies which follow. What the two appropriations of Bourdieu's theory have in common, is that both authors see the structuralist-constructionist as primarily a macrostructural theorist.

The theoretical categories underlying the papers are those of the triad *habitus*, *capital* and *field*. *Habitus*, the most controversial concept of the three, is a set of dispositions which generate practices and perceptions, namely a structure by which we try to explain the dispositions that influence us to become who we are. These dispositions, which include beliefs, values, tastes, feelings and body postures are constructed through history, inculcated in childhood, and are socially reinforced through education and culture. As Bourdieu himself argues "the body is in the social world but the social world is also in the body" (1990: 3). This duality, which also invests identity, is the underlying assumption in NIAMH KELLY's Bourdieusian study, the first paper in this volume, where identity influences, but is in turn influenced by, social interactions. For Bourdieu, every linguistic exchange is a relation of symbolic power since through 'legitimate' language we can impose our social competence, power and our authority. This is crucial to second language acquisition (SLA) theories in that interactions between native speakers and non-native speakers may be considered as sites of reproduction of power relations.

---

Kelly's research highlights the relevance of the role performed by the social, political and cultural context in second language acquisition (SLA). SLA research became more systematic in the mid 1990s when cognitivism in the field of language learning was rejected in favour of a more context-related perspective. Before that date - as Kelly rightly observes - interest in locating learning in social interaction had been shown in Bakhtin's (1981) non-formalist approach to language. Her study contributes to confirming the connection between power and identity through language, and advocates a major role of SLA theory in the pedagogy of L2, since it embodies the complex social identity of the language learner.

Similarly, the interplay between language, identity and socio-cultural context constitutes the backdrop to JANE JACKSON's ethnographic research which involves Chinese participants and their studies of English in England. The research question deals with the discrepancies between the individual's internalised principles and those of the social arena of the school in England, namely conflicts between *habitus* and *field*.

By assembling data from a number of sources she analyses material collected personally over a time span of eight years. Bennett's (DMIS) model outlined in the interview is applied here to track the students' intercultural sensitivity. The author notices that, despite the initial enthusiasm for the project, some students, inhibited by the threat of an unfamiliar setting (*field*), reinforced their national identity by limiting their contact with the host culture; on the contrary, another more flexible group of Chinese students was more likely to overcome the culture shock through improved prior knowledge of the British culture. Apart from the prior knowledge, a number of other variables seem to affect the results among which we find agency as well as the degree of mutuality in the host family.

### **3. Identity and the Media**

Two of the papers presented in this issue focus on Italy. Hardly surprisingly, when discussing the media, Italy provides a fascinating case study. Not only is there Berlusconi, "the great communicator" (cited in Ginsberg 2004: 112), and his power over the media, discussed in this section, but there is also the country's own catholic/liberal struggle for control over media output (covered more in the 3rd section). But we

---

begin this section with an analysis of how the media itself, this time with examples taken from the US, can create and transform identity through editorial decisions related to front page layout.

ANNA BIANCO's study deals with implicit themes in the language of the news and devotes her analysis to the front pages of two American newspapers *the New York Times* and *the Washington Post*. She begins with a number of related premises. First, no piece of information is stored in isolation in our mind but words form semantically associated clusters with related concepts. Secondly, this association may be accessed both consciously and unconsciously (see Moon 1997; Taylor 1995). Her analysis focusses on the single most important page of the two newspapers, and shows how they activate a particular associations of concepts. Bianco demonstrates how seemingly unconnected articles and pictures laid out on the page, actually form part of an editorially pre-determined connecting frame, leaving the reader little room for an independent assessment of the identity of the major players in the news.

Semiotics and stylistics provide invaluable tools in the analysis of how the juxtaposition of words, stories and pictures act to become the manipulative mechanisms allowing newspapers to reinforce particular ideologies.

MARIA CRISTINA CAIMOTTO then, relying on Critical Discourse Analysis, investigates the identity of one particular man, the Italian prime minister at the time, as constructed through his own words, and the one reconstructed through the foreign media.

By combining qualitative and quantitative methodology, Caimotto analyses two corpora and text types spreading over a two year period. A collection of original speeches by Berlusconi are contrasted with articles reporting news from the foreign press and published in the *La Repubblica*. Much, as already noted, has been written about the "great communicator", but the originality of this study is the analysis of the most frequent or 'preferred' stories in the foreign press regarding Berlusconi, which - not surprisingly - build up around sex and corruption.

Caimotto takes as her theme the difference between 'news as information' and 'news as narration', and argues that the latter is the focus in the news coming from abroad. The translation of 'the news' into Italian, contrary perhaps to expectations, is used as a further source for gossip and entertainment, where what counts more is developing the narration of personal identity rather than the institutional role.

---

#### 4. Identity and Integration

The second theme in this volume, integration, is addressed in FRANCO ZAPPETINI's study which focuses on the role played by cultural values in the construction of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) identities. The debate in the Italian Parliament of the Bill regarding cohabitation rights for same-sex couples in February 2008 gives the author the chance to analyse LGBT identities and the cultural factors which have affected their integration in the wider Italian social context. Once again, the analysis shows that the exaltation of religious values typical of a Catholic country, such as the importance of 'the family' (see Caimotto this volume), represents a strategy to fight what is now a global wave of countries sanctifying same sex unions. Zappetini demonstrates how the 'uncertainty avoidance' cultural orientation comes to the fore in this context, in that same-sex cohabitation is perceived as a threat to traditional Italian family values. As his media analysis shows, people look to the Church as the institution which provides certainties in an uncertain world. To support this view, the author also analyses other material such as blog pages and scripts of televised debates discussing the Bill and LGBT identity.

What is revealed is that not only 'news as information' and 'news as narration', but opinionated blog pages on both sides of the debate too, demonstrate the same conservative, high uncertainty avoidance, and masculine traits in line with Hofstede's studies. LGBTs are projected, by both sides, as non-conformists - and particularly by the detractors - as undermining the procreational traditional vision of marriage as sanctioned by the Church.

Continuing with Hofstede's cultural orientations, COSTANZA CUCCHI's work demonstrates how 'power distance' and 'individualism/collectivism' can explain differences in a comparable corpus of English and Italian websites of potato-crisp manufacturers. The originality of this investigation resides in the study of the linguistic features of the English version of the Italian website. Although the English texts on this website are forms of mediation from Italian, they are analysed as being autonomous, addressing the international audience and thus representing a case of English used as *Lingua Franca*.

In order to avoid the problems associated with culture-bound translation (see *Cultus* 1), which tends to leave residues of the original cultural identity, national rather than international food companies were

---

preferred as sites of analysis. The national companies will, clearly, tend to show more of their own national-culture specific characteristics through language.

The study confirms the validity of the cultural parameter of ‘power distance’. Here Cucchi finds patterns of text markers in the English data, which indicate an orientation to equality and the reduction of the visibility of differences in society. Markers in the Italian data, on the other hand, reveal a more pyramidal image of society with respected experts visibly distant, at the top. The quantitative analysis of first person pronouns, for example, shows the presence of a less personalized style in the Italian data. Also, in informing, and promoting the products, the English corpus shows clear signs of subjectivism, use of informal discourse markers and a more informal style, which contrast with the Italian more high-power-distance authoritative and impersonal stance, further confirming Hofstede’s findings.

## **5. Concluding remarks**

The papers presented in this volume have shed light on the complex and multi-layered nature of ‘identity’ both at national and international levels, and its umbilical connection with integration and language. Four major theories have been tested here: Bourdieu’s *habitus* theory, Bennett’s DMIS model, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory along with Critical Discourse Analysis. Both Hofstede’s and Bennett’s theories have been discussed and criticised, particularly in Issue 2. What is refreshing here is that theory or model has contributed to furthering our understanding of how communication works to create identity, and how identity works in communication, especially across cultures, from culture shock to integration.

## **References**

- Bakhtin, M. 1981. *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality*.

- 
- Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Caldas-Coulthard, R. and Vasta, N. 2009. Introduction. *Textus XXII*, pp. 3-22.
- De Fina, Anna, 2003. *Identity in Narrative, a Study of Immigrant Discourse*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam.
- Du Gay, Paul, Evans, Jessica, Redman, Peter (Eds.), 2000. *Identity: A Reader*. Sage, London.
- Erikson, E. 1968. *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Ginsberg, P. 2004 *Silvio Berlusconi: television, power and patrimony*, Verso, London
- Lemke J. L., 2008. "Identity, Development and Desire: Critical Questions", in C.R. Caldas-Coulthard and R. Iedema (eds.) 2008, *Identity Trouble. Critical Discourse and Contested Identities*. Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 17-42.
- McLuhan, M. 1962. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. USA: University of Toronto Press.
- Moon, R. (1997). "Vocabulary Connections: Multi-word Items in English", in *Vocabulary: Description; Acquisition and Pedagogy* (ed. M McCarthy & N. Schmitt.) Cambridge: CUP.
- Riley, P. 2007. *Language, Culture and Identity*. London: Continuum.
- Taylor, J. R. 1995. *Linguistic Categorization* Oxford: Clarendon Press.



## **A conversation on cultural identity and integration**

*Milton Bennett interviewed by Patrick Boylan*

Milton Bennet is a seminal figure in the intercultural field. As a youth he joined the Peace Corps, the American volunteer organization created by President Kennedy in 1961 to send young people overseas to help with aid projects in the Developing World, but mostly as ambassadors of the “other America” – the one that said it wanted peace and reciprocal understanding.

The project was an initial failure: the young people sent abroad were unprepared for the culture shocks awaiting them in their contact with peoples whose everyday life and lived values were so vastly different. Many of these young Americans returned home after only the first few weeks, disheartened by the culture shocks, the promiscuous living conditions, the lack of sanitation and electricity, and, worst of all, the difficulty in establishing genuine contact with the population – and thus the loneliness.

So Kennedy set up a task force to organize pre-departure training courses in the local languages, in the local life styles and, in addition, in a new skill, one that had no name at that time but that gradually became known in later years as “intercultural communicative competence” (ICC).

As for Milton, either the ICC courses proved effective, or he was particularly resilient: in any case he held out in Micronesia for two long years (1968-70). When he came home, he decided to study intercultural communication at the University of Minnesota where a fledgling course had meanwhile been set up. Where he went from there is recounted in the blurb on him you will find in the “Notes on contributors” section at the back of this issue.

So here is this ex-Peace Corps volunteer who, in his youth, spent two years in Micronesia wondering all the time he was there if he was **really** understanding the people he encountered in his daily activities, and who today, forty years later, is still wondering. This, apparently, is the secret of his success.

It's that infinite will to hold off judgment, listen attentively, accept uncertainty and make do with "emerging realities" that never emerge completely, that enables him to be so effective in diagnosing intercultural communication breakdowns and helping the parties reach some kind of understanding. I could see, as the interview went along, that he was doing precisely that to me: diagnosing me and trying to help me define the questions I thought I had clearly articulated before the encounter. How well he succeeded will be evident on reading the transcription. In any case, what I had thought I wanted to discover, in asking Milton for the interview, were his views on the concept of "identity" – how much it is socially determined or self-determined – and whether we can really know (and assimilate into our identity) strikingly different cultural realities, ones that seemingly have no correspondences in our world. And this doubt then raises the question of multiple identities: if we do manage to incorporate radically different cultures into our identity, how can we then avoid inner conflicts? The question applies to individuals as well as to global companies and multiethnic societies.

But as the interview proceeded, it gradually became clear that the real question I had in the back of my mind was another: it was whether, in order to interact effectively with people of a different culture, we need to constitute a new identity, one consonant with theirs.

No one doubts that to interact effectively with our interlocutors we need to share at least *some* values with them – as a starter, the dictionary values of the words we use so that we can begin to understand each other. But in fact, it would seem that we need to share much more than that. How much more? Is it enough merely to "accept" our interlocutors' ways of doing things and their value system? Or do we need to go further and try to adapt ourselves to their habits and to their value system? Indeed, perhaps we ought to do even more: integrate their value system into ours and thus, by being able to switch identities, "be" like them during our encounters? And should we choose to integrate into their culture, what becomes of our native identity? Do we risk schizophrenia? These questions easily arise in any serious intercultural training or coaching session.

Similar questions are also raised by many sociologists, in reflecting on their work in the field. “To be or not to be (a participant observer), that is the question.” Bourdieu wrote that successful interviewers should be able to attune themselves to their interviewees “through forgetfulness of self”, thus undergoing “a true transformation” of the way they view their subjects “in the ordinary circumstances of life” (Bourdieu, 1966: 24). But does this mean that these interviewers should learn to belong, almost as members, to their subjects' world – at least for the duration of the interview? Is this what the concept of integration implies?

With these questions buzzing through my mind, I turned the recorder on and began.

### An update on Milton Bennett's current work

BOYLAN: Thanks, Milton, for finding the time to be interviewed. Most of our readers will be familiar with your past work; perhaps you could begin by filling them in on what you are doing currently.

BENNETT: I continue my connection with the Intercultural Communication Institute (ICI) in Portland, Oregon, which has offered for many years, and continues to offer, professional development in Intercultural Communication (IC) and Intercultural Relations (IR). Specifically, I'm in the faculty of the Master's program that we offer in conjunction with the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, besides teaching one or two courses in the summer institute we run at ICI every July.

But I would say that more of my activity now has been moving towards Europe and Asia and that activity is of essentially three types: predominately with the Intercultural Development Research Institute (IDRI) in Milan, which is a different entity than the ICI. The purpose of IDRI is to sponsor research specifically in developmental or constructivist approaches to intercultural work and to support dissemination of that perspective.

BOYLAN: But it's not an institute as in Portland, right? You can't go to IDRI and take a course.

BENNETT: Probably within the year we will be beginning to offer courses: not in TOT (the Training of Trainers), but specifically in the perspective of a constructivist approach to intercultural work, perhaps something research-oriented.

In addition to that there's my consulting work, to some extent corporate, i.e. executive training programs for enterprise consortia. Companies typically send executives to joint training programs that are offered in multiple places in the world and I'm brought in as a faculty person for those programs. So that's mainly what I'm doing on the corporate side.

BOYLAN: So training, but not coaching.

BENNETT: I also do some coaching but it's typically around IDI, using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993). Although I am certainly hoping that there will be some alternative measurements coming along, so far I still think that's the best one and so I use that.

In the educational sphere, I'm doing a big project with an international school here in Milan, a multiple year project to help develop faculty and international baccalaureate curricula, integrating the concepts of intercultural learning (Bennett, 2009). I also teach occasionally in universities in the U.S. as well as in Europe: Jyväskylä, Helsinki, several universities in Germany and of course here at the University of Milan Bicocca, in their graduate program. Essentially it's an International Relations program, but IC/IR come into the teaching of the Sociology of Cultural Processes.

BOYLAN: How do you feel – as a person, as Milton Bennett, the man – in front of all these different audiences: university students, high school students, corporate execs in training programs?

BENNETT: That's a wonderful question, Patrick. But I'll tell you: every time that I'm successful – in the sense of being understood and helping people learn things that make a difference to them – I feel an immense sense of gratification in being able to operate in such different worlds.

BOYLAN: But do you feel more “yourself” with company executives than, say, with high school kids? Or with university grad students?

BENNETT: You know, that goes right to the central question of our interview, I think.

BOYLAN: You mean, what is “yourself”?

BENNETT: Precisely, which is really the identity issue. So I would say, just to begin, that I feel equally myself in all three of those situations.

BOYLAN: And yet you act differently and assume different mind sets: after all, you hardly interact with school kids as you do with corporate execs, right? Nonetheless, while being three different Milton Bennetts, you say you remain “yourself”. So let's clarify what that means, that is, what you mean when you speak of your “identity.” Especially your cultural identity.

### Are cultural identities imposed or freely constructed?

BOYLAN: Bourdieu offers a good starting point. As you know, some people – not me but many people – consider his perspective to be highly deterministic, culture being a *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990; and Kelly and Jackson this issue), a habit of mind that you acquire under the influence of family, schooling, etc. And that makes up your identity to a large extent.

I say “highly” deterministic because you become structured not only cognitively but also affectively and volitionally. That is, you do not simply acquire a certain vision or interpretation of the world, through certain conceptual (cognitive) schemes. You also become structured affectively and volitionally. That is to say, you learn to like and want what your society manages to get you to like and to want – unless you rebel in some way. But even then you rebel in characteristic ways. You, Milton, rebelled as a 1968 “flower-power” hippy, right? Thus you rebelled in an American way, based on what and where you were at that time. In other words, even when you were rebelling against your American upbringing, you were subservient to your American *habitus*.

Well now, if that is Bourdieu's account of cultural influence, it makes for a highly deterministic world, doesn't it?

Whereas in your writings, I get the impression that you think that people are free in determining their identities as individuals, at least to a large extent. Can you elaborate on that view?

BENNETT: Yes, and I do think the issue is epistemological. I'm not sure, though, that I agree that Bourdieu is "highly deterministic"; I classify him more as a relativist in the sense that he recognizes and talks a lot about perspective and operating in a field. His discourse is more typical of a relativist than a positivist. But, that said, yes, I would differentiate myself from his views, mainly because I favor constructivism as a paradigm, rather than the more systems-based thinking that, in my opinion, characterizes Bourdieu. Quantum Thinking (DePorter, 2000; Vella, 2002) and, more generally, constructivist thinking hold that, by transacting with phenomena, we generate reality. Reality is an emergent quality of our transaction with phenomena. This differs from the strictly relativist approach which holds that there is indeed a reality somewhere out there, although it is necessarily constrained by one's perspective of it. Any given individual can catch a glimpse of that reality, but only in a particular way, depending on where that person is located in time and space or, as Bourdieu would put it, depending on that person's history, as synthesized in his or her habit of mind. This is what seems to me to be the mainstream way of describing how we see reality if we are strict relativists. Whereas the constructivist view is somewhat different. It asserts that, epistemologically, we can only describe the emergent quality of our transaction with phenomena, but not the phenomena itself, neither wholly nor partially.

BOYLAN: So any object is only what I have made it to be for me up to a certain point, in my interaction with it. For a small child, who uses the lipstick he found in his mother's room as a crayon, that lipstick IS a crayon. At least, until his mother enters the room: from that point on, "what the lipstick is" will be a co-creation between the child, the lipstick and now his mother. Is that it? And when you say "emergent," do you imply that it is always evolving, it is always constituting itself, and is never defined or definable?

BENNETT: Let's say it's defined insofar as you define it.

BOYLAN: So we create it. When, for example, we have the impression that we have “perceived” a certain trait of a given culture and we put a label on that trait, we are in fact creating it, using fragments of the various interpretive schemes stored in our memory. Like the child who labels the lipstick “a crayon,” based on his experience of crayons. Is that the point?

BENNETT: Yes, indeed. And it is most definitely an on-going, generative act.

BOYLAN: But, you know, I believe most strict relativists would say the same thing. They would say that we construct what we then perceive as our realities. And, like you, they would add that we do so using the mental tools that society has given us – which explains how our constructions are so similar, albeit not equal, to those of other people in our culture. This fact is what permits us to communicate with the other people in our home context, or work context, or whatever context.

For example, when we use even common words like “clean” or “love” or “yes”, we construct meanings for them that are based on what passes for “clean” and for “love” or for “yes” in a given context, say in our family; this ensures that all of us in the family understand each other, more or less, when we use these words. But if we interact with a person from another family or another culture, we may discover that this person has constructed a different representation of the reality that these words are supposed to represent. This person might exclaim, on visiting our home: “How can you call your kitchen 'clean', it isn't, it's f-i-l-t-h-y!”

In other words, we, as members of a given tribe, construct what passes for “objective realities” within our tribe – for example, our idea of what cleanliness is. And we think these “realities” constitute absolute reality. But that is not so. Because there is no absolute reality, or, more precisely, none that is knowable in itself, as an absolute value. For example, the word “clean” means nothing in itself, as an absolute value. It only means what a given community has decided it means. And even then, there may be given sub-communities, like the teenage children in a family, who perceive the “reality” of cleanliness differently from their parents. Isn't this what constructivism holds, too?

BENNETT: I suppose you can find a blend or even a confusion between these two paradigms. That's why I emphasized the underlying

epistemological and ontological assumptions. (By epistemological I mean what we are able to know about reality; by ontological I mean what the nature of reality consists of.)

Insofar as you take the nature of reality as having some kind of on-going, independent existence, then I would call your view a “strict relativist” one, since it is constrained by some system or field.

A relativist view of reality is different from an absolutist view. For both, reality exists “out there” as a single “thing”, but for the absolutist there is only one “correct” view of it. For the relativist it appears differently to different people, like the elephant that six blind men describe differently because they touch different parts of it. In spite of its variable appearances, though, reality exists for the strict relativist as an entity with an independent existence, even if we can never know it completely as such.

If, on the other hand, you take a constructivist position, then reality is only an emergent quality of our transactions with events, not a given. It is always “yet to define itself.”

This means, in your work as a constructivist intercultural trainer or coach, that the realities that you try to come to grips with are quite different from the realities that a positivist trainer or coach tries to come to grips with.

If you're a positivist, for instance, you think you can grasp the reality of a client's intercultural competence or of a foreign person's cultural heritage with a simple questionnaire, and then pigeon-hole that competence or that culture using a chart or an inventory of traits. And you are convinced that your chart maps really-existing qualities, and that the traits you list have real existence. But if you're a constructivist, you find all that illusory. Instead, you try to get to know that competence or that culture through reconstructing it within you, by analogy with something outside you that you can only glimpse as in a dark mirror. To be more exact, you *co-construct* that “emerging reality” within you, by interacting with that client or that foreign partner in certain controlled ways. This is what little children do, too. They constantly test their mother or father to see how much they can get away with. They “map” their parents' value system (the “Accepted Rules of Behavior” which even their parents may be incapable of defining precisely, at least in many borderline cases) as a constantly emerging reality that, through repeated testing, gradually takes shape within their minds – although it will never ever acquire a definitive form.



BOYLAN: So we construct reality from nothing that already exists definitively, right? And we do so through the kind and quality of interactions we have. Does this apply to our identity, too?

Because, if that is the case, then, to return to Bourdieu's categories, we should in theory be free to *affiliate* with whatever culture we encounter, through an act of our will. Even if our community tries to *ascribe* us to the roles it assigned us at our birth, we are in theory free to co-construct a different identity by simply taking a trip and changing the community we interact with.

If this is your view, then it is, indeed, quite distant from Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, however one interprets it.

BENNETT: The constructivist view is that you cannot really avoid creating your own identity. The question is whether you are aware of that or not. Typically we operate in a group, we receive our socialization through a group, we maintain that pattern of behavior (which we call our culture) through interaction with people in the group, and we may – or may not – be aware that we are in the process of constructing all that. But once we become aware, then we can take charge of the process.

BOYLAN: One might criticize that view by saying “You think you are free, you think you are taking charge of constructing your identity, but in fact you are still being manipulated by your community”. I gave you an example of that a minute ago, when I spoke of the 1968 American hippies who thought they were rebelling against their society but in reality were actually confirming the basic American values inculcated in them, by negating them or exacerbating them. These rebels were like strident atheists who, by getting so worked up, show they secretly feel god exists. It is though American society offered young people in the 1960's a certain number of both conformist and nonconformist menus to choose from, but those menus were, nonetheless, 100% stars and stripes – all of them.

BENNETT: Maybe we need to step back a little bit to the concept of freedom and free will. The assumption here that I'm making is really an essentially constructivist, Maturanian assumption: our view of the world is co-ontological (Maturana, 1978, 1988). This means that we are in the process of both being constrained by and creating the constraints of the various fields or systems that we operate in.

BOYLAN: So does this mean that, if we travel to several different countries, thus operating in several different fields, we create different constraints in each one and thus form multiple identities?

BENNETT: Yes, but rather than using the term “multiple identities”, I would use the term “multiple repertoires.” If we take identity to be in the first place our *sense of affiliation* with a group, going back to that idea of ascription, we may or may not then choose to affiliate with a group we are ascribed to – we may simply wish to correct people about their assumptions regarding us. There are a lot of interesting issues deriving from this affiliation and ascription dyad, particularly regarding bi-racial people, adoptees, and other situations where you have somebody who does not, to put it simply, look like the kind of person one associates with a certain place or role: how do they handle that issue? And the reason I'm interested in it is because it raises the point: how does one maintain a given construction of identity? Especially in cross-cultural situations.

BOYLAN: I addressed that question in a paper of mine, “On being European” (Boylan, 2006): I look at how Europeans are trying to construct their common identity out of their fairly divergent national cultures, and raise the general question of how individuals manage that feat.

But you seem to be thinking of **highly** conflictual cross-cultural situations, like trying to operate in a culture where people live values that strongly contrast with one's native or chosen value system.

BENNETT: That's right. And so the issue really is: what “range” do you have? What kind of repertoire do you have that allows you to look at things in a variety of ways and, in this case, in the way of the society you find yourself in. All the while recognizing that all these things are constructed. So most hippies of 1968 probably had a limited range: they constructed a view of reality that was only somewhat different from that of their 1950's parents that they were rebelling against.

BOYLAN: Anyway, with hind sight, maybe we could say that the 1968 hippies, however rebellious they may have seemed then, were actually part of an overall emerging reality, a complex process involving all parts of that particular society. And they were being constructed as a

“counterpoint” to the static 1950's society of their parents, by their society as a collective parent. Parents often have repressed needs or unfulfilled wishes that they unconsciously prod their children into living out... while disapproving of their behavior at the same time! And that's how society progresses, through double binds. If we can call that progress.

BENNETT: If you want, you can take a Freudian or Batesonian (Bateson, 1969) view, but it's a more deterministic view, so you inevitably conclude that the combination of nature and nurture heavily determines people's behavior. But if you step aside from such a view, as I am trying to do in this interview, and take a constructivist view, then the question is not “How has your behavior been determined?” so much as it is “How are you participating in the on-going collective generation of a world view, or way of organizing the world?” And it may be that you are participating in some construction of the world that either pleases your parents or doesn't please your parents or appears to be the fulfillment of some counter-desire they might have. All of these things are explanations that we bring to bear on this underlying process of generating the world view... from a constructivist perspective.

BOYLAN: But can I go to another country whose values I don't really share – they are not in any of my repertoires and I feel no empathy toward them – and nonetheless get into their culture and construct an identity that is consonant with their culture? That's what I had the impression you were saying initially. “Everything's possible.” Now you seem to limit that possibility by the number of repertoires one has, so in some cases it would be impossible to create an identity consonant with the culture one finds oneself in.

Empathy as the key to integration (and adaptation, too)

BENNETT: Let's move back a little bit because there are several assumptions embedded in your question. For instance, saying that you don't empathize, which implies that sometimes empathy is impossible. Well, that's a particular view of empathy, synonymous with liking or appreciating or willing to have like behavior. But you might use the term empathy in another way: being able to understand and thus “stand

under” a particular organization of the world. That should **always** be possible.

BOYLAN: I agree that “empathy” is not just feeling an affective resonance for someone. That for me is the definition of “sympathy”: you feel the joy or pain of another person. Instead, empathy for me is a volitional resonance, a gut complicity. That other person's *experience* of life becomes yours. That includes their feelings, of course, but also what they live for. And you need that kind of empathy in order to “stand under” another person's particular organization of the world, metaphorically wearing their banner, and do so sincerely.

So, for me, empathy is more than sympathy. And it is much more than just “understanding” another person. You can “understand” a person while remaining atop an ivory tower, neither affectively nor volitionally involved. This is mere cognitive resonance and it won't be enough to interact effectively with that person. Your words of solidarity, for example, will risk falling flat. Because, to sound sincere, you will need to resonate with the other person “volitionally”, at gut level, feeling his or her cause as **your** cause. **That** for me is empathy. And since we can't command our gut reactions, perhaps we can't empathize with everyone and every culture. What do you think?

BENNETT: No, we should be able to... at least ideally. We should be able to look at the world placing ourselves in any potential perspective and some of those may be ways of looking at the world that we wouldn't choose to maintain for ourselves. Imagine, for example, a highly authoritarian society in which people's rights are heavily limited, where women are subjugated... it's easy to think of a lot of examples of societies in which you or I would not feel comfortable. But that doesn't mean that you can't effectively create a world-view – let's call it a facsimile world-view – that allows you to look at the world from that perspective. You can see perfectly that, from their standpoint, theirs is a perfectly good way of organizing the world.

BOYLAN: Yes, but that's not empathy, as I just defined it. That's “understanding”; that's looking at their world from an ivory tower, sharing their world view cognitively but not affectively nor, above all, volitionally. Which you would have to do in order to get into that society and make it part of your identity, so that you can engage effectively with

the people there. Identities, like empathy, are not just cognitive realities. They are also affective: when you acquire a new identity, you come to like or dislike or laugh at certain things that you didn't like or dislike or laugh at before. And, above all, they are volitional: you come to want certain things, or shun certain things, or root for certain things that you did not want or shun or root for before. At least you do so for the time you choose to live that identity. And because empathy is visceral, you can't playact these things, people will detect your shallowness... unless you are a really good actor.

BENNETT: Then your question is: “Are we able to operate in a society that has a world view that includes **lived** values that we disagree with?” Is that the question you're asking?

BOYLAN: That's right. And I would add: “...lived values that we **strongly** disagree with, when we are in our native culture.” So what do you think? In such situations, can we add a new identity to our repertoire – cognitively, affectively and volitionally – without being hypocritical and without producing conflicts within us?

BENNETT: It depends on how integrated we are. Which raises the question of integration. Let's take as given that ALL of us are able to generate ANY possible world-view. We all have that latent potentiality, OK? This would therefore include the world-view of society X that you are traveling to. So how are you going to get along in X?

As you know from my work on the six-stage Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, the last two stages suggest that there are two ways of doing that. One is called “Adaptation”: you maintain your own value position but identify through a process of taking perspective, which is how I define empathy. But listen, it is **not** simply the cognitive empathy that you described. It is what I referred to, in my writings that go back to 1979, as “intuitive empathy”, which is being able to organize the world almost to the extent of engaging in an embodiment of that perspective, such that you are able to generate appropriate behavior in that other cultural context (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004).

Now I can do that, and be perfectly aware that I am doing that, and still continue to say that it is me, Milton Bennett with my native value system, who am operating from the standpoint of this other world-view. And this enables me to generate appropriate behavior which I do not

consider to be “me”, or rather that I consider to be “me” but in an extended sense. It's “me” being able to operate in a way different from the way I generally choose to operate. And that's what I call “Adaptation.” I think it's a very highly developed and sophisticated skill. And the only difference between that and the next stage, called Integration, is that with Integration, you do in fact see who you are as somebody different from who you were, as somebody who **wants** to do the things that are considered appropriate in the other culture. That's the volitional or gut side you were insisting on. Or at least you see yourself as somebody who is perhaps somewhat different from the locals but nonetheless able to do sincerely the things they do because you can want the kinds of things they want. (In addition, you can want things they would never dream of wanting, because you have within you your native identity as well; but you don't bring that aspect into the picture; it would only create confusion.)

So, at stage six (Integration), you begin to define your identity as that of a person living in an extended state, not just confined to your native state. Then the question is: “How do you integrate those various values that co-exist in that extended state and that come from living in entirely different cultures – values that are, in fact, in contrast with one another?” They may consist of even **highly** conflicting values, as you were suggesting.

Let's say, for example, that the society that you are currently operating in effectively believes that the role of women should be highly distinct from men whereas for the other society that you operate effectively in, your native society, the role of women should be interchangeable with that of men. Here I'm using that Hofstedian (Hofstede, 2001) masculine-feminine dimension just to simplify things. Well, that sets off a conflict, right? Or at least potentially.

But do you really need to decide that only one of those beliefs corresponds to reality? And that the other is a distorted view or a fabrication? If you feel you do, then you are an absolutist; you have a positivist, deterministic perspective. But even if you are a relativist, a strict relativist, even if you admit that **both** realities are fabrications or “points of view,” you still haven't eliminated possible sources of conflict completely. Because it's like the idea of the elephant in the mind of each of the six blind men. For you, there is **some** way in which things really **are** – you just have to be patient and keep on accumulating the various perspectives in order to get the whole picture. When finally you do, if

you finally do, then you will have a picture of reality that you can call “right” and the other pictures in your mind, that you had previously accepted as possible alternative views, will be “wrong”. And there will be conflict.

But if you have a developmental, constructivist, Maturanian perspective, then there is no way you can ever claim to see “reality,” because it only exists as an on-going emergent quality of our transactions with events. You are never exposed to the possibility of inner conflict.

BOYLAN: So, whatever you see as a “reality” is not really there; “what is there” is in the process of becoming something that you cannot yet perceive as such. And, indeed, that you will never see as such, unless you live forever. And so this way of thinking permits you to accept everything as provisionally true or possible... “in a sense”. Because nothing is yet what it really “is” when it has totally emerged. And that will be, if we must fix a limit, at the end of time. Is this what you mean?

Well then, in this case, I guess nothing is impossible to accept... at least, momentarily. And that means you can indeed identify with and “be” anyone, in any society. This of course does not mean that you abandon completely your native identity and preferences; it simply means you do not assign an absolute value to them either, and thus can share other people's preferences whatever they are, even preferences that seem initially repulsive to you.

I have the impression that the current Pope would not subscribe to these views, Milton.

BENNETT: (Chuckle) Really?

BOYLAN: But actually, if you think about it, these views are **not** amoral. Because in the final analysis, one does make ethical choices. One does have a value system. One does not say “everything is the same to me.”

To make this point clear, I often give my students the example of musical preferences. If you like rock music exclusively and consider, for example, Italian opera repulsive and Moroccan gnawa music cacophonous, then you do not understand music. Because there is no one music that is “right.” But if you can hear the richness of opera and the power of gnawa, if you get to like to listen to both on occasion and neither seems cacophonous or repulsive any more, then you have ceased to be a musical absolutist or fundamentalist and have become a musical

## CULTUS

---

relativist or constructivist... maybe we could even say “interculturalist.” But... and here's the point... this is not to say that you have abandoned rock as your preference, as the music you listen to most often. You don't become a musical agnostic: you remain faithful to the U2 or whatever other rock band you identify most with. It is simply that now you have learned to hear all the other kinds of music as “true”, “beautiful”, “desirable to listen to”... in a sense and on occasion. So you **do** have values; it's just that they're not mutually exclusive, fundamentalist values.

BENNETT: That's an interesting analogy. But you know, when I said that, if you have a constructivist perspective, then there is no way you can claim to see “reality” because it only exists as an on-going emergent quality of our transactions with events, I was not preaching agnosticism. I was not saying that people with a constructivist perspective do not believe in anything or that, for them, since everything is possible, anything goes. Not at all. I was simply saying that such people have learned to see things as constantly developing, so they don't pigeon-hole them. But, of course, they have preferences and take a stance in life; we all do! They just don't give their preferences and their stances an absolute value, as fundamentalists do. For example, they don't burn unbelievers at the stake!

BOYLAN: Or bomb and occupy their countries, in order to bring them democracy or save their women folk from oppression. They believe there are other ways to share values and get them accepted. And I agree.

BENNETT: Yes, there are usually many other ways and much more effective ones.

BOYLAN: Besides, there's something we have forgotten to add: one always has a “back door entry” if one cannot possibly accept a given behavior in a given culture – say, the stoning of adulterers in Saudi Arabia, should one decide to live there. Instead of identifying with the stereotypical member of that culture who approves of stoning, one can identify with the non-stereotypical members, the ones who do not approve and yet are part of that culture. As I said about American hippies in the 1960's, all societies offer both conformist and non-conformist menus for their members to choose from. So, in this case, one can identify with a militant Saudi dissident – provided one accepts



the risks. If not, one can always identify with one of the mainstream Saudis who disapprove of stoning, yet are not persecuted because they do so for Saudi (Muslim) reasons in Saudi (artful) ways. This provides an easier point of entry into that culture. One does not seek to Westernize one's hosts, one simply sides with mainstream dissenters who seek change from within.

### From theory to practice

BOYLAN: Now, let's look at all this from a practical standpoint, from the standpoint of a company IC trainee or coachee. Up to now we have talked of the difficulty of assimilating other cultures that seem initially unacceptable because they contrast with our deeply felt native values, as in this last example.

But actually, when you think about it, company executives often have just as much difficulty in living in and accepting cultures that are, in fact, very similar to their own.

I'm thinking of Italian managers. In my company training (which often includes helping trainees interact effectively in English), I encounter many managers who refuse to learn to speak English in a British or American way; they feel they are Italian and want to speak it in an Italian way. Talking like a Brit or a Yank seems false to them. And I encounter the same problems if I try to get them to adapt to British or American linguistic norms in view of a trip abroad; they don't want to learn to call their American counterpart "Bob", they want to call him Dr. Smith or Engineer Smith or whatever his qualification is, even if everyone else in the company calls that person Bob. Doing things the American way or the British way seems hypocritical to them. And vice versa for many British or American managers who are assigned to work in Italy. I find the same resistances.

So let's leave aside the difficulties of living in cultures that condone stoning. Let's tackle the seemingly easier problem of how to get British top executives sent to Naples off their high horse and into acceptance of local ways, or Italian top executives into a frame of mind where they're willing to construct a new identity and acquire speaking habits that are consonant with British culture.

## CULTUS

---

BENNETT: First of all, let me say that whenever we use cross-cultural examples in IC work, we use them in prototypical ways rather than in culture specific ways.

In addition, if you're looking at cultural divergences, it really doesn't matter what cultural difference you're looking at. So you're right: I mentioned possible conflicts in prototypical East-West relations but I could just as easily have mentioned two neighboring European cultures. As for your examples of Italian and British managers' difficulties in adjusting culturally to each other, I would certainly agree it's a challenge, as in the case of any two cultures.

That said, I wouldn't set my task as a trainer or coach in those terms. I would start out by avoiding telling the managers that they need to construct a new, more inclusive identity. I would also avoid setting the goal of “decentring” (Boylan, 2003) as you do with your university language students who are undoubtedly much more receptive. I would, instead, define our work together as increasing the managers' repertoire of behavior. A simple example that I sometimes use in those contexts is to ask managers if they communicate in the same way with their spouses as they do with their grandparents...

BOYLAN: ...or their children...or the Reverend Pastor of their church...

BENNETT: ...yes, and so the managers will say: “No, we use different styles.” And so I ask them: “Are you being more real using one style than in using the other?” They inevitably reply “No, it's still me” and so I point out that they have repertoires. Now, I tell them, our task is simply to widen your repertoires (Bennett, 2001).

BOYLAN: Yes, but the affective-volitional issues still remain. While these executives may accept their grandparents, their children and even their pastor, they may not accept, at gut level, overly reserved Brits or overly friendly Americans, whom they may find “*antipatici*”, dislikeable. Thus, when interacting with them, they will instinctively avoid accommodating to them and remain the Italian manager they are normally. So do you have any tricks to get them to make that leap into the other party's cultural world?

BENNETT: As you well know, all of this is a developmental issue. So no leaps. You have to give them time to develop the perceptual infrastructure, as I call it, the ability to organize the intercultural dimension of their worlds. In addition, people need to develop a good level of sophistication (cultural awareness, for example) in order to do that. It's like every other developmental process – for example, the one described by Piaget (1936) for children. Once you have established a certain number of discriminations that allow you to handle change in a reasonably sophisticated way, this mental framework then allows you to move from your current state X over to a new state Y. So, no, there is no particular trick in getting people to do that, but there is a particular level of perceptual organization that this hypothetical manager we're talking about would need to have, in order to accept or adapt to or even integrate into the other culture.

And that would include a perception of his or her own Italian value system as – and again, let me make this distinction – not just “relative” but “emergent”. He has to see that he has not just a *habitus* that has been foisted on him and that he can't easily get out of, but a world-view that is emerging and that can be what he chooses to make it be, because – in spite of appearances – it is not yet fully determined. Especially in today's global, multiethnic Italy, “being an Italian” can mean many things, and the number of different things will only increase with time. So it's his choice.

Of course, when you have managers who are pretty dedicated to the defense of their own world, that's going to take time. Because those defenses have the advantage of giving the subject a strong sense of identity, albeit monocultural and ethnocentric. So unless such a person sees the advantages and, especially, the safety of moving out of that defensive position, they're pretty much going to maintain it.

BOYLAN: So your training or coaching aims at making them feel safe in putting to one side their native identity.

BENNETT: Yes, it's a push-pull situation. The push frequently dominates but that's not always very successful for the kind of managers we just mentioned. The pull would be getting them to evaluate if they are effective with foreign clients and if their colleagues, who are less rigid in their maintenance of identity, seem to be more effective in such intercultural situations.

## CULTUS

---

BOYLAN: But, even with time, many trainees or coachees will never get to stage five or six on your scale.

BENNETT: Right, adaptation or integration are not questions that these individuals are pursuing or ready to pursue; and the more that you or I try to push them by saying “Hey, here is what you need to do” and putting it into terms of identity-change or integration, the more mystified at best these people are going to be. More likely they will simply retort: “What you’re saying is not relevant to me so get out of here!” And they’d be right!

BOYLAN: Yes, well, I try to show them, besides reviewing the culture clashes they have inevitably suffered (otherwise they would not have called me in for training or coaching in the first place), the **missed** opportunities they and their company have suffered because of insufficient entente with their non-Italian clients.

BENNETT: Yes, but that probably comes over as push, too. You need to get them to consider the pull, what is it that allows them to move out of their current position, which in many other ways serves them well, to a position that I would classify as stage three, minimization. The person needs to see that minimizing differences is more than political correctness, it’s a way of expanding their sense of the complexity of humanity.

BOYLAN: OK, but once they learn to at least minimize differences, why not take it to the hilt and encourage them to attain integration as a way of really augmenting their sense of the complexity of humanity? You seem dubious about the value of attaining that highest stage.

BENNETT: I don’t believe that the DMIS is teleological. For a lot of people who are operating routinely in another culture, it could be useful for them to consider integration. But let’s also consider an alternative to integration, adaptation.

As you know, the term “integration” in the DMIS does not refer to social issues, but rather how much one can act with integrity. And if somebody routinely operates across two different cultural frames of reference in which there are a lot of seemingly contradictory elements, then that person probably needs to spend some time trying to integrate those

---

things if they want to maintain their integrity. To integrate means to reconcile them with one another, so that operating from both those frames of reference can work for them. In other words, it can permit them to operate with integrity and not hypocritically, it can permit them to be integrated as opposed to disintegrated. Disintegrated means fragmented, having little enclaves, little air-tight categories. A disintegrated person might say: “OK, now I'm finished being my Italian self, I'll start being my British self; OK, that's done, now back to my Italian self.”

So, to explain the two different choices in a nutshell, at stage five, adaptation, what the Italian manager we're talking about needs to be able to do, if he decides to get that far, is to say: “I'm this Italian and here's the way I like being and this is who I am... but I can **also** behave in this British way, not unlike talking to my grandmother.”

Whereas at the sixth stage, integration, he would say: “I'm Italian but I'm routinely operating in this British context, half of my time is with Brits, so how do I handle that, without continually flip-flopping back and forth?” He might even be married to a British woman and have children: so how does he help his kids develop an identity that is respectful of themselves, in both their British and their Italian manifestations? These are his goals if he chooses to get to the sixth stage.

BOYLAN: So he has to avoid – and help his children avoid – having bits and pieces of himself/themselves that are little islands, cut off from each other. This reminds me of the clinical description of multiple personality disorder (MPD), although it is admittedly an over abused construct (Putnam, 1989). A subject with MPD seems to be, at different moments, two different people, with distinct identities and ways of interacting with the environment and with little memory of the other identity. That's going too far. And in fact, when you think of it, that is **not** stage six integration at all – precisely because the two spheres do not merge into a single whole, as they do in successful multiple reenactments of the self (McLeod, 1998).

Stage six integration, in my understanding of it, means you have a single but composite identity; so you are not playacting when you talk to a Brit as a Brit and to an Italian as an Italian, you are simply being yourself, mindful that, like a sophisticated pipe organ, you have various registers you can switch over to when playing.

Whereas at stage five, adaptation, in my opinion you **are** playacting.

## CULTUS

---

BENNETT: I beg to differ. I don't think that you're playacting any more than you are in any situation in which you are behaving authentically in a way that is not the way you normally behave.

BOYLAN: But at stage five, you don't really believe in the values you are choosing to display. Whereas with integration, the highest stage, you do believe in those values because you have worked out a way to reconcile them with the other values of your composite identity.

BENNETT: No, I really don't think the difference is whether you believe it or not. I think the difference is whether or not you incorporate it into yourself. With integration you incorporate; you say: "This is who I am, I am a person who is sometimes this way and sometimes that way." You define your identity precisely as the constellation of those differences and your personality as the way you navigate among them. Whereas at stage five, adaptation, you take the perspective of the person who is culturally diverse from you, for example you as an American take a Brit as your model, and you allow British style behavior to be generated, that is, to come forth intuitively from your embodied sense of British culture. I don't believe that is playacting. I believe that is just as authentic as any other behavior is.

So there is a difference between being able to operate authentically from a particular cultural perspective (stage five) and operating authentically in an extended state with an extended repertoire and to define your identity in those terms (stage six).

### Integration on a macro level

BOYLAN: Let me touch on one last issue.

You mentioned that the concept of integration has a social dimension. We can certainly see it on a macro level every day in the newspaper. The French, for example, have their particular way of integrating their various ethnic communities: everyone is expected to share the same basic values because, it is claimed, these values are "real", they correspond to what Reason dictates. Thus Muslim women cannot choose to wear a burka since that violates what is held to be the universal concept of women's rights. So what is your take on this French policy of integration? Does it not reduce multiculturalism to

monoculturalism and thus negate the very possibility of intercultural exchange? As well as negating the possibility of integration as you define it at level six for individuals, since that would require creating a shared ethos in which various, even contrasting, repertoires can be lived and expressed alongside each other?

BENNETT: Yes, I tend to agree with that. It's an assimilationist policy and I doubt whether it will work any better than the "melting pot" policy in the United States – which has been mythologized after the fact.

BOYLAN: True, it no longer exists – if it ever did.

BENNETT: Yes, and even if it did exist to some extent, it was not very successful then. It may have muted the distinctions between some European groups – which are now trying to re-establish those distinctions.

BOYLAN: Well, the "melting pot" is still Sarkozy's goal and now apparently Angela Merkel's as well in Germany. On October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010, she declared that multiculturalism had been a failure in Germany and so, in the future, greater linguistic and cultural integration would be demanded of all inhabitants. This means that the Turks in Kreuzberg will have to acquire a German identity and exhibit that.

BENNETT: You know, all organizations – from societies down to multicultural teams in companies – have to face the issue of reconciling unity and diversity. They need to figure out how to obtain focus and yet, at the same time, make diversity work for them. Pretty much everybody agrees that diversity is the fuel for innovation. Unfortunately both societies and groups tend to make the same error: they go too far. The pendulum swings in the direction of unity and they respond in chorus by saying "Let's all be the same!" as in France and now Germany; then the pendulum swings back in the direction of diversity and they say, like for instance in Canada and in some places in the U.S., "Every view is sacrosanct and nobody should have to adapt to anybody", thus maintaining enclaves. Both of these positions are unworkable: you can't force people into a "unity". Indeed, Hofstede (2001) among others has pointed out how people tend even to accentuate their differences in such circumstances. As for enclaves, they block society-wide communication

and exacerbate differences. But how to reconcile the need for diversity with the need for unity? The society that figures that out will be the most successful. It will be a society in which people maintain their distinctness as their heritage identity, and at the same time participate in a common, “national” identity that unites them with the other groups, guarantees communication, and makes differences acceptable (Bennett, 2004).

BOYLAN: Yes, that's how the composite identity we were talking about before, at stage six, works in individuals. Well, do you know of any such societies?

BENNETT: I said that, in some places in the United States, the pendulum has swung too far towards diversity, while we all know from newspaper accounts that in other areas it has swung too far towards unity. That said, there are still other regions where I think the composite identity model you mentioned has worked fairly successfully, although even there you could argue that there is a backlash going on now.

However I'm not sure it is specifically about multiculturalism; there are other issues at stake. Like “What narrative is going to be the prevailing narrative about who we are?”

Culture, in fact, is nothing but the narrative about who we are, the narrative we accept. And it changes as the constituency of the group changes. And that produces reaction from people who become distressed that things aren't the way they “always” were. They perceive that their identity narrative is changing and the reason it is changing is because there is a change in the constituency that is generating that narrative. That's what's going on in the United States now. And in Germany, France... and also in Italy, for that matter. There is an impending change in the narrative of who we are, because who we are is, in fact, changing.

BOYLAN: Aptly said. And, speaking of Italy, that reminds me of a recipe book, just out, from a small Bolognese publishing house. It's called “Ricette delle nuove famiglie d'Italia” (Cucci, 2010), “Recipes from the new families of Italy”, and consists of an interview of 24 families you wouldn't have found in Italy a generation ago, at least not so widely or not so openly, plus the recipes, with photos, of their favorite dishes. These “families” are principally mixed marriages – Italians with Albanian, Chinese, Moroccan or Ukrainian spouses, etc. – but also de



facto families like gay or lesbian partners, one from the countryside with its culinary traditions, the other from the city and used to fast food; students cohabiting with workers; Italian university researchers who have lived and done research (and learned to cook) in various countries and who are now sharing a flat and cooking together back in Italy. The “fusion cuisine” that these new families have come up with is absolutely delicious, according to the bloggers I've read, while being neither stereotypically Italian cuisine nor the posh International Cuisine you find in five star hotels.

Since Italians have traditionally maintained their identity through their food, this book and its singular culinary narrative tell us that a new Italy is taking shape, hardly without our noticing it. How's that for a tangible, even edible, example of a developmental “emerging” reality? As well as stage six cultural integration!

BENNETT: You've got my mouth watering!

BOYLAN: I bet! Well, Milton, thanks so much for the interview.

BENNETT: My pleasure.

## References

- Bateson, G. 1969/1972. *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*, New York: Ballantine. p. 271-278.
- Bennett, M. 1993. “Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, Education for the Multicultural Experience”. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press. 21-71.
- Bennett, M. J. 2001. “Developing Intercultural Competence for Global Managers”. In R-D Reineke & C. Fussinger (Eds.), *Interkulturelles management*. Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag.
- Bennett, M. J. 2004. “Becoming interculturally competent.” In J. S. Wurzel (Ed.), *Toward multiculturalism: A reader in multicultural education*. Newton, MA: Intercultural Resource Corporation. On the internet at: [www.tinyurl.com/bennett04a](http://www.tinyurl.com/bennett04a) [accessed 12.12.2010]

- 
- Bennett, M. J. & Castiglioni, I. 2004. "Embodied ethnocentrism and the feeling of culture: A key to training for intercultural competence." In D. Landis, J. Bennett & M. Bennett (Eds.), *The handbook of intercultural training* (3rd ed., pp. 249-265). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. On the internet at: [www.tinyurl.com/bennett04b](http://www.tinyurl.com/bennett04b) [accessed 12.12.2010]
- Bennett, M. J. 2009. "Defining, measuring, and facilitating intercultural learning: a conceptual introduction to the Intercultural Education double supplement." *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 20 (S1–2), S1–13. On the internet at: [www.tinyurl.com/bennett09](http://www.tinyurl.com/bennett09) [accessed 12.12.2010]
- Bourdieu, P. 1966. "Understanding." *Theory, culture and society*, 13:2, pp. 17-37. (A translation into English of pp. 903-925 of P. Bourdieu, *La Misère du Monde*, Paris: Seuil, 1993).
- Bourdieu, P. 1990. "Structures, Habitus, Practices". In P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 52-79, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Boylan, P. 2003. *Rewriting oneself*. Unpublished paper presented at the 4th annual IALIC conference, "The Intercultural Narrative," Lancaster University (Department of European Languages and Cultures), 14-15.12.2003. On the internet at: [www.tinyurl.com/boylan21](http://www.tinyurl.com/boylan21) [accessed 12.12.2010]
- Boylan, P. 2006. "On being European." *Language and Intercultural Communication*, vol. 6, no. 3&4, pp. 286-96. On the internet at: [www.tinyurl.com/boylan26](http://www.tinyurl.com/boylan26) [accessed 12.12.2010]
- Cucci, B. 2010. *Ricette delle nuove famiglie d'Italia*. Bologna: Pendragon.
- DePorter, R. 2000. *Quantum Thinking: Creative Thinking, Planning and Problem Solving*, Oceanside, CA: Learning Forum Publications.
- Hofstede, G. 2001. *Cultures Consequences, Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 279-334.
- Maturana, H. R. 1978. "Biology of language: The epistemology of reality," in G. A. Miller & E. Lenneberg (eds.), *Psychology and Biology of Language and Thought: Essays in Honor of Eric Lenneberg*. London: Academic Press. pp. 27-63.
- Maturana, H. R. 1988. "Ontology of observing: The biological foundations of self consciousness and the physical domain of existence". In the conference workbook *Texts in Cybernetics, American Society For Cybernetics Conference, Felton, CA. 18-23 October, 1988*. On the internet at [www.inteco.cl/biology/ontology](http://www.inteco.cl/biology/ontology) [accessed 12.12.2010]
- McLeod, J. 1998. *Narrative and Psychotherapy*. London: Sage.

- Piaget, J. 1936/1953. *The Origins of Intelligence in the Child*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Putnam, F.W. 1989. *Diagnosis and Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Vella, J. 2002. "Quantum Learning: Teaching as Dialogue", *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2:93, pp. 73-84.



## A Bourdieusian Perspective on Identity and its Role in Second Language Acquisition

Niamb Kelly

### *Abstract*

*This paper demonstrates the need for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory to develop a concept of the language learner as possessing complex social identities and that, by incorporating social theory into the field of SLA, researchers can begin to explore the relationship between the second language learning context and identity formation. The work of researchers who have conducted their studies within a Bourdieusian framework is presented to illustrate this. The paper acknowledges the inextricable link between language learning and identity formation and discusses the pedagogical and research implications this holds.*

### **1. The Sociocultural Perspective of SLA**

The study of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) emerged from Chomskyan linguistics and cognitive psychology in the late 1960s. Over the years, a substantial body of research has been generated in the literature on the psychological processes the second language (L2) learner goes through when acquiring a second language and the different environmental factors that impact on these processes. In an attempt to explain the differential success of the L2 learner, all of these major language acquisition theories explore learner strategies, language teaching, linguistic input and output, or affective variables that are internal to the language learner. The complex social, political, and

---

historical context in which the second language was learned and used and how relations of power in the social world affected the interaction that took place between the L2 learner and the target language speaker was, for the most part, ignored until the mid 1990s and 2000s, when theorists in the field of SLA (Cummins 1999, 2000; Norton 1995, 2000; Norton and Toohey 2001; Pennycook 2001) began to move away from viewing the sentence structure as the unit of analysis with the language learner regarded as “a one dimensional acquisition device” (Pennycook, 2001:143). This sociocultural approach shifted the focus of attention away from the cognitive processes of the L2 learner and how they internalise rules, and began to move towards an interdisciplinary and socially informed study of the sociocultural context in which the language learner is situated, exploring issues such as how speaking a second language can influence the social identity of the language learner and how the social context will either expediate or hinder the learning process by denying or facilitating access to the linguistic resources of the community in which the learner finds themselves.

Willet (1995) sums this up by saying that SLA looks at how the L2 learner acquires the linguistic rules of the language, whereas the sociocultural perspective looks at how, in addition to acquiring linguistic rules, they also appropriate identities, social relations and ideologies, which may inhibit or facilitate the acquisition of further L2 routines.

However, it should be pointed out that prior to the mid 1990s, the concept of exploring social variables in SLA was not completely ignored in the literature. The social approach to language learning is often accredited to Vgotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981), however, the first researcher to integrate the notion of social distance into SLA theory should be accredited to Schumann (1978), when he introduced the notion of social distance to explain the lack of morphological development of a Costa Rican immigrant to the United States. In his Acculturation Model, Schumann (1978) posited that societal factors such as gender and motivation, and social distance between language groups either promote or inhibit social solidarity between two groups, and can thus affect L2 development. Social distance arises when the language learner is politically, culturally or economically dominant or subordinate to the target language group, and inhibits language development. Other factors which Schumann (1978) cites as being factors of social distance include the integration pattern of the language learner, be it one of assimilation, acculturation or preservation, the cohesiveness of the L2

group, the compatibility of the two cultures and the attitudinal orientation of both groups.

Schumann's subject experienced both social and psychological distance from the target language group, thus inhibiting his ability to gain competency in English. However, while Schumann did try and study L2 acquisition from a sociocultural perspective, he considered these social and cultural factors as external to the learner and having only a marginal role to play in determining the language acquisition process.

At the same time as Schumann was looking at social distance as a variable in language development, the well known video *Crosstalk* (Gumperz, Jupp and Roberts 1979) was aired by BBC1 in 1979. This programme explored the issue of miscommunication due to racial and ethnic stratification in the workplace. A revised and expanded programme was broadcast in 1990.

## 2. Identity and Language Learning

The interrelationship between identity and language was already recognised in the field of sociology, particularly in poststructuralist theory:

For poststructuralist theory the common factor in the analysis of social organisation, social meanings, power and individual consciousness is *language*. Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested (Weedon, 1987: 21, emphasis in original).

However, the question of identity and its role in language learning was for the most part ignored by SLA literature until it was addressed by Wagner and Firth (1997) in a special edition of the *Modern Language Journal*, which was devoted to a debate on making SLA theory more socially informed. In their paper, they questioned the narrow view of the language learner's identity, which was framed as having one identity, that of language learner or non-native speaker (NNS), with verbal productions being compared to those of a native speaker (NS) in the target language:

The identity categories NS and NNS are applied exogenously and without regard for their emic relevance. The fact that NS or NNS is only one identity from a multiple of social identities, many of which can be relevant simultaneously, and all of which are motile (father, man, friend, local, guest, opponent, husband, colleague, teacher, teammate intimate acquaintance, stranger, brother, son, expert, novice, native speaker, uninitiated, joke teller, speaker, caller, overhearer ad infinitum) is, it seems fair to conclude, a nonissue in SLA. For the SLA researcher, only one identity *really matters*, and it matters constantly and in equal measure throughout the duration of the encounter being studied. (Wagner and Firth, 1997: 292; emphasis in original)

Responding to Wagner and Firth, Gass (1998) stated that no interrelationship between identity and L2 learning had been theoretically established and was thus not relevant to how identity affects L2 acquisition. However, other researchers (Norton 2000; Norton and Toohey 2001; Day 2002) concluded that when individuals interact, there is more involved than the transfer of information from speaker to listener; in addition to negotiating meaning, speakers also negotiate identity, a viewpoint that highlights the interplay between identity, power and L2 learning. Much of the research emerging on identity and language learning sees the language development process inextricably linked with the social and cultural context, with identities being shaped by the dynamic relationship between the fixed set of categories that mark group identity and the different identities people assume through discourse.

Thesen (1997:488) defines identity as:

the dynamic interaction between the fixed identity categories that are applied to social groupings (such as race, gender, ethnicity, language, and other, more subtle representations that are activated in certain discourse settings) and the way individuals think of themselves as they move through the different discourses in which these categories are salient.

Duff and Uchida (1997: 452) echo this view and highlight the role language plays in shaping identity, stating that:



Sociocultural identities and ideologies are not static....rather... identities and beliefs are co-constructed, negotiated, and transformed on an ongoing basis by means of language.

In her treatment of social identity, Norton (1995, 2000) argues that SLA researchers need to integrate the idiosyncratic, complex and evolving identities of the language learner into their theory, and examine how their social world and language learning context interacts with the language learning process. She posits that language learning is much more than a skill, arguing that it is a complex social practice that engages the identities of the student.

SLA theory needs to develop a conception of identity that is understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable, social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction. ... foreground the role of language as constitutive of and constituted by a language learner's identity (Norton, 2000: 5).

Rather than using the term social identity, Norton draws on the Poststructuralist theorist Chris Weedon, using the terms subjectivity and subject positions, terms central to poststructuralist theory. This approach rejects the notion that identity is unified, fixed and coherent, stable over both time and space. Instead, it is viewed as constantly being reconstituted through communications and interactions with others in situated learning environments that reflect the lived histories of individuals. Weedon (1987: 32) defines subjectivity as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world”. Subjectivities that will impinge on language learning include race, gender and class. During the language acquisition process, the learner vocalises their experience, and understands it according to different ways of thinking, thereby reconstituting their subjectivities (Weedon, 1987: 33).

In attempting to understand a language learner's social identity, many SLA theorists draw on concepts pioneered by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. In particular, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and

---

relations of power have informed theoretical discussions on identity in SLA.

### **3. Bourdieu's Approach to Identity and Concepts that inform SLA Theory**

In order to understand how Bourdieu's theories inform discussions on identity in the field of SLA, it is necessary to first understand the concepts that underlie these theories. Specifically, I will review Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, capital, and relations of power, as it is these concepts which SLA theorists have drawn heavily on. Block (2007) describes Bourdieu's approach to identity as a dual action, where identity conditions and is conditioned by social interaction and social structures, which continuously alters and recreates identity. These social structures impose constraints on the identities of individuals, due to what Bourdieu refers to as different power relations between individuals. Bourdieu describes power in terms of capital, which is inherited from the past and constantly being created. In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu (1986) makes a distinction between economic, cultural and social capital. He later added the notion of symbolic capital, as being necessary for the other forms of capital to operate. Bourdieu came up with the notion of social and cultural capital in an attempt to provide a theoretical hypothesis to explain the disparities in educational achievement of children from different social backgrounds. Economic capital, which forms the basis of the other forms of capital, was considered an insufficient explanation. It is the construct of cultural capital, and the strong link between that and the construct of the habitus, from which an individual can derive cultural capital, that has received much attention from SLA researchers. Cultural capital stems from the social background of the individual, and includes gender, level of education, skin colour, all of which can facilitate or inhibit your chances in life, and be a source of class domination. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital distinguishes between embodied (or incorporated) cultural capital, objectified cultural capital and institutionalised cultural capital. Linguistic competence (Bourdieu 1991), which he relates to social class and to the habitus, can function as an embodied form of cultural capital, and in modern society, individuals from minority backgrounds tend to possess a smaller volume of this cultural or linguistic capital, as the linguistic capital of that society

will lie in the official language used by the dominant social group, which the dominant social group can then use to buy even more symbolic power.

Acquisition of this linguistic capital, which cannot be transmitted to another individual, is done in the interest of self-improvement, and presupposes a personal cost to the individual in the form of investment of time and energy, in the hope that it will yield profits for its owner, while at the same time, function as symbolic capital. This symbolic capital can then be converted to economic and social capital, thus enabling the individual to gain access to other material capital, such as education and other valuable linguistic practices such as literacy skills, furthering their ability to access even more material resources. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital explains why minority groups will try and acquire knowledge held by the dominant group, such as acquisition of the dominant language, in an attempt to gain materials, or access to materials, that only the dominant class has access to. A typical example would be a non-English speaking immigrant family moving to Dublin, trying to acquire English, the language of educational and socioeconomic advancement, in order to gain access to the education system or the labour market. By moving to Dublin, this minority family have lost economic, cultural and social capital. Their children will be at a disadvantage in relation to children who have been socialised in the dominant culture, as it is the dominant culture which is reproduced in the schools.

This paper will discuss three areas of L2 learning that been informed by concepts pioneered by Bourdieu; namely interaction, the notion of the legitimate speaker and learner motivation. These three areas have been chosen as they all help shape the identities of the L2 learner.

#### **4. The Notion of Interaction in Language Learning**

Study of interactional routines in SLA literature looks at the importance of psycholinguistic processes involved in the interaction between L2 learners and other speakers of the L2, and focuses on the speech used by native speakers (NS) when addressing the non-native speaker (NNS). Studies revealed that, in order to facilitate the L2 learner's comprehension of the language, the NS used a simplified, often

ungrammatical, version of the language when addressing the NNS. In a seminal paper by Hatch (1978), the importance of interaction and language learning is discussed, and over the years, many SLA researchers have taken Hatch's lead and looked at the importance of interaction and its role in aiding the language learning process (Aston 1986; Braidí 2002; Doughty and Verala 1998; Farrar 1992; Foster and Ohta 2005; Gass 1988; Gass and Varonis 1985; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991; Long 1983; Long and Robinson 1998; Lyster and Raita 1997; Oliver 1995; Pica 1994; Pienemann 1989).

However, Willet (1995) and Menard-Warwick (2005) have brought these studies to task and called for a more sociocultural approach where the focus is on the external sociopolitical context, rather than solely on the internal linguistic processes of interaction. Willet (1995) argues that studies should examine who can say what to whom, and for what purpose and in what manner is what is uttered shaped by the social context. Willett (1995), based on a case study of four children acquiring English in a mainstream classroom, demonstrates how the micropolitics of the classroom shaped how the children interacted with each other and how members of the classroom jointly constructed the L2 children's positive social identities, and ideologies, and that these identities, social relations and ideologies facilitated the conditions necessary for language development to take place.

Menard-Warwick (2005) echoes this and points out that very often individuals interacting across linguistic boundaries come from different positions within a given social structure, and drawing on Bourdieu, argues that the key point in understanding Bourdieu's contribution to SLA theory is to accept that since interactions between individuals tend to reflect the societal positions of the interlocutors, these interactions are likely to both express and reproduce the structures of society. The NS/NNS interactions that have been considered key to language acquisition in SLA theory are recognised in Bourdieu's theory as sites in which power relations are reproduced, an area which will be explored in more detail in the next section.

---

#### 4.1 Bourdieu's Notion of the Legitimate Speaker and Language Learning

Bourdieu (1977, p. 648) takes SLA theory to task due to its abstract concept of linguistic competence, arguing that it must incorporate the right of the interlocutor to speak as well as the power of the interlocutor to impose reception:

Language is not only an instrument of communication or even knowledge, but also an instrument of power. One seeks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished. Whence the complete definition of competence as right to speak, that is, as right to the legitimate language, the authorised language, the language of authority. Competence implies the power to impose reception.

Due to their low level of linguistic competence, McKay and Wong's (1996) subjects struggled with the Bourdieusian concept of "the power to impose reception" (Bourdieu, 1977: 75) and thus must simultaneously acquire the right to speak while negotiating their identities. Proceeding from Norton's premise that identity is multiple, fluid and often contradictory, and furthering this by stressing that the language learner has human agency, the learner is considered to be subject to and subject of relations of power, and needs to exercise this, by focusing on discourses or establishing counterdiscourses. They extend Norton's analysis which centres on the subject positions of the L2 learner, and argue that the L2 learner, while positioned in power relations and subject to the influence of discourses, resist the position to which they are assigned, attempt repositioning or establish counterdiscourses to conduct social negotiations and form identities (McKay and Wong, 1996: 603).

Norton (2000) demonstrates how Bourdieu's notion of the legitimate speaker helps explain the natural language learning experiences of the immigrant women in her study. Angelil-Carter (1997) draws and extends Bourdieu's notion of the legitimate speaker and argues that the positions of language learners and thus their ability to claim the right to speak, will change over time, and can even change within one encounter.

Norton (1995) takes SLA theory to task for failing to recognise that inequitable power relations will limit the opportunities of the L2 learner to integrate with target language speakers, both in the formal classroom situation and in the informal environment of the target language community. It is the relations of power which will determine the opportunities the L2 learner has to speak the L2 both inside the classroom and outside the classroom with other members of the L2 speaking community.

Day (2002) also draws on Bourdieu's notion of power to explore the interrelationship between language learning, identity and social relationship of Hari, a Punjabi-speaking English language learner attending a mainstream kindergarten classroom in Canada, in the context of his relations with his teacher and classmates. Day demonstrates how the complexity of power relations in the classroom play a critical role in identities that learners can negotiate in the classroom. Despite his English language development, with the exception of his interaction with a newcomer to the class, with whom he built up a caring, trusting relationship, Hari did not have 'the power to impose reception' with his other classmates, thus limiting the kind of access and extent of participation he could have in the classroom. Due to the valued place he had with his teacher, Hari transformed his participation and played an active role in developing the position she offered him. Day (2002:109) sums up the study saying that:

Hari had different social value with different members of his class and that these evaluations influenced the identities he displayed, his access, his participation, and his opportunities for learning.

Lin (1999) demonstrates how Bourdieu provides useful tools for considering the issue of reproduction and transformation in schools by examining the notion of relations of power in the classroom by exploring whether classrooms where English is taught are places where social identities and power inequalities are reproduced or transformed. She looks at four diverse classroom situations in Hong-Kong and discusses how different classroom approaches may have different implications for the reproduction or transformation of the students' lives, and concludes that teachers must use creative and discursive practices that are appropriate to the student and congruent with the

students' identity, thus facilitating the transformation of the students' habitus and social position.

## **5. From Motivation to Investment**

Norton (2000) challenges the notion of motivation, an important concept which SLA research use to quantify the desire of the speaker, who has a unified, coherent identity, to speak the L2. Norton (2000) argues that the notion of motivation in SLA does not capture the interrelationship between power, identity and language learning and instead builds on Bourdieu's theoretical notion of cultural capital, introducing the term investment, which she first coined in 1995, as a better indicator in explaining language use. The construct of investment:

conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires. The notion presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organising and reorganising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space (Norton, 2000:11).

Norton's data shows how the L2 learners' motivation to speak is mediated by investments related to the learners' social identity, which may conflict with their motivation to speak. An understanding of motivation in the SLA literature should incorporate this and acknowledge that motivation is not a fixed personality trait, but an ever-evolving trait which needs to be understood in the context of the learners' complex learning environment with reference to relations of power which will determine the learners' opportunity to interact with the target language community. She argues that students invest in linguistic capital, in the hope that, in doing so, will enable them acquire and gain access to symbolic and material resources, that would otherwise be unattainable. In Norton's (2000) narrative of five female immigrants in Canada, she argues that their investment in English gives them the power to claim the right to speak, opens up their ability to acquire

symbolic and material capital, which consequently will alter and enhance their perception of self and their future ambitions. Other researchers who adopt Norton's notion of investment include Angelil-Carter (1997), Ibrahim (1999), McKay and Wong (1996) and Potowski (2004).

Potowski (2004) draws on Norton's concept of investment to explain how students' identity investments may accelerate or hinder their language use in a dual immersion classroom and goes on to say:

Individuals' investment in using a given language can seem at times contradictory, depending on the relationship they have with a given interlocutor and the facets of their identity that they wish to portray at a particular moment (Potowski, 2004:77).

if students' identity investments compete with their investments in developing the target language, or if the classroom environment denies them opportunities to participate in ways that are acceptable to them, their target language growth will not be as great as educators might hope (Potowski, 2004: 95).

McKay and Wong (1996) adopt and revise Norton's concept of investment in their longitudinal study of adolescent Chinese immigrant students in the United States. They expand on the notion of investment-enhancement and argue that identity-enhancement and agency-enhancement are also powerful indicators in L2 development. McKay and Wong's study highlights the need to study the interrelationship between discourse and power in SLA; what they call viewing the language learner from a contextual perspective.

## **5.1 Pedagogical Implications**

Acknowledging that issues of power and identity are intertwined with the language learning process, it follows that SLA theory that incorporates the complex social identity of the language learner can be used to inform language pedagogy in ways that will enhance and facilitate the L2 learning process.



---

Menard-Warwick (2005), echoes Norton (1995) and Thesen (1997) and stresses that for successful language learning to take place, it is necessary for teachers to design curricula that incorporates, engages and identifies with the learners' identity in the teaching and learning process and ensure that the programme is congruent with the various identities of the learner, such as their lived experiences, class background, ethnic history and societal position that learners bring with them to the classroom, while at the same time being congruent with the futures to which they aspire.

Discussing how classrooms might identify with learners' identities, Pennycook (2001) cites Jewell (1998: 4) who argues that the content of English as a Second Language (ESL) textbooks and many ESL classrooms is still "a world in which young, heterosexual, middle-class, well-educated people live in big houses and travel and shop incessantly". For effective L2 learning to take place, it is vital that textbooks and classroom content identify with the L2 learner. Norton (1995) expands this notion stating that teachers must constantly adapt the curriculum to fit the changing needs of the students as their identities continue to change over the time and space they inhabit.

Norton (1995, 2000) stresses the need for teachers to understand why their students are there, and help students become aware of the unfair power relations of societies. They need to complement the students' learning situations outside of the classroom by teaching students the language necessary to interact with the various environments and enable them to raise their voices against the unfair power relations. Teachers need to be aware of the opportunities (or lack of) available to students to interact with other speakers of the target language outside of the classroom. The good language learner depends not only on what they do as individuals to enhance their learning experience, it also depends on their ability to access the social networks of the target language speakers and teachers need to facilitate access to these social networks. As a means to achieve this, Norton (1995: 26) proposes a classroom-based social research framework as a means to "engage the social identities of students in ways that will improve their language learning outside the classroom and help them claim the right to speak". Norton (2000: 152) defines class-room based social research as collaborative research that is conducted by L2 learners in their local communities, under the guidance of their language teacher.

Teachers must ensure that social identities and unequal power relations are not reproduced in the classroom, and, in the words of Lin (1999: 393), must see if students and teachers are conducting language classes “in the reproduction or in the transformation of the students’ social worlds”. If the habitus of the L2 learner is incongruous with that of the school or classroom, then social stratification will be reproduced rather than transformed. Because language is a key agent in the transformation of identities, teachers should encourage students to engage in talk. Language educators must develop their students’ agency of identity, and must enhance the language learning experience by implementing strategies to encourage the student to consider how their identity is either constructed or constrained in communities of practice and encourage them to claim the right to speak.

Day (2002) recommends practices such as collaborative learning, oral story telling, peer tutoring and buddy systems as pedagogical practices that will help give the child a voice in the classroom, and help foster a sense of community in the classroom by facilitating social relations and friendships in the classroom.

However, it is worth noting that, in interviews with teachers of language minority children, teachers displayed a great awareness of the need to adopt the various pedagogical approaches discussed above in order to help embrace the needs of the language minority student and facilitate their learning process and their ability to interact with their peers. Interviews with teachers showed that they were mindful of how well students succeed in learning English and how well they succeed academically will be greatly dependent on the English language support they receive, and the pedagogical practices they encounter in the ESL (English as a Second language) and mainstream classes. However, all teachers cited a number of obstacles, such as lack of suitable materials, adequate teacher-training, coupled with time and space restraints, which limit what they themselves can do to enrich the educational experience of the student. Teachers felt challenged to address the difficulties these children face which hamper their academic achievement. Teachers commented that many of the ESL textbooks available were contextually meaningless to students, transmitting the values of the dominant host culture and did not acknowledge the socioeconomic reality of the student.

## **5.2 Implications for Future SLA Research**

To provide an enhanced understanding of identity and L2 learning, SLA research needs to incorporate a sociocultural perspective into its theories. Block (2003) proposes that SLA research which relies more on learners' accounts of their own experiences would be a suitable way to incorporate the sociocultural perspective into SLA theory. This is referred to as the narrative approach. Block (2003: 131) argues that a narrative approach:

is more informed by social theory than applied linguistics, and that it represents a shift from seeing outcomes of encounters with languages only in linguistic or meta-cognitive terms to seeing them in sociohistorical terms. For example, rather than focus on the acquisition of morphemes, this research examines whether or not learners are able to become fully participating members of the communities of practice they wish to join.

Block, citing Mitchell and Myles (1998) goes on, however, to argue that research should not only look at L2 development embedded in its social context, it should also address the linguistic side of SLA and the learning path being followed, saying that the desired research approach should combine the two contrasting perspectives of the social context and the cognitive and linguistic aspects of SLA.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the importance of the relationship between identity and the acquisition of a second language, demonstrating how Bourdieu provides us with tools which can facilitate our understanding of how learning and speaking an L2 can influence the formation of the social identity of the language learner and the transformation of their social lives. The need for SLA theorists to incorporate this sociocultural perspective into the linguistic and cognitive aspect of their research is evident from the studies presented here. The learners' lived experiences, class background, ethnic history and societal position must be regarded as constituting the very fabric of their lives, and must be acknowledged

---

and incorporated into pedagogical practices in the classroom in order to facilitate the learning process.

## References

- Angelil-Carter, S. 1997. "Second Language Acquisition of Spoken and Written English: Acquiring the Skeptron". *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, pp. 263-287.
- Aston, G. 1986. "Trouble-shooting in Interaction with Learners: The More the Merrier?" *Applied Linguistics*, 7, pp. 128-143.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Block, D. 2007. "The Rise of Identity in SLA Research, Post Firth and Wagner (1997)", *The Modern Language Journal*, 91, Focus Issue, pp. 863-876.
- Block, D. 2003. *The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986. "The Forms of Capital". In: Richardson, J.G. (ed). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258.
- Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Oxford, UK: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. "The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges", *Social Science Information*, 16, pp. 645-668.
- Braidi, S. 2002. "Reexamining the Role of Recasts in Native-Speaker / Nonnative Speaker Interactions". *Language Learning* 52; 1, pp. 1-42.
- Corson, D. 2001. *Language Diversity and Education*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cummins, J. 2000. *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clarendon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. 1999. "Biliteracy, Empowerment, and Transformative Pedagogy". In: J.V. Tinajero, and De Villar, R.A. (eds.). *The Power of Two Languages: 2000*. New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 9-19.
- Day, E. (2002). *Identity and the Young English Language Learner*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Doughty, C. & Varela, E. 1998. "Communicative Focus and Form". In C. Doughty & J. Williams (eds.). *Focus on Form in Classroom Second*

- 
- Language Acquisition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 114-138.
- Duff, P. , & Uchida, Y. 1997. “The Negotiation of Teachers’ Sociocultural Identities and Practices in Postsecondary EFL Classrooms”. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, pp. 451-486.
- Farrar, M. 1992. “Negative Evidence and Grammatical Morpheme Acquisition”. *Developmental Psychology*, 28, pp. 90-98.
- Foster, P. & Ohta, A.S. 2005. “Negotiation for Meaning and Peer Assistance in Second Language Classrooms”. *Applied Linguistics* Vol. 26, Number 3. pp. 402-430.
- Gass, S. 1998. “Apples and Oranges: Or Why Apples are not Oranges and don’t need to be, A response to Firth and Wagner”. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82, pp. 83-90.
- Gass, S. 1988. “Integrating Research Areas: a Framework for Second Language Studies”. *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 9, No. 2., pp. 198-217
- Gass, S. & Varonis, E.M. 1985. “Speech Modification to Non-native Speakers”. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. Vol. 7, No. 1., pp. 37-57.
- Gumperz, J.J., Jupp, T.C. & Roberts, C. 1979. “Crosstalk: A Study of Cross-cultural communication”. London: National Centre for Industrial Training in association with the BBC.
- Hatch, E. 1978. “Acquisition of Syntax in a Second Language”. In J.C. Richards (ed.) *Understanding second and foreign language learning: Issues and approaches*, pp. 34-69. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Hawkins, M. 2005. “Becoming a student: Identity Work and Academic Literacies in Early Schooling”. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39, pp. 59-82.
- Ibrahim, A. 1999. “Becoming Black: Rap and Hip-Hop, Race, Gender, Identity, and the Politics of ESL Learning”. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 349-369.
- Jewell, J. 1998. “A transgendered ESL learner in relation to her class textbooks, heterosexist hegemony and change”. *Melbourne Papers in Applied Linguistics*, 10, pp. 1-21.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. E., & Long, M. H. 1991. *An introduction to second language acquisition research*. New York: Longman.
- Leki, I. 2006. “Negotiating Socioacademic Relations: English Learners’ Reception by and Reaction to College Faculty”. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. Vol. 5. Issue 2, pp. 136-152.

- 
- Lin, A. 1999. "Doing English-Lessons in the Reproduction or Transformation of Social Worlds?" *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 393-412.
- Long, M. H. 1983. "Native speaker / non-native speaker conversation and the negotiation of comprehensible input". *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 126-141.
- Long, M. & Robinson, P. 1998. "Focus on Form: Theory, Research and Practice". In C. Doughty & J. Williams (eds) *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 15-41.
- Lyster, R. & Ranta, L. 1997. "Corrective Feedback and Learner Uptake. Negotiation of Form in Communicative Classrooms". *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 20, pp 37-66.
- McKay, S. & Wong, S. 1996. "Multiple Discourses, Multiple Identities: Investment and Agency in Second-Language Learning among Chinese Adolescent Immigrant Students". *Harvard Educational Review*, 66, pp. 577-608.
- Menard-Warwick, J. 2005. "Both a Fiction and an Existential Fact: Theorizing Identity in Second Language Acquisition and Literacy Studies". *Linguistics and Education*, 16, pp. 253-27.
- Mitchell, R. & Myles, F. 1998. *Second Language Learning Theories*, London: Edward Arnold.
- Norton, B. 2000. *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Norton, B. 1995. "Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning". *TESOL Quarterly*, 29 (1), pp. 9-31.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. 2001. "Changing Perspectives on Good Language Learners". *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 307-322.
- Oliver, R. (1995). Negative Feedback in Child NS-NNS Conversation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 17, pp. 459-81.
- Pennycook, A. 2001. *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pica, T. 1994. "Review Article. Research on Negotiation: What does it Reveal about Second-Language Learning Conditions, Processes, and Outcomes?" *Language Learning* 44 (3), pp. 493-527.
- Pienemann, M. 1989. "Is Language Teachable? Psycholinguistic Experiments and Hypotheses". *Applied Linguistics*, 10, 52-79.
- Potowski, K. 2004. "Student Spanish Use and Investment in a Dual Immersion Classroom: Implications for Second Language Acquisition

- 
- and Heritage Language Maintenance”. *Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 88, no. 1, pp. 75-101.
- Schumann, J. 1978. *The Pidginization Process: a Model for Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Thesen, L. 1997. “Voices, Discourse, and Transition: In Search of New Categories in EAP”. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 487-511.
- Vygotsky, L. S. 1978. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wagner, J. & Firth, A. 1997. “On Discourse, Communication, and (Some) Fundamental Concepts in SLA Research”. *Modern Language Journal*, 81, pp. 286-300.
- Weedon, C. 1987. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. London: Blackwell.
- Willett, J. 1995. “Becoming First Graders in an L2: An Ethnographic Study of L2 Socialization”. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 29. No. 3, pp. 473-503.





***Habitus*, self-identity, and positioning:  
The multifarious nature of study abroad**

*Jane Jackson*

***Abstract***

*For the social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, habitus denotes ‘the durable motivations, perceptions and forms of knowledge that people carry around in their heads as a result of living in particular social environments and that predispose them to act in certain ways’ (Layder 1997:23). When individuals move from their home environment to unfamiliar social settings they are naturally exposed to different, and sometimes unsettling, ways of being (e.g., linguistic and cultural practices). While some border crossers develop a sense of belonging in the new milieu and experience identity and linguistic expansion, others retreat to the safety of their L1 and habitus. What might account for differing outcomes on stays abroad? Drawing on an ethnographic case study of Chinese sojourners in England, this paper explores the complex interplay between language, identity, and sociocultural context. Weaving together data from various sources (e.g., open-ended surveys, interview transcripts, diary entries, field notes) sensitized me to the contradictory, relational, and dynamic nature of self-identity and the influence of social relations, power, and access on L2 acquisition and intercultural adjustment. Individual, social psychological factors also impact on sojourn outcomes. Some students took advantage of linguistic and cultural affordances in their environment, opting to ‘converge’ and appropriate the discourse of their hosts (Bourhis et al. 2007). By contrast, those who experienced identity misalignments and felt constrained in new social fields clung to their L1, national identity, and familiar habits. The unique and diverse developmental trajectories of these sojourners underscore the complexity and multifarious nature of study abroad.*

## 1. Introduction

For the past decade, groups of English majors from a Hong Kong university have been travelling to England as part of a study abroad program that is specially designed to enhance their intercultural communicative competence. To better understand their language and cultural learning, I have conducted ethnographic investigations of most of the cohorts (Jackson 2008, 2010). When analysing the data I discovered interesting differences in developmental trajectories and sojourn outcomes. To help account for these variations, this paper draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, who drew attention to the context-dependent sociocultural and political dimensions of language and cultural learning.

## 2. Bourdieusian social theory

To fully grasp the implications of Bourdieusian social theory for the sojourn experience, it is essential to be familiar with the constructs of *field*, *linguistic capital*, and *habitus*. The former refers to a social arena in which individuals or ‘social agents’ compete for desirable resources (e.g., status, knowledge, wealth). Social positions and relations are thought to be structured internally in terms of power differentials, with values and worldviews largely determining what individuals consider worth striving for. For example, when the linguistic and cultural capital (worth) of English is prized, people in non-English speaking countries may invest considerable time and effort into mastering this global language.

Also central to Bourdieu’s (1977, 1991) social theory is the notion of *habitus*, which refers primarily to the non-discursive elements of culture that influence our thoughts and behaviours, reinforcing bonds with other members of the social groups we belong to. For this theorist, *habitus* encompasses the learned habits (e.g., daily practices), skills, styles, tastes, values, and beliefs shared by specific groups, societies, or nations. This ‘set of dispositions’ is believed to guide the actions and discourse of individuals in social exchanges. Basically, *habitus*, from a Bourdieusian perspective, involves the ‘durable motivations, perceptions and forms of knowledge that people carry around in their heads as a result of living in particular social environments and that predispose them to act in certain ways’ (Layder 1997: 236).

---

Bourdieu (1991) coined the term 'linguistic habitus' to describe the 'sub-set of dispositions' acquired while learning to communicate in a socially acceptable manner within specific sociocultural settings (e.g., at home, at school, with grandparents). Similar to other forms of *habitus*, a social agent's linguistic habitus is a cumulative product of experience and socialization, which serves as a guide for language use in daily life. Through the process of language and cultural socialization, dispositions are influenced by prevailing sociopolitical conditions and hierarchies in the environment. Therefore, *habitus* affects linguistic practices (e.g., the use of a particular accent and style of communication) and, as Vann (1999) points out, it impacts on one's perceptions of the symbolic value of these practices in various social arenas or what Bourdieu refers to as a *field*.

Within Bourdieu's theory of practice, linguistic exchanges are regarded as 'situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies' (Thompson 1991: 2). When communicating through language, Bourdieu (1991) argues that individuals call on their repertoire of linguistic resources and, to varying degrees, adapt their discourse to their interlocutor, taking into account the social '*field*' of the interaction. Speakers who have been socialized in the same environment typically observe learned norms of behaviour, reinforcing prevailing social structures.

What happens when social norms and hierarchies are not recognized or adhered to? Bourdieu (1991) warns of the miscommunication and disorientation that can occur as a consequence of incongruence between a *habitus* and a *field*. For example, when individuals cross cultures, they travel with sets of dispositions (*habitus*) linked to the socialization process they experienced in their home environment. Initially, their behaviour, values, and worldviews may be an uncomfortable fit within the new *field*. Consequently, they may experience culture shock when exposed to practices and values that clash with their own. In the host culture, they may find it difficult to express their thoughts and emotions in their second language in a way that is understood by their hosts. Further, they may be unsure about what is considered 'appropriate' in a range of sociocultural settings that are foreign to them. They may then suffer identity misalignments, frequently feel misunderstood, and begin to question their place in the world.

Even if newcomers adjust their behaviour to conform to local norms (e.g., appropriate local expressions of politeness, imitate a local accent) as

---

articulated in the communication accommodation theory (Bourhis, el-geledi, and Sachdev 2007; Gallois, Ogay, and Giles, 2005), host nationals may still view them as outsiders. Much to their chagrin, locals may not recognize or accept their new identity. Instead, they may continue to deny the newcomers 'in-group' membership status, as Joseph (2004: 75) explains:

Even the individual who in a wilful, active way undoes the identity they were born and socialized into and takes on a new identity (thus undercutting the very basis on which the habitus stands) is still going to be perceived, interpreted, and measured by those around them in terms of their relative place within a network of social hierarchies based on the distribution of cultural capital.

While individuals possess the ability to understand and make choices about their own behaviour, Bourdieu (1991) maintains that the degree of agency is limited by prevailing power structures and hierarchies within a *field*. Even if newcomers engage in the act of 'convergence' (e.g., 'adapt their communicative behaviours in terms of a wide range of linguistic (e.g., languages, accents, speech rates), paralinguistic (e.g., pauses, utterance length), and nonverbal features (e.g., smiling, gazing) in such a way as to become familiar to their interlocutor's behaviour' (Bourhis et al., 2007: 37), they may still be denied access to resources and their preferred self-identity (Joseph, 2004; Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, 2002). Bourdieu's social theory raises our awareness of the potential challenges facing border crossers who enter a new environment and seek to become accepted in the new community. The remainder of the paper explores Bourdieusian notions that help elucidate variations in the trajectories of second language sojourners.

### **3. The short-term study abroad program**

Since 2001, the Chinese University of Hong Kong has been offering a study abroad program for second year English majors. It is specifically designed to enhance their English language proficiency, intercultural sensitivity, literary awareness, and intercultural communicative competence. The program encourages the participants to become more confident when communicating in English in a variety of contexts, including informal, social situations.

The program consists of pre-sojourn seminars in applied linguistics (ethnographic research), intercultural communication (culture-general/culture-specific elements) and English literature; a five-week sojourn in England; post-sojourn debriefing sessions; and an undergraduate dissertation related to the experience abroad. The sojourn includes a homestay component, literary and cultural studies at a university in central England, excursions (e.g., to the theatre, museums), and small-scale ethnographic projects (Jackson 2006). All elements of the program are credit-bearing and integrated into the Bachelor of Arts program of studies.

### **3.1 Ethnographic investigations of the sojourn experience**

To better understand the language and cultural development of the participants, from 2001-9 I conducted ethnographic investigations of most offerings of this program. By spending more than a year with each cohort in informal and formal situations, I was able to observe and record their language and intercultural development both in Hong Kong and England. This allowed me to track their trajectories in a range of environments and better understand the impact of the sojourn experience.

#### **3.1.1 The participants**

Since the first offering of this program, I have observed more than 115 participants, with an average of 13 students in a cohort each year. All of them have been full-time English majors in the second year of a three-year BA program; the vast majority have been female, reflecting the gender distribution in the English Department at the home institution. On entry into the program, the students have had an average age of 20.2 years and a grade point average of 3.2. All of them have grown up in Hong Kong and nearly all declared Cantonese to be their first language. A few spoke Putonghua (Mandarin) or a Mainland Chinese dialect as an additional language (usually the mother tongue of a parent) and many also knew some basic French, Japanese, or German. All of the students have had an advanced level of proficiency in English on entry, with an average of 'B' on the 'Use of English' A-level

examination at the end of their secondary schooling. Only a few had participated in other exchange programs before travelling to England with their peers (e.g., a summer language immersion program in Canada or the U.S.). For most, forays outside Hong Kong had largely consisted of short family trips to Mainland China or organized tours to other Asian countries.

Before joining the program, none of the participants had ever taken a course in intercultural or cross-cultural communication, anti-racist education, or multiculturalism. Further, except for the few students who had visited an English-speaking country, their use of English had largely been confined to academic settings in Hong Kong. Most had had very limited exposure to informal, social English before travelling to England. Only a few had personal relationships across cultures.

Each year, all of the participants signed a consent form as part of the home institution's research ethics review procedures. Although free to withdraw at any time, none did.

### 3.1.2 Data collection

The ethnographic investigation of each cohort consisted of three distinct phases: pre-sojourn, sojourn, and post-sojourn. Pre-sojourn data included: each student's application letter to join the program, a language and cultural identity narrative and an intercultural reflections journal written in the intercultural communication course, open-ended surveys, and interviews that prompted the participants to reflect on: their cultural background, language use, identity, previous travels/ study abroad experiences (if any), intercultural contact, and aspirations/ concerns about the impending trip to England. During this phase I kept detailed field notes.

Data collected during the sojourn included a diary and weekly open-ended surveys designed to draw out student views about: their intercultural adjustment, their awareness and reactions to cultural differences, their use of English in daily life, their identities, their perception of their intercultural communication skills and sensitivity; and their investigation of a cultural scene (e.g., pub scene, charity shop). Data about the students' intercultural adjustment and behavior was also gathered from their instructors and homestay co-coordinator at the host institution. I accompanied most of the groups to England and recorded

my observations and ethnographic conversations in my field notes.

Post-sojourn data included: an open-ended survey and an interview with the participants about their sojourn and re-entry experiences. In particular, the interviewees were encouraged to reflect on the impact of study abroad on: their intercultural awareness and sensitivity, self-conception, and intercultural communication skills. During a three-month period, I supervised the development of the ethnographic dissertations of those who chose this option. This afforded me the opportunity to have further informal discussions with them about their sojourn and re-entry experiences. I continued to keep field notes during this phase of the study.

From 2006 to 2009, I also employed the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI, version 2) (Hammer and Bennett 2002) to measure and track the participants' intercultural sensitivity at strategic intervals: on entry, after the pre-sojourn preparation, and immediately after the sojourn.

### **3.2 Procedures and analysis**

Each year, once the students in a cohort agreed to participate, I set up a project database for them in NVivo, a qualitative software program. Each piece of data was entered soon after it was gathered, resulting in a rich database of oral and written narratives, digital images, and IDI scores (for post-2006 groups) (Jackson 2008, 2010). Using an 'open coding' approach (Grbich 2007), I devised codes to reflect what I saw in the material rather than restrict myself to preconceived notions. As I triangulated data types and sources, new categories continually emerged, while others were reorganized as I gained more awareness of the relationship between items. Similar steps were repeated with each offering of the study abroad program and the NVivo analyses for all cohorts were then merged to form a large database. This permitted the development of a more comprehensive picture of the language and cultural learning and self-identity changes of all program participants over time. Due to space limitations, the remainder of this paper focuses on elements of Bordieusian social theory that help explain variations in sojourner trajectories.

---

### 3.3 Discussion of Findings

All of the students who joined the study abroad program had an advanced level of proficiency in English and took part in the same pre-sojourn preparation in Hong Kong. While in England, they lived with their own host family for five weeks and joined the same excursions, cultural and literary studies courses, and weekly debriefing sessions. All of the young sojourners conducted small-scale ethnographic projects in a cultural scene of their choice and on a daily basis were exposed to numerous cultural practices ('actions with a history') (Bourdieu 1991) that differed from what they were used to in Hong Kong. Despite these similarities, there were profound differences in the way their sojourns unfolded.

While some of the students (e.g., Niki and Elsa), experienced significant growth in terms of their linguistic and cultural learning, others (e.g., Ada and Cori) never felt at home in the new environment and were less satisfied with their progress, which they largely measured in terms of academic development (e.g., knowledge of English grammar) (Jackson 2008). Some participants engaged in various 'acts of convergence' when interacting with locals (e.g., Elsa, Niki, and Jade experimented with the more direct communication style of their hosts), while others resisted (e.g., Ada and Nora adopted an exaggerated style of Hong Kong English that distinguished them from host nationals and bound them closer to their Cantonese-speaking peers) (Jackson 2008, 2010). Some of the sojourners (e.g., Elsa and Jade) embraced the emergence of a more cosmopolitan, global sense of self, while others (e.g., Ada and Cori) were very troubled by identity misalignments in new *fields* and clung tightly to a national or ethnic identity (Jackson 2008, 2010). How might Bourdieu's social theory contribute to our understanding of these disparate outcomes?

Prior to the sojourn, all of the participants recognized the 'linguistic capital' of English (Bourdieu 1991), convinced that fluency in the language was essential to gain access to 'symbolic and material resources' in their own community (e.g., a lucrative job and higher status). Before travelling to England, the majority displayed a primarily instrumental motivation towards the learning of English, focusing on pragmatic aims. Even at this early stage, however, there were noticeable differences among the participants. Some expressed the desire to make the language more a part of their life and draw closer to the world outside Hong



Kong. Prior to departure, they made more of an effort to practice English outside of class and talked excitedly about the opportunity to make friends across cultures in England. While their peers were preoccupied with the enhancement of their academic English language proficiency and job prospects, these individuals sought to enhance their social English and experience another way of life.

As the sojourn unfolded, I observed that some participants (e.g., Elsa, Jade) paid attention to colloquial expressions and appropriated markers of politeness in the host culture; others (e.g., Ada, Cori) were disinterested and resisted this trend, seeing no relevance to their use of English in Hong Kong (Jackson 2008, 2010). The latter engaged in the act of ‘divergence’, ‘a dissociative strategy where individuals change their communicative behaviours to become less similar to their interlocutor’s behaviour’ (Bourhis et al., 2007: 37).

The analysis of the sojourners’ oral and written narratives disclosed a wide range of factors (e.g., individual, sociocultural, psychological, historical, political) that impacted on their willingness to communicate in the host language and establish bonds across cultures. While some made an effort to use English throughout the sojourn, others found this uncomfortable and preferred to chat in Cantonese with their peers to relieve stress as they struggled to adjust to unfamiliar practices. These sojourners remained more fixated on Hong Kong affairs and did not take full advantage of the opportunity to explore new cultural and linguistic scenes in England. In their narratives, some disclosed fears that they would lose their first language even though their period of residence in England was only five weeks.

Those who were less successful in coping with culture shock and displayed a more rigid personality remained uncomfortable with values and modes of behaviour (e.g., communication styles) that differed from their own (*habitus*). Less attuned to host norms of politeness in new *fields*, they appeared oblivious to gaps in their intercultural communicative competence. Believing it sufficient to just be themselves, some were not aware that their communication style (e.g., degree of self-disclosure, indirect discourse) might be adversely impacting on relations with their hosts. The intercultural competence of these sojourners lagged well behind their academic proficiency in the host language.

Aware of their non-native speaker status, some were afraid of making mistakes when using English and felt disadvantaged in a community where they were surrounded by ‘Westerners’ who conversed fluently in

the language. Feeling threatened in an alien environment (*field*) where they were a visible minority, they frequently retreated to the computer room at the host university to connect with friends and family back home via the internet. Drawing closer to a Chinese identity, they remained distant from their hosts and spent much of their free time with their peers. In surveys, they lamented the lack of opportunity to use English in the host environment and were not satisfied with their linguistic gains.

By contrast, others more fully embraced the opportunities that the host environment afforded them. Instead of rejecting everything new as 'strange' or 'irritating', these individuals made much more of an effort to suspend judgment and find out what lay behind these practices. In the weekly debriefing sessions, they asked more focused questions about linguistic and cultural elements in the host culture that had captured their attention. Exhibiting a more flexible, open mindset, I also observed that they experimented with novel ways of being (e.g., appropriating local expressions) as they became more relaxed in their surroundings and better acquainted with their host families. By choosing to spend much of their free time with their hosts, they gained more exposure to the host language and culture. Gradually, these 'social agents' displayed more sociopragmatic awareness (e.g., recognition of local norms of politeness) and became more confident communicating in English in informal, social situations. By the end of their stay, they took pride in their bilingual status, degree of independence, and more sophisticated sense of self. In most cases, their perception of English broadened while in the host culture; they drew closer to the language by using it to function and build personal relationships in their daily life. More invested in enhancing their social English, they interacted with host nationals at bus stops, in grocery stores (service encounters), as well as in their homestay. Where some of their peers saw only limitations, they recognized opportunities.

Agency certainly played a role in how the sojourn unfolded. The choices the participants made in their free time, for example, impacted on their degree of exposure to the host language and culture. This, however, does not fully explain the different learning trajectories. Sociocultural and political elements and the positioning of the Chinese sojourners in the host environment also impacted on their language and cultural learning, as predicted by Bourdieu's social theory. While all of the participants were placed with their own homestay family, not all

situations were equal. Some benefited from a warmer welcome and more access to a wider variety of social scenes (e.g., exposure to their hosts' hobbies, frequent family dinners and gatherings, relaxed conversations in the lounge and kitchen, weekend visits with relatives of their hosts, trips to the pub for a meal). In these homes, the students were treated like a member of the family and often spent their evenings chatting together, which helped deepen their bond.

By contrast, some hosts were very busy with work or personal affairs and spent little time with their 'guests'. In fact, several of the students never had a family meal or joined their hosts on outings. In these homestays, the students experienced far less exposure to cultural scenes and also had less opportunity to develop a relationship with their hosts. Not surprisingly, many of these sojourners never felt fully secure and throughout their stay were keenly aware of their newcomer status (e.g., racially different non-native speakers in a largely white neighbourhood).

The degree of mutuality and respect in the homestay proved to be a key factor in determining sojourn outcomes. From the onset, some hosts appeared to be genuinely interested in their 'guests', often asking about their interests, family background, and life in Hong Kong. These hosts expressed appreciation for Chinese culture and were willing to try Hong Kong dishes when the students prepared a special meal for them. They also tended to be more aware of and sensitive to the students' preferred identity (e.g., Hong Konger not Mainlander). Their stance helped the students feel at ease and adjust to the new environment. Not all of the sojourners experienced this degree of warmth, respect, and openness, however. A few had to repeatedly tell their hosts that they were from Hong Kong and not Japan. These participants sensed a large cultural distance between themselves and the 'large, white Westerners' and never established a personal connection with their hosts. Access, agency, and degree of mutuality all play a role in how sojourns unfold.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The ethnographic investigations of Hong Kong sojourners have revealed that the relationship between language and culture learning on stays abroad is far more complex and variable than what is often conveyed in the literature. It is naïve to assume that all students will automatically enhance their proficiency in the host language simply by

being present in the host culture. Placement in a homestay situation does not guarantee that the experience will be positive and lead to enhanced intercultural communicative competence and a broader sense of self. As Bourdieu (1991) warns, identity misalignments and hostility can arise due to incompatibility between a *habitus* and a *field*, especially when different values collide.

If students are resistant to anything new and not mentally prepared to cross cultures, the outcome can be detrimental. Without effective coping strategies, culture shock may endure and negative stereotypes of host nationals may become further entrenched (Jackson 2008; Stangor, Jonas, Stroebe, and Hewstone 1996). Students may even return home with 'a strengthened sense of national identity' (Block 2007; Jackson 2010) rather than a more open, global mindset.

What are the implications of this? To enhance the learning of student sojourners, adequate linguistic and cultural preparation is essential. Well-designed pre-sojourn programs can play a vital role by fostering the skills they need to cope with the natural ups and downs that occur when one crosses cultures. By developing a range of strategies to make sense of unfamiliar linguistic and cultural scenes, students will be better prepared to adjust to a new environment. Reducing fears and providing encouragement throughout a sojourn can nurture the independence and personal expansion of sojourners. Regular debriefing sessions can prompt deeper reflection and the refinement of language and cultural learning goals throughout a sojourn.

These ethnographic studies of Hong Kong sojourners (Jackson 2008, 2010) also raise awareness of the need for host institutions to attract and retain host families who are genuinely interested in other cultures and prepared to share their daily life with international students. This is critical as students who have supportive, respectful hosts are much more apt to experience significant personal, linguistic, and cultural growth, even during a short stay in the host culture.

Language instructors and study abroad educators who have a realistic grasp of the affordances and constraints facing sojourners in the host culture are better positioned to help second language students optimize their stay abroad. Pre-sojourn programming, on-site support, and re-entry debriefing/ sharing sessions can then be designed to enhance and extend the learning of student sojourners.

## Acknowledgments

My investigations of the study abroad learning of Hong Kong students have been generously supported by Direct Grants from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (#2010288, 2010312), as well as a Competitive Earmarked Research Grant (#4393/04) and General Research Fund Grant (#20100167) from the Hong Kong University Research Council. I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude to the student sojourners. Without their co-operation this research would not have been possible.

## References

- Block, D. 2007. *Second Language Identities*. London: Continuum.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. "The economics of linguistic exchanges". *Social Science Information*, 16 (6), pp. 645–68.
- Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourhis, R. Y., el-geledi, S. and Sachdev, I. 2007. "Language, ethnicity, and intergroup relations". In A. Weatherall (Ed.), *Language, Discourse, and Social Psychology*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 15-50.
- Gallois, C., Ogay, T. and Giles, H. 2005. "Communication accommodation theory". In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, pp. 121-48.
- Grbich, C. 2007. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Hammer, M., & Bennett, M. 2002. *The Intercultural Development Inventory: Manual*. Portland, OR: Intercultural Communication Institute.
- Jackson, J. 2006. "Ethnographic preparation for short-term study and residence in the target culture". *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 30 (1), pp. 77–98.
- Jackson, J. 2008. *Language, Identity, and Study Abroad: Sociocultural Perspectives*. London: Equinox.
- Jackson, J. 2010. *Intercultural Journeys: From Study to Residence Abroad*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.
- Joseph, J. E. 2004. *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Layder, D. 1997. *Modern Social Theory: Key Debates and New Directions*. London: UCL Press.
- Stangor, C., Jonas, K., Stroebe, W., and Hewstone, M. 1996. "Influence of student exchange on national stereotypes, attitudes and perceived group variability". *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 26 (4), pp. 663-675.
- Thompson, J. B. 1991. Editor's introduction. In J. B. Thompson (Ed.), *Language and Symbolic Power (Pierre Bourdieu)*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 1-31.
- Vann, R. 1999. "An empirical perspective on practice: operationalising Bourdieu's notion of linguistic habitus". In P. Lang (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Language, Culture, and Education*, Berne: Peter Lang, pp. 73-83.
- Webb, J., Schirato, T., and Danaher, G. 2002. *Understanding Bourdieu*. London: SAGE.
- rl.com/eurospeak

## Subliminal Messaging in Multimodal Newspaper Editing

The Case of the 2008 US Presidential Election on the Front Pages  
of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*

Anna Bianco

### *Abstract*

*The front page of a newspaper generally contains what its editor considers to be the most important “news of the day”. The front page is known to be a multimodal setting for a whole series of headings, subtitles, articles, reports, news flashes, photographs and other images that are placed together in apparently random fashion. The readership knows little about this layout structure that goes much beyond a general awareness that the most important news is “carried” in a top/central position on the page with large-print headlines, whereas the less important topics are below to one side (and sometimes centrally) in a smaller type size.*

*Specialists in news reading and writing, for their part, know that there is much more to a page and that the multimodal choice of similar topics and related structures also constitute what is known as “newsworthiness”.*

*A few other studies have also looked at the “less important” items reported on the front page and have shown that even unrelated items are actually carriers of the same message or theme as the main items, though without the readers being consciously aware of what is going on. These “unrelated” news items or “implicit topics” are in fact non-casual subliminal messages chosen and designed by the editorial staff as an intrinsic part of the theme of the page as a whole.*

*This paper therefore intends to explore how subliminal messaging was actually used by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* during the US Presidential election campaign 2008. The conclusions to be drawn about this sort of editorial manipulation and subjective reporting, especially during key ideological*

---

*moments like political elections, will hopefully enhance our critical awareness and further debate.*

## 1. Introduction

Most textbooks and manuals that deal with journalism (Hartley 1982, Faustini 1995) agree that the news published in newspapers is selected according to specific criteria. The basis for this choice is often referred to as “newsworthiness” or “news-value” (first mentioned in 1973 by Galtung and Ruge) but, as Fowler rightly points out, “there is always a feeling, in reading newspaper materials [...], that the specific texts are ‘about’ something else” (1991: 170).

When Fowler stated this, however, he was referring to individual articles, whereas Calabrese and Violi (1984), Violi (2004) and Bianco (forthcoming) have shown that on each page of a newspaper (“Corriere della Sera”, “Repubblica”, “The Guardian”, “The Times”) the various items of news, even those seemingly different, are actually linked together by a common ‘theme’ or “topic” (Eco 1979). Hence the aim of this work to analyse and to verify if this device or ‘frame’ may also be found in American newspapers.

So, how is it exactly that the reader of a newspaper can grasp the theme or themes that are suggested by the newspaper? Studies in cognitive psychology are helpful. They state that “the semantic association between words is automatic” and operates both at the conscious and subconscious level (Falvo 2003). Indeed, it is claimed that “considerable evidence suggests that subliminal presentations can influence the recognition of semantically-related words” (Epley 2005; see also Falvo 2003). They also state that the closer the relationship between words and images, the quicker the semantic association is made” (Falvo 2003, Epley 2005).

Similarly, another study has shown through a “technique known as *conceptual priming* that the effect of this priming is achieved through exposure to a concept, a category, a personality trait or a stereotype which, in a successive moment (or context), apparently unconnected to the first, can unknowingly influence the way we assess and judge it socially” (Falvo 2003: 22).

On the basis of the above premises, this paper will attempt to show that a single page or several pages of a newspaper can automatically



create a whole series of semantic associations, concepts and consequently value judgements. In order to do this, the newspapers themselves use many words that are in some way connected between themselves as a means to giving emphasis to one particular concept or *theme* rather than another.

## 2. Methodology

In this paper, two US daily newspapers are analysed, namely the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Their front pages are examined to show how a theme is constructed through a stylistic analysis that takes into account all of the components of a page, from the words to the photographs. To make it easier for the reader of this paper to understand a newspaper text creating associations for the American reader, a familiar topic has been chosen, namely the American presidential election campaign.

For the sake of clarity and in order to avoid possible misunderstandings or misinterpretations, it should be stressed that, even though the journalists who were writing and collaborating within the same newspaper may have been of different political orientations, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* themselves were pro-Democratic. Indeed, the former clearly supported Hillary Clinton with a public endorsement on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, whereas the latter officially came out on the side of Barack Obama on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

Only the front pages of these two newspapers<sup>1</sup> are examined – those of the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2008. They have been specifically chosen because they were published the day after the Primaries in Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas and Vermont (and the caucus in Texas as well). This had been an interesting day, not only because it saw the announcement of the last three front-runners in the presidential race (Clinton, McCain, Obama), but also because, and above all, it did not see the Democratic

---

<sup>1</sup> In order for the reader to make reference to these front pages, two links (kindly authorised by [www.newseum.com](http://www.newseum.com)) have been inserted:

[http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/hr\\_archive.asp?fpVname=NY\\_NYT&ref\\_pge=gal&b\\_pge=1](http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/hr_archive.asp?fpVname=NY_NYT&ref_pge=gal&b_pge=1) and

[http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/hr\\_archive.asp?fpVname=DC\\_WP&ref\\_pge=gal&b\\_pge=2](http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/hr_archive.asp?fpVname=DC_WP&ref_pge=gal&b_pge=2)

---

nomination of Barack Obama. The breaking news of the day was that Hillary Clinton had won after 11 consecutive defeats.

# THE NEW YORK TIMES (A)

Step by s Step, ... (5a)  
Broader U.S. Role(6a)

(2a) CLINTON TAKES OHIO ...

EASILY;  
McCAIN

G.O.P. NOMINATION TO ...



P1a

CLOSE TEXAS  
RACE  
(3a)

Fight Against  
Obama  
Will Continue  
Huckabee Out  
(4a)

Senator John McCain, at a rally Tuesday night in Dallas, claimed the Republican nomination (1a)

Easily Overlooked Lesions Tied To  
Colon Cancer, Study Finds  
(9a)



In 2 Battlegrounds  
Voters Say, Not Yet  
(8a)

P2a

Hillary Rodham Clinton,  
triumphant in Ohio (7a)

THE 2008 CAMPAIGN

## INSIDE

(13a) Abbas Rebuffs U.S. on Talks



P3a

Chávez Employs  
Colombia Feud  
As Flashpoint  
for Feud With U.S.  
(12a)

(Ruth Lopez gives her student Abigail  
Ortega... 10a)

Next Question: Can Students Be Paid  
to Excel? (11a)

### 3. Analysis: the *New York Times*

Beginning with the *New York Times*, the analysis starts with the key components of a page, that is to say “the three elements that arrest eye movement in a newspaper (...) photographs, graphics and headlines” (Hodgson 1987: 44). First of all, in the upper section of the page, we have a large photograph (P1a), which is of Sen. John McCain, with the following caption: “Senator John McCain, at a rally Tuesday night in Dallas, claimed the Republican nomination” (1a). This is preceded by the main headline “Clinton Takes Ohio Easily; G.O.P. Nomination To McCain” (2a), with two subtitles on its right “Close Texas Race” (3a) and “Fight Against Obama Will Continue – Huckabee Out” (4a). There is a further headline to the left “Step by Step, Bush and Fed Move on Mortgage Rescue” (5a), followed by its subtitle “Broader U.S. Role Is Seen in Aiding Rescue” (6a).

In the central section of the page, there is a smaller photograph (P2a), directly under picture (P1a), showing Hillary Clinton with the caption “Hillary Rodham Clinton, triumphant in Ohio” (7a). On the right-hand side, there is the political column “News Analysis” with the title “In 2 Battlegrounds, Voters Say, Not Yet” (8a), whereas on the left there is the headline “Easily Overlooked Lesions Tied To Colon Cancer, Study Finds” (9a).

In the lower section of the page, finally, there is a third photograph (P3a) that is the same size as picture (P1a), showing a classroom in a school with a woman teacher and two girl pupils in the foreground. The caption reads “Ruth Lopez gives her student Abigail Ortega a certificate showing her earnings from test scores” (10a), followed by its headline “Next Question: Can Students Be Paid to Excel?” (11a). There is another headline to the right “Chavez Employs Colombia Feud As Flashpoint for Feud With U.S.” (12a) and, lastly, at the bottom left of the page, 5 news flashes in the “Inside” column.

Roland Barthes, at the beginning of his book (1985: 5) notes that “in newspapers, the photograph is a message” and “the text *guides* the reader between the meanings of the image, making him avoid some and perceive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, he is guided as if by remote control towards a meaning that had been chosen a priori” (1985: 30).

So, having briefly seen the photographs (P1a, P2a) and the related captions (1a, 7a), one word stands out notably for its strong connotation,

which is the word “triumphant” placed under Hillary Clinton’s picture, automatically *guiding* the reader to stop and look at the Senator of New York State more carefully. The same thing happens with John McCain, in that in picture (P1a) the reader is ‘led’ in a certain sense to note the Republican candidate’s smile and pose by means of his supporters’ out-of-focus placards on the right of the photograph *pointing* directly at his face.

In this way, the reader is induced to compare and notice the more spontaneous smile of the Senator from New York State, her gaze towards the left of the picture and her open right hand placed on her heart. Equally the reader notes the rather contained smile of the Republican Senator John McCain (similar to the one on the balloon above his head), his gaze directed at his viewers and the same right hand, this time stretched out with his palm faced downwards towards the public, in the same direction as the readers.

As far as pictures are concerned in general terms, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 122, 123) distinguish between “demand images” and “offer images”. Demand images are those in which, on an imaginary level, “the participant’s gaze (and the gesture, if present) demands something from the viewer”, whereas with offer images “the viewer is not object, but subject of the look, and the picture ‘offers’ [sic] the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, object of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case” (1996: 124).

In the light of these considerations and on the basis of the order according to which the *New York Times* displays the main headlines from the top of the page “Clinton Takes Ohio Easily; G.O.P. Nomination to McCain” (2a), “Close Texas Race” (3a), “Fight Against Obama will Continue – Huckabee Out” (4a), “In 2 Battlegrounds, Voters Say, Not Yet” (8a), the newspaper clearly aims to show both Hillary Clinton’s and McCain’s emotional response after the news of their respective victories and, of course, how they feel about their chances as they “continue [their] fight against Obama”.

More precisely, in picture (P1a) McCain seems to be ‘allowing’ himself a somewhat more contained expression than that of his adversary on the page (P2a), as if he were already planning his next step. As such, he is ‘demanding’ his public/his potential readers to “continue” to support him till the very last “nomination” – as president this time. In contrast, Hillary Clinton seems to be enjoying the moment and has

stopped to thank *heartily* all her electors for an unprecedented day in every sense, since it allows her and her supporters to share a personal and a collective *triumph* all together.

Also, if attention is focussed on the headlines (2a), (3a), (4a), (8a), and if the newspaper only alludes to Hillary Clinton's percentage obtained in Texas versus McCain's in the subtitle (3a), the readers may also infer a certain lack of importance. Even vaguer results are given later on in "in 2 battlegrounds..., Not Yet", (8a), the word "Ohio" next to the adverb "easily" in the *first* line of the opening headline, all of which do convey the importance of the news item but, at the same time, it enables the newspaper both typographically and metaphorically to play down the news of her victory in Texas. Not for the reason that her victory in Texas was unimportant; quite the contrary, it was rather to play down, or indeed hide – as in (8a) too – the news that Texas had not actually been the overwhelming victory that everyone had expected and, consequently, there was not very much to be happy about.

Upon closer inspection, however, the subtitle "Close Texas race" (3a) refers to Hillary's and Obama's results but, at the same time, the message remains the same. It is surely not mere coincidence, rather, that the pro-Clinton newspaper does not print – as the *Washington Post* does – the graphics showing the results for each candidate clearly listed.

The omission of Hillary Clinton's results in Texas against Obama in the main headline also helps the readers/newspaper focus on another important 'news of the day' item, which seems to echo Hillary Clinton's message at a rally in Ohio the day before the polling. It is repeated over and over throughout the first four paragraphs of the main article (2a): "No candidate in recent history – Democratic or Republican – has won the White House without winning the Ohio primary".

Consequently, the adverb "easily" in the opening headline (2a) and the expression "not yet" (8a) aim to underline that her time to leave the presidential race has not "yet" come. Quite the contrary. It recalls that US history points to her as the likely winner over Obama.

The headline in (9a) "Easily Overlooked Lesions Tied To Colon Cancer...", which appears on the left, repeats the adverb "easily", thus linking it to the main headline of Clinton's taking Ohio and taking away the attention from headline (3a) about Texas. Throughout the article (9a), from the introduction where the expression "easily overlooked" first appears, all the paragraphs repeat the same concept over and over,

in an attempt to make the readership think that Hillary's chances were underestimated and that she is a real threat to Obama.

If we take articles (9a) and (8a), respectively to the left and right of Hillary Clinton's photograph/article, characterised by strong concepts like "death" and "not yet", the reader's eyes inevitably focus on the central photograph and the emotion shown by the Democratic candidate in picture (P2a): a mixture of tenderness and happiness together, a feeling of 'having made it'.

The two headlines (5a) and (6a) are linked to another two on the page, "Chavez Employs Colombia Feud As Flashpoint for Feud With U.S." (12a) and the first headline of the "Inside" column "Abbas Rebuffs U.S. on Talks" (13a), in that they 'share' certain words, like the "U.S.", "Bush", and "Washington". Furthermore, beyond the words, the three headlines deal with the same theme, namely successful "agreement" and unsuccessful "talks" with Bush as always the common component.

The repetition of the word "feud" in the headline (12a) and the repeated use of synonyms implying action like the verbs "to employ" and "to use" guide the reader towards this article to help him "see" what else Bush has actually done, compared to the slowness ("Steps by steps...", 5a) of his measures against the mortgage crisis which is *diametrically* opposed in terms of positioning on the page:

"He [Bush] used the diplomatic crisis *to push* [my italics] the Congress to approve a Colombia trade deal that has languished for more than a year because of concerns among senior Democrats over human rights abuses there." (12a)

"However much they might oppose it on ideological grounds, the Bush administration and the Federal Reserve are *inching* [my italics] closer toward a government rescue of distressed homeowners and mortgage lenders." (5a)

At this point, (5a), as it is to the left and running along the opening picture (P1a) with the headline "G.O.P. Nomination/McCain" (2a), clashes with McCain's *quick* smile and plans on how to continue his campaign without losing his supporters. At the same time, the newspaper also leads the readers to interpret the upper part of the *New York Times* in terms of the opposition between what is "the Given" and what is the "New relation" (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 181-192),

whereby “the left is the side of the ‘already given’, something the reader is assumed to know already, as part of the culture, or at least as part of the culture of the magazine, [image, newspaper...].” The aim then of the pro-Clinton newspaper is once again to remind the electors/readers of what the incumbent president Bush has done and, on the right, what another potential Republican candidate for the presidential “nomination” (McCain) could do.

Between articles (12a) and (13a), as already mentioned above, there is the third photograph (P3a) that *focuses* on three females (a teacher and two students) who have clearly Hispanic names and traits (its caption says “Ruth Lopez gives her student Abigail Ortega a certificate...”, 10a), and, more precisely, on a smiling student who is looking at her teacher while she is about to receive her “certificate showing her earnings from test scores” (10a).

As the photograph is placed close to words like “Texas”, “Bush” (who as we know is from Texas), “Chavez” and “Colombia”, the reader might easily think that the photograph had been taken in a school in Texas or south of the border. In fact, surprisingly, it is a school in the State of New York which, surely not by chance, is where Hillary Clinton is Senator:

“New York City, with the largest public school system in the country, is the forefront of this movement, with more than 200 schools experimenting with one incentive or another. In more than a dozen schools, students, teachers and principals are all eligible for extra money, based on students’ performance on standardized tests”.

In the above quotation, both the semantics and syntax of the verb “experimenting”, together with the use of the present tense in the caption and in the photograph, seem to convey the idea that a woman represents not only the future (“Next Question”) but is already a *present* and tangible reality for the American people. This concept is further enhanced by the use once again of the right hand (as in pictures P1a and P2a) being used by the woman to hand over education and well-being to future generations.

The fact, then, that the third picture (P3a) is placed between the headline “Abbas Rebuffs U.S. on Talks” (13a) and the headline “Chavez Employs Colombia Feud As Flashpoint For Feud with U.S.” (12a) implies (see Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 216, 217) that it is a woman who will be dealing with the problems of the world: on the left, there is



the real and tangible “Next Question” on how to mediate between Palestine and Israel (13a), whereas, on the right, there is the “Next Question” of how to deal with the Chavez-Bush crisis (12a).

**THE WASHINGTON POST (B)**

(2b) Clinton Beats Obama in Texas and Ohio;  
McCain Clinches Republican Nomination

Huckabee  
Leaves Race  
(3b)



(P1b)

Democrats Now  
Look to  
Pennsylvania  
(4b)

“The contest begins tonight,” Sen John McCain, with his wife, Cindy,  
told supporters in Dallas after clinching the Republican nomination  
(1b)

OBAMA: Setback Could Mean  
Costly Battle with Two Opponents (6b)

CLINTON: Back Against the Wall,  
Former Front-Runner Pushes On (7b)



P2b

Her arms raised in victory.... Last night gave her a much-needed boost (5b)

No. of growth reports	CLINTON	OBAMA	HUCKABEE	McCain
TEXAS	36%	51%	47%	36%
OHIO	80%	55%	43%	32%
RHODE ISLAND	57%	58%	41%	22%
VERMONT	47%	38%	60%	14%

**CAMPAIGN 2008**

**CANDIDATE SLOOPS:** In turbulent times, the Clinton campaign hangs on in Ohio. *Dana Milbank's Campaign Sketch*, A11

**NO COUNTRY FOR DEMOCRATS:** Why do Ohio's farmers favor Republicans? There are many answers in the voices of voters. *Style*, C1

**LATE RETURNS:** Results, analysis and discussions all day on [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

**INSIDE**

Cancer Risk Stays After Hormone Therapy (9b)



P3b

Packers' Brett Favre Calls It  
Quits(8b)

Drop in Applications Test D.C. Area Private Schools  
(10b)

#### 4. Analysis: the *Washington Post*

The *Washington Post*, like the pro-Clinton *New York Times*, prints three photographs on its front page, the first two of which are very similar: in the top centre position there is a photograph of John McCain (picture P1b) – smaller than the *New York Times*’ – with the following caption: “‘The contest begins tonight,’ Sen. John McCain, with his wife Cindy, told supporters in Dallas after clinching the Republican nomination” (1b). Both are under the main headline “Clinton Beats Obama in Texas and Ohio; McCain Clinches Republican Nomination” (2b) with two straplines on either side (to the left, “Huckabee Leaves Race”, 3b, and to the right “Democrats Now Look to Pennsylvania, 4b).

The centre page is likewise dominated by a photograph (P2b) of Hillary Clinton – interestingly, much more extended than the *New York Times*’ – with the caption: “Her arms raised in victory, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton faces an adoring crowd in Columbus, Ohio. Among those onstage with her, from the left, are daughter Chelsea, Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-Ohio), former senator John Glenn, and Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland. Last night gave her a much-needed boost” (5b). The photograph is under two other headlines – separated by a vertical line – one set to the left which reads “Obama: Setback Could Mean Costly Battle With Two Opponents” (6b), the other to the right “Clinton: Back Against the Wall, Former Front-Runner Pushes On” (7b). (As already mentioned in the previous analysis, under the central picture (P2b), there is on the left a graphics with the electoral percentage the poll in the four states for each of the three final candidates).

The lower section of the page has a small photograph to the centre left of an American football player (P3b), the “quarterback” Brett Favre. It has the heading “Packers’ Brett Favre Calls It Quits” (8b), which itself is under the standing line “Sports”. On the other side, at the same height, there is the news item “Cancer Risk Stays After Hormone Therapy” (9b), under which can be found the last article “Drop in Applications Tests D.C. Area Private Schools” (10b).

As in the *New York Times*, the first association of ideas that is conveyed is strong and juxtaposed in the main captions as well as in both pictures (P1b, P2b): “The contest begins tonight” (1b) and “...Last night gave her a much-needed boost” (5b).

The “offer image” (P1b) displaying McCain, this time, suggests, as in the previous newspaper, that the Republican candidate is ‘allowing’ himself a more relaxed smile for the satisfactory result, being aware though that a harder campaign (“contest”) was still there waiting for him to “begin” (“tonight”, “...after clinching the Republican nomination”, 1b). On the other hand, even though the “demand picture” (P2b) shows Hillary Clinton in a more *triumphant* mood than in the *New York Times*, the focus is still much more on the past (“last night/gave/much-needed boost”).

Moving on for a moment to the opening headline (2b), the reader cannot help noticing that, unlike the pro-Clinton paper, the *Washington Post* does not omit the news about Hillary Clinton’s “tight” victory in Texas. On the contrary, it inserts it in the foreground, that is to say, in the first line of the opening news before her “decisive” victory in Ohio. In this way, a greater contrast between the “slim” victory in Texas and the more important one in Ohio is created.

The contrast is even more noticeable when the reader notes that, in the second line of the leading paragraph in (4b), under the main headline (2b), the word order of the names of the two states is inverted (“Ohio and Texas”), as it is on two other occasions in (7b). In the graphics just below picture (P2b), on the other hand, it remains unchanged, coming first in the list of the four states. Furthermore, by means of bold capital letters and blue and red circles for the Democratic and the Republican party respectively, the graphics also draw the reader’s attention to the fact that, in contrast to McCain’s four red-circled wins, the only missing blue is actually ‘in’ Texas. The effect here is clearly to play down the news of Hillary Clinton’s unexpected and more important victory in Ohio (picture P2b). In this way, picture (P2b) shows that Clinton’s victories, though “needed” and clearly displayed at an emotional level (by her eye contact with the viewers, her open smile, her raised hands), were not enough to give her a sufficient number of delegates to hope to “beat” Obama. Thus, the exaltation shown in the photograph actually disguises what the victory really means. In other words, the newspaper invites the reader to keep picture (P2b) in the right perspective, which is clearly disproportionate if compared to McCain’s picture (and his victory) in (P1b) and even more to both McCain’s and Hillary Clinton’s pictures on the front page of the pro-Clinton newspaper (P1a, P2a).

The size of picture (P2b), more so than (P1b) and both pictures in the *New York Times*, also enables the *Washington Post* to include more than one participant, thus leading the viewer to *also* notice, on the extreme left, Clinton's daughter Chelsea, and thereafter to look for husband Bill on the right of the picture, corresponding to picture (P1b) which has McCain's wife on the right of the photograph. This device helps the reader note the former President's quite predominant 'presence' in the picture, as well as his weight in Hillary' campaign (his name is also mentioned in 4b).

In headlines (6b) and (7b), similar words and expressions are repeated such as "setback", "back against the wall", creating a link to the "quarterback" in the third photograph (P3b). This photograph clearly gives an idea of sport and provides a key to understanding the juxtaposition of elements in the rest of the page: there is the Republican team led by McCain (Huckabee at this point has been sent off, 3b); then there is the Democratic team with Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. McCain's "two opponents" belong to the opposite team but, at the same time, they are adversaries themselves.

Upon closer inspection, the vertical line between (6b) and (7b) also helps the viewer to see, in terms of the "Given-New relation" (Krees and van Leeuwen, 1996), that on the left, in (6b), the newspaper adds nothing more than what is "known already" about Obama's campaign: he is still in the presidential race and still in "a protracted two-front war" (first paragraph in 6b) against Hillary Clinton on the one hand and McCain on the other.

The remote chance ("could") that Obama then has from that night on to clinch the Democratic nomination quickly clashes, typographically and metaphorically, with the right side of the picture, which has the *news of the day* about Hillary Clinton's decision to continue ("pushes on") her race. And yet, this news does not actually say anything *new* about Hillary Clinton's campaign: rather, by the very first sentence in the opening paragraph (7b), it implies some doubt about the wisdom of such a decision:

"As Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton raced from border towns to farm community trying to salvage her troubled presidential campaign in recent days, staffers at her Arlington headquarters were awash in mixed feelings about whether she should go on"

a doubt which is repeated over and over in later paragraphs:

“Defeats in both of the big states would spell the end. But the prospect of a split decision or close results generated sharply different judgments from strategist about her future”/ “the tight vote in Texas signalled she may yet face a tough decision in coming weeks. The slim margin in the Texas popular vote and an additional caucus process in which she trailed made clear that she would not win enough delegates to put a major dent in Sen. Barack Obama’s lead.”

The newspaper thus aims to show that, notwithstanding all of these factors, Hillary Clinton is somewhat obstinately continuing her campaign, even though she now has her “back against the wall” (7b) and is still nonetheless the “former front-runner” (“former” being the operative word here) as pictured in headline (7b).

Immediately below picture (3b) and the graphics, a bold line – not infrequent in the *Washington Post* – seems to separate the different items of news on the page. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 216, 217) argue, however, that “the repetition of colour in different elements is [a] key connection device”. In the *Washington Post*, for instance, by running along two other “apparently unconnected elements” in bold, the black frame line guides the reader also to focus on the word “Inside” above the third picture (P3b), then down to the headline “Packers’ Brett Favre Calls It Quits” (8b) and then again, to the right of it, the headline (9b). Indeed, these three elements - the third picture and headlines (8b) and (9b) - are separated by no more than a thin bright frame line this time.

The third picture (P3b) displays, this time, the serious face of a young football player, namely “the 38-year-old charismatic quarterback”, who is already a veteran in his football team and thus *decided* to retire (8b). The suggested analogy with Sen. McCain’s age is clear, but it may be extended equally to his more senior Democratic adversary Hillary Clinton, as she obstinately refuses to withdraw from the race.

Next to picture (P3b) and the foregoing article (8b), the reader cannot help noticing the following headline “Cancer Risk Stays After Hormone Therapy” (9b) which seems to introduce a completely new and different topic (if it is seen beyond the bold black line from P2b and 7b): “Menopausal women who took estrogen and progesterone faced a small increased risk of cancer for more than two years after they stopped...”

It *indirectly* alludes to the real “risk” (the word appears no fewer than 7 times in the article) that this represents for women in general and for

Hillary Clinton as a woman. This should be compared with the *New York Times*, which highlighted the metaphorical risk of Clinton as Obama's opponent ("Easily Overlooked Lesions...", 9a). Similarly then, in the pro-Clinton newspaper, the inclusion of the article (9a) within the typical frame lines used by the *New York Times* to separate 'unconnected news' (a double line, made up of a bold and a less visible one) and next to the picture (P2a) displaying Hillary Clinton suggests an ever more semantic association ("Tied", 9a) between the two elements on the page.

The other "unconnected" article on schooling (10b), instead, talks about "a shrinking pool of younger students" applying to an elite private school in the Washington area. It is a sombre picture of education during the recession and seems in almost direct opposition to the *New York Times'* optimistic article on paying students to excel.

In the article on schooling (10b) expressions like "Others are *rethinking the way we do business ...*", "And as fears of a *recession* spread, other schools are slowing down tuition increases and looking for *other ways* to raise *money*", "Some schools are *cutting* programs, some are looking at class size and *we are looking for ways* to generate *revenue*" clash again with the "news of the day" about Hillary Clinton. According to the newspaper, instead of *pushing on* "her campaign mired in debt" (7b), she "*could avert*" (6b) "costly battles" (6b) and a "protracted" waste of public and private money for her campaign, as well as Obama's and McCain's too. As a result, the newspaper seems to be at odds with Hillary Clinton's decision to continue her presidential race and with her apparent enthusiasm in the picture (P2b), thus underlining a real contradiction between the financial situation of the USA and her promises/deeds:

"Clinton, *her back to the wall*, played the role of aggressor, challenging Obama on his readiness to be commander in chief and *chastising* him on *trade* and health care".

## 5. Conclusions

To sum up, on the one hand, it has been argued here that news items on the front pages of national newspapers are selected according to precise criteria, giving priority to the "Impact" factor as demonstrated by

Stone (1987: 57 ). On the other hand, it has also been the aim of this paper to show that the newspapers themselves connect up the news in order to create a theme and then indicate “how to interpret the many different news items, including those that are apparently unconnected” (Violi, in Lorusso & Violi 2004: 52) by means of a whole series of linguistic devices and typographical choices (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). Through similarity and opposition of not only words and concepts but also the closeness or distance of the positioning of the news, the editors manage to favour certain concepts or themes with respect to others.

How much these choices, these designs, actually influence the way readers think and, consequently, the way they vote is impossible to say and it is certainly not within the scope of this paper. Other factors play an important role in determining such influences, such as “the reading of the same or different newspapers on a daily basis” (Murialdi 1982: 23), the influence of family and schooling, as well as “the cultural and psychological expectations that determine the choice of a given code” (Eco in Faustini 1995: 25).

Having said this, however, Eco again (1979) recalls that the interpretation of a text, in general, is always the result of cooperation between both the author(s) and the reader(s), even though a text is usually interpreted with a certain degree of unambiguity.

In conclusion, returning to Fowler, this paper has attempted to show that newspapers do indeed try to “silently offer” what is clearly “the ideological position” of the newspaper (Fowler 1991: 232). What emerges is a very complex puzzle made up of a whole series of linguistic and metalinguistic devices that the ordinary readers may not consciously notice, but which nevertheless are designed to influence them.

## References

- Barthes, R. 1985. *L'ovvio e l'ottuso*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi.
- Calabrese, O., Violi, P. 1984. “Il giornale come testo”. In M. Livolsi (ed.), *La fabbrica delle notizie. Una ricerca sul “Corriere della Sera” e “La Repubblica”*. Milan: Franco Angeli, pp. 104-151.
- Eco, U. 1979. *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Epley, N. “Science or Science Fiction?: Investigating the Possibility (and



- 
- Plausibility) of Subliminal Persuasion". In D. Elrod (Ed.), 2005, Cognitive Studies/Computer Science/Psychology/201/Cognitive Science in Context Laboratory. Laboratory Manual, in <http://www.csic.cornell.edu/201/subliminal/>
- Falvo, R. 2003. *Tecniche di priming subliminale nella rivelazione di pregiudizio e stereotipi impliciti*. Bologna: Pàtron.
- Faustini, G. (ed.). 1995. *Le tecniche del linguaggio giornalistico*. Rome: Carocci.
- Fowler, R. 1991. *Language in the News. Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Hartley, J. 1982. *Understanding News*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Hodgson, F.W. 1987. *Modern Newspaper Editing and Production*. London: Heinemann.
- Kress, G., Van Leeuwen, T. 1996. *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Lorusso, A.M., Violi, P. 2004. *Semiotica del testo giornalistico*. Rome & Bari: Laterza.
- Murialdi, P. 1982. *Come si legge un giornale*, Rome & Bari: Laterza.
- Stone, G. 1987. *Examining Newspapers. What Research Reveals about America's Newspapers*. Newbury Park: Sage.

## Websites

[www.csic.cornell.edu/201/subliminal/#nutsbolts](http://www.csic.cornell.edu/201/subliminal/#nutsbolts)  
[www.newseum.com](http://www.newseum.com)  
[http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/hr\\_archive.asp?fpVname=NY\\_NYT&ref\\_pge=gal&b\\_pge=1](http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/hr_archive.asp?fpVname=NY_NYT&ref_pge=gal&b_pge=1)  
[www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/hr\\_archive.asp?fpVname=DC\\_WP&ref\\_pge=gal&b\\_pge=2](http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/hr_archive.asp?fpVname=DC_WP&ref_pge=gal&b_pge=2)

\* Quotations taken from works in Italian have been translated by the author of this paper.



## **MEDIating Italy: the construction of Silvio Berlusconi's identity**

*M. Cristina Caimotto*

### *Abstract*

*The aim of this paper is to analyze the construction of identity of the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi through a Critical Discourse Studies approach (Van Dijk 2009). Interviews with Berlusconi and articles published on the La Repubblica website, reporting foreign media views, constitute the main object of enquiry of this paper in the attempt to establish what role these various actors played in constructing Berlusconi's identity.*

*As others have pointed out (Stille 2006, Ginsborg 2003), Berlusconi's relationship with money, media and political power, and the effect on reporting crystallise problems and issues that exist in all modern democracies. Though, in Italy's case, there are other historical factors involved (Loporcaro, 2006) – apart from Berlusconi's personal monopoly, the Italian case study points to the potential danger for democracy in any country. This work also takes into account the difficulties researchers face when dealing with contemporary political issues in terms of objectivity and proposes tentative solutions based on Corpus-Aided Discourse Studies and News Translation Studies methodologies.*

### **1. Introduction**

At the time of writing, media mogul Silvio Berlusconi is still the Italian Head of Government. Four times Prime Minister of Italy, he is one of the most controversial figures in Italian politics and his actions are

discussed worldwide. His most recent political victory to date belongs to April 2008, when he won the early elections, held after only two years under the previous left-wing government. According to Stille (2006), he crystallises problems and issues that exist in all modern democracies: the close relationship between money, media and political power.

The first two years of his current mandate proved particularly problematic: Italy suffered the financial crisis; a ravaging earthquake hit L'Aquila in April 2009, and Fini – once one of Berlusconi's closest allies – publicly criticized Berlusconi and left the coalition in July 2010 to create a new parliamentary group named *Futuro e Libertà*, Future and Freedom. In the meantime, Berlusconi's wife divorced him and he was involved in a series of sex-related scandals.

Berlusconi's figure has been extensively analyzed elsewhere (Edwards 2005; Pasquino 2007; Campus 2006; Amadori 2002; Ginsborg 2003; Musso 2008 to name but a few). Drawing on their work and on Loporcaro's analysis of the Italian mass media, the present paper intends to contribute to the debate by analysing new texts and comparing them with the image created by *La Repubblica* – the newspaper which Berlusconi sued because they continued to ask him ten questions over a period of months, which he never answered.

## 2. Objectivity and Corpora

Researchers dealing with political discourse studies, who follow a qualitative approach, face difficulties when carrying out their research, because they risk falling into the trap of excessive subjectivity. This work proposes research methods that may help researchers achieving greater objectivity, through the use of Corpus-Aided Discourse-Studies or CADS (Baumgarten 2009). Many scholars (Garzone & Santulli 2004; Partington 2004; Bayley 2007; Duguid 2007; Fairclough 2007 to name a few) believe that corpora, with its empirically verifiable data, can not only be an extremely useful tool to verify the hypotheses developed in qualitative analysis, but can also provide inspiration. As Partington (2004: 12) notes, reading and concordancing not only provide different kinds of insight but also reinforce and complement each other. This qualitative-quantitative method has been employed elsewhere, for example, to analyse Veltroni, Obama and Zapatero (Bani and Caimotto 2010).

---

An extensive corpus-based study of Berlusconi's speeches already exists: Bolasco et al. (2006, 11) analysed a corpus of 325.000 words collected between 26 January 1994 and 28 April 2005 (when a cabinet reshuffle took place and his third government started). The two corpora created for the present paper comprise respectively 53.908 (corpus B) and 54.060 (corpus R) words and both cover the time span between 13 April 2008 – first polling day – and 30 September 2010 – when Berlusconi asked for a vote of confidence as a consequence of his party's internal troubles mentioned above.

Corpus B includes the 32 interviews with Berlusconi archived on the official Government website, [www.governo.it](http://www.governo.it).<sup>2</sup> This corpus comprises a selection of articles from various news providers, which we can presume met with Berlusconi's approval. Corpus R, on the other hand, consists of a collection of articles, downloaded from *La Repubblica* website. These report what foreign newspapers published regarding specific events and scandals involving Berlusconi. According to Audipress, *La Repubblica* is the most widely-read newspaper website in Italy. This research concentrates on the electronic version of the newspaper, both because it allows for the creation of the corpus and also because that is the information people are most likely to read if they search for old articles. The articles were selected by searching the *La Repubblica* archive using the words 'Berlusconi' and the English word 'Times'<sup>3</sup> as this provided articles that translated and commented on news from the Anglo-American media; 72 articles were then manually selected.

By analysing the two corpora, it is possible to compare the image Berlusconi wants to give of himself and the image *La Repubblica* created through the reporting of news from the foreign press.

### 3. News translated

As already argued elsewhere (Caimotto, forthcoming) there is reason to believe that the frequent habit of Italian newspapers of reporting what

---

<sup>2</sup> Two interviews included in the archive were excluded from the corpus: one from *Le Figaro* because it was in French and one from Video TV, because it consisted of a video accompanied by a very short summary.

<sup>3</sup> Seven newspapers quoted in Corpus R comprise the English word 'Times' in their name: *Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Financial Times*, *Irish Times*, *New York Times*, *Guatemala Times*, *Sunday Star-Times*.

foreign journalists write abroad about Italian issues may well be a strategy implemented by Italian reporters to protect themselves in case of legal prosecutions. This is believed to be particularly relevant in the case of *La Repubblica*, which in 2009 was sued for libel by Berlusconi after conducting the ten question campaign mentioned above.

Interestingly, the charge included reference to this upside down gatekeeping practice (Vuorinen 1995): “...resorting to the expedient of reporting the contents of the French weekly [*Le Nouvel Observateur*], they have published once again untruthful news, reporting circumstances which do not correspond in any way whatsoever to the present situation existing in fact or under law. This action is part of a well-known contention, which has been continuing over the last few months”. (Nigro 2009, personal translation).<sup>4</sup>

Naturally, it would be interesting to understand how the “expedient” was used: was *La Repubblica* reporting relevant critical information - scarcely available in Italy - that would help Italian readers understand the image of Italy constructed in other countries better? The extensive study carried out by Loporcaro (2006: 175-181) demonstrates that the foreign media dedicate a significant amount of space to Italian events focussing on issues related to financial and legal problems, and, importantly, reporting facts that can hardly be found anywhere by the Italian mainstream news providers.

The tentative hypothesis to be verified through the two corpora is that, most of the time, *La Repubblica* did not actually exploit the work of a more reliable Anglo-American journalistic practice but rather employed the translation practice to perpetuate what Loporcaro (2006, 15-16) describes as ‘news as narration’. In his analysis, Loporcaro divides news into two kinds: one is that of news as information – fundamental for democracy to work – the other is that of news as narration, an ongoing story which replaces the role once played by myths. He argues that in Italy, news as narration is the only rule and that the blending of information and entertainment – which affects all Western democracies – has reached unprecedented levels in Italy. One might then expect that the articles coming from abroad would be used to redress this imbalance

---

<sup>4</sup> “...con l'espiediente di riportare il contenuto del settimanale francese ha pubblicato ancora una volta - nel quadro della ben nota polemica di questi ultimi mesi - notizie non veritiere, riportando circostanze che in alcun modo corrispondono alla situazione di fatto e di diritto realmente esistente.”

---

and offer, through translation, a glimpse of the information Italian readers are missing (Bani, 2006).

What seems to happen is actually the opposite: translation is employed as one more tool for gossip and storytelling. A specific case-study has been analysed elsewhere (Caimotto, 2010), which focussed on an article from the *Financial Times* regarding Prodi's victory in 2006. The *FT* simply observed that the victory was too narrow to guarantee the survival of the government for five years and the implementation of the necessary reforms, while Italian newspapers turned the story into the new position held by the British press, now as unhappy about the left-wing victory as it had been about the right-wing victory five years earlier.

Before moving to the analysis of the two corpora to verify the tentative hypothesis introduced above, the next two sections focus respectively on Berlusconi's first speech and on the influence that British and American politics have had over Italian politics.

#### 4. The Past

Berlusconi's political success can be ascribed, among other aspects, to his extensive work on language and communication. When announcing his candidacy for the first time on 26 January 1994, Berlusconi broadcast a message that was transmitted by every newscast that night. *Forza Italia*, his party, was presented only two months before the elections and won in spite of the short time available. The following passage of that speech is analysed here as the construction is considered particularly significant. Berlusconi is here referring to "orphans and those who look back nostalgically on communism". "This is why we are forced to oppose them [the left-wing]. Because we believe in individuals, family, enterprise, competition, development, efficiency, free market and solidarity, the daughter of justice and freedom" (personal translation).<sup>5</sup>

If we observe the lexico-grammatical structure of this passage, we can notice that the use of the pronoun *noi* (we) is not necessary in Italian and its marked use here can be ascribed to an attempt to reinforce the polarization between Us (good) versus Them (evil/guilty) (Van Dijk 2006: 370). Even more significant is the *Forza Italia* manifesto list of ten

---

<sup>5</sup> "Per questo siamo costretti a contrapporci a loro. Perché noi crediamo nell'individuo, nella famiglia, nell'impresa, nella competizione, nello sviluppo, nell'efficienza, nel mercato libero e nella solidarietà, figlia della giustizia e della libertà."

values, which have been classified here, either according to their intrinsic conservative framing or, to their more universal reference to ‘natural principles’.

individual	}	These four values are typical of right-wing positions, favouring individuals and their skills in achieving their business goals. As far as “family” is concerned, in an Italian discourse it is usually connoted with references to the Catholic Church and its war against other forms of relationship, such as living together or same sex couples.
family		
enterprise		
competition		
development	}	These are the first two words that are, in general, universally accepted.
efficiency		
free market		This is the last ‘right-wing term’ in the list, a very strongly felt conservative principle.
solidarity	}	The list is closed by three universal principles.
justice		
freedom		

Because of the way this series of *Forza Italia*’s values is constructed, it implies that ‘the left’ is against all these values. The list starts with three terms that form a scale, from a single person to a group of people, which gives the whole utterance a climatic effect, culminating in the most important word: ‘freedom’. It is important to notice the connection between ‘free’ market and ‘freedom’. As reported in Bolasco *et al* (2006: 47), Berlusconi usually likens the ethics of liberty to ‘liberalism’ and plays on the confusion of the adjectives ‘liberal’ and ‘liberalist’ (*liberale* and *liberista*).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> The meanings intended here are: *liberal*: respecting and allowing many different types of beliefs or behaviour; *liberalist*: in favour of laissez-faire and the free market.



## 5. Anglo-American influence over Italian politics

At the beginning of Berlusconi's political career, the United Kingdom influenced Italian politics in as much as Berlusconi often presented himself as the Italian counterpart of Margaret Thatcher. Then, starting from the 2001 election, Berlusconi began to give the United States more prominence. A very relevant aspect is the influence Frank Luntz had on Berlusconi's language and communication. Probably the best known conservative political consultant and pollster in America, Luntz was hired by Berlusconi in 2001 (Luntz, 2007: 138) and helped him with his election campaign. The 'contract' Berlusconi signed during a television programme, between him and the Italian people, was suggested by Luntz and inspired by the 'Contract with America' released by the Republican Party in 1994.

Starting from 2006, a new election system was put in place which effectively obliged parties to form separate left and right wing coalitions, finally cancelling the five or so party centrist governing coalitions that had driven Italy for many years. Interestingly, this new system was presented to Italians as based on British and American examples. This, together with the disappearance of radical left parties in 2008, resulted in a political spectrum which is now much closer to those of the UK and the US. American politics entered Italy in 2006 in one more way: the televised debate between the two main candidates. Such debates were presented as *all'americana*, the American way, because the speakers had to respect specific times, and each of them was guaranteed the same number of minutes to answer the same question. The debate was certainly very different from the kind of messy discussion that Italians were used to, in which speakers get attention according to the loudness of voice.

All these aspects suggest that British and American politics play an important role for a variety of reasons – for both the right and by the left-wing parties. This can be considered one of the reasons that drive journalists to report information about British and American politics and also why they dedicate much of their attention to information and comments regarding Italy published abroad. We will now focus on news articles from the UK and the USA published on *La Repubblica* website.

## 6. Berlusconi vs. *La Repubblica*

Berlusconi has often demonstrated his ability to detect what his public wants to hear and is able to change his declarations accordingly. There is, however, one key idea in his communication which never seems to falter or change, and that is his criticism towards ‘the lefties’, ‘the radical left’ or ‘the communists’. As shown above, this leitmotiv has been present ever since his very first political speech. He constantly accuses ‘the extreme left’ of impeding his work through a “campaign of hate” against him and through a “conspiracy of the magistrates”, and the judiciary in general.

That is why analysis of corpus B began with the image of ‘the left’ and ‘the communists’ that can be found in interviews. 128 occurrences for *sinistra*/left, and 10 for *centrosinistra*/centre-left were found. It is interesting to observe the kind of verbs associated: has always forgotten / has always (unrealistically) demanded / obstinately insists / has accused / has done everything to thwart us / has completely distorted the truth / blackmails / criticizes / mouths platitudes / blocks/ is getting it all wrong.<sup>7</sup>

If we compare these with the image of the left that results from searching for occurrences of *sinistra* in corpus R (54 occurrences), the image is not very different. References to *sinistra* either refer to the political slant of the foreign newspapers quoted – hence they are not about Italian left-wing parties – or report words from Berlusconi and his entourage, reinforcing, by doing so, the negative frame that Berlusconi’s discourse constructs: as Lakoff (2002) explains, every time a frame is evoked it is also reinforced.

According to Bolasco et al. (2006: 25), Berlusconi tends to avoid some specific words (in comparison to the Italiano-Standard and Repubblica-90 frequency lists included in Taltac software). Among these, four were chosen: *donna*, *chiesa*, *banche*, *mafia* (woman, church, banks, mafia). Here are the frequency results:

Corpus B	Corpus R
donne/a            12	donne/a            96
	donnaiolo/i [womanizer]    2

<sup>7</sup> ha sempre dimenticato / ha sempre preteso / si ostina / ha accusato / ha fatto di tutto per ostacolarci / ha stravolto la verità / raccatta / critica / si riempie la bocca / osteggia / sta sbagliando tutto.

chiesa/e	10	chiesa	39
banca/che	26	banca/che	6
bancario/i	5	banchiere	3
banco	2	bancaria	1
		banco	1
mafia	5	mafia/e	8
mafioso	1	mafiosa/e	5
		mafioso/i	3

**Table 1** frequency of woman, church, banks, mafia

These numbers suggest that *La Repubblica* used the foreign articles mainly to report gossip related to the sex scandals. The vast majority of the occurrences of *donna/e* in corpus R belong to articles that deal with the sex-related scandals, coupled with a few occurrences referring to women objecting to Berlusconi's attitude towards the opposite sex. The occurrences found in corpus B refer to pension age (6), abortion (2), euthanasia (1), Angela Merkel (1) and only two refer to women as such (e.g. "I adore women. And he who loves respects"). (personal translation)

As far as church is concerned, in 9 occurrences Berlusconi describes the very good relationship between his party and the Church, while in one he states "The TV I have created has always been a positive TV. This positivity has won over everybody and everything, and even those who wished and still wish to see me begging for money on the church steps."<sup>8</sup> (personal translation)

Most of the time, corpus R reports information about the clash between Berlusconi and the Church as a consequence of the sex-related scandals. Only 3 occurrences are about other topics. A few occurrences deal specifically with Dino Boffo, the director of *Avvenire*, a newspaper with a catholic slant, who was forced to resign because of a false scandal created by a Berlusconi family owned newspaper, *Il Giornale*.

Of the 5 occurrences of *mafia* in corpus B, 3 describe the positive results obtained by Berlusconi's government against criminal organizations; the remaining two, interestingly, share a very similar statement from Berlusconi published in two different newspapers on the same day: "Those leftists have mounted a non-case. They consider me a

<sup>8</sup> "La Tv che ho creato io è sempre stata una Tv positiva. E la positività ha vinto su tutto e su tutti, anche su quelli che si auguravano e augurano ancora di vedermi sui gradini di una chiesa a chiedere l'elemosina."

bandit, one of the mafia. No. I won't deal with them anymore. Full stop". (*Liberò*) (personal translation).<sup>9</sup> "They spread false information about school and university. They invent a non-case against Italy's interest such as the one about sun-tanned people [Berlusconi's description of Obama]. I am treated like a bandit, like one of the mafia". Conclusion: "I won't deal with them. Full stop." (personal translation).<sup>10</sup>

Finally, references to 'banks' in corpus R are far less numerous than those in corpus B and none of them deals with scandals involving Berlusconi. On the contrary, in Corpus B all the occurrences of *banca/banche* but one are related to the financial crisis and describe Berlusconi's or the government's choices as the best possible solution. The exception refers to the case involving David Mills, a British lawyer who was accused of having been bribed by Berlusconi to protect him from legal accusations related to his financial TV-related activities abroad.

That event is another connection linking British and Italian politics, as at the time of the scandal, the lawyer was married to Tessa Jowell – a British Labour Party politician who was officially questioned regarding a potential clash of interest between her personal life and her ministerial duties. When searching for 'Mills' in corpus B, occurrences were only found in interviews by foreign journalists from *El Mundo* and CNN. In both interviews, Berlusconi answered the question by stating that he is innocent and that the whole issue was invented by 'red' magistrates.

Occurrences of 'Mills' in corpus R are, as expected, more numerous, but when reading the various articles, the overall effect is confusing. The *La Repubblica* articles state that some foreign articles write about Mills, but the *La Repubblica* journalists do not include detailed information as they do when they deal with sex-related scandals. One could argue that this may happen because the case is already explained in Italian articles. But even when reading the Italian articles about Mills it is possible to detect the characteristics that Loporcaro (2006: 68-71) identifies as typical of news as narration: facts are not reported as evidence that will help readers to form their own critical opinion, events are rather

---

<sup>9</sup> "Quelli della sinistra hanno montato un non-caso. Mi considerano un bandito, uno della mafia. No. Io non ci tratto più. Punto e basta."

<sup>10</sup> "«[...] Diffondono notizie false sulla scuola e sull'università. Si inventano contro l'interesse dell'Italia un noncaso come quello degli abbronzati. Io vengo trattato come un bandito, come uno della mafia». Conclusione: «Non ci tratto, punto e basta»."

described through the narration of the various positions, and the whole issue becomes a matter of personal opinion. The final part of this paper focuses on the interview Berlusconi gave to CNN, which fully deserves its own section.

## 7. Berlusconi revealed on CNN

The reading of the Berlusconi corpus brought to light a further interesting aspect related to the selective construction of identity: on 23 May 2009 Paula Newton interviewed Berlusconi for CNN. The Italian Government website includes an Italian article which reports the questions and answers. The whole video of the interview, however, is not available online. On 25 May, CNN released a few short videos and in October 2009 the feature programme *Silvio Berlusconi Revealed* was broadcast and is now available on the CNN website.

It should be pointed out here that in Italy *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* published articles about the interview on 25 May 2009 and both included videos in their online TV pages. *Il Corriere* provided a version with a short introduction in Italian and with Italian subtitles, while *La Repubblica* left the original CNN soundtrack, in which both speakers are dubbed in English (the interview had taken place in Italian). Two videos from Sky news are available online as well and provide summaries dubbed back into Italian. The two articles and the Sky news videos claim to report verbatim what CNN had broadcast that morning, but in fact they are clearly based on the Italian version published on the [governo.it](http://governo.it) website.

This can be demonstrated by the fact that the articles and the two videos on Sky news report passages which were not present in the CNN video. In those passages, Berlusconi talks about David Mills, the economic crisis, and the 'red' magistrates. He also defends himself from accusations of having had a relationship with a 17 year old girl, Noemi Letizia. This passage had been excluded by CNN in the first short video and was only partially broadcast in the feature programme. The first short video and the related article on CNN website foreground the passage in which Berlusconi stated that he had never made any gaffe, not even one. This is nowhere to be found in *La Repubblica* or *Il Corriere* articles or even in the Sky news videos. Not a single occurrence of the word 'gaffe' is present in Corpus B.

---

The *Revealed* video on CNN website includes other passages that were not transcribed in Italian, such as a joke about the Italian press always criticizing Berlusconi. Interestingly, in the *Revealed* video some speakers are dubbed while others speak English: Berlusconi's dubbed voice has a marked Italian accent while another participant Giulio Anselmi – presented as one of Berlusconi's prominent detractors – is dubbed by a much more native sounding voice.

When comparing the Italian report with the video, dubious editing can be detected. When Newton asks Berlusconi if he thinks it is “humane” to send immigrants back to their country, the *governo.it* site reports her question as “Ma non è bello respingerli...” [But it's not nice to send them back (personal translation)]. Again, this confirms that the *La Repubblica* article was based on the version published on the government website because in their article they write, using the same *non è bello*, “and to those who point out that it is not nice to send illegal immigrants back, Berlusconi replies:...” (personal translation)].

Paula Newton reports having interviewed Berlusconi for more than an hour. The text reported online is certainly shorter than that and the whole *Revealed* programme is also shorter. As it is not possible to access the whole CNN interview, we do not know how much of what is reported on *governo.it* was actually included in the full interview, nor how many questions and answers were edited. What we do know is the way in which the Italian mass media reported the CNN interview; that is foregrounding what had been foregrounded by Berlusconi's staff on *governo.it* rather than reporting CNN's analysis directly from the source, as the newspapers claimed to have done.

## 8. Conclusion

Even if the figure of Berlusconi, his identity and the crucial role that communication has played and continues to play in his political career have been extensively analysed by scholars and journalists in Italy and abroad, little attention has been dedicated to the phenomenon of the Italian newspapers' regular reporting of what the foreign media publish about Italy. This phenomenon can be ascribed to two main causes: first, the fact that the Italian public tends to look up to Anglo-American politics and journalism (for different reasons, depending on their political convictions); and second, the fact that Berlusconi's newspaper

critics of hope to be less vulnerable in case of legal trials, given the frequency with which he sues news providers, journalists and anybody who criticises him.

According to Bani (2006, 40) this habit of translating is almost an obsession and “translation becomes a necessary phenomenon: our country is now going through a (temporary?) moment of weakness and translated texts represent a way of thinking about itself and promoting internal debate.”

After briefly introducing the role played by language and the influence of Anglo-American politics in the Italian political system, this paper has analysed the news items published during what is Berlusconi’s current mandate at the time of writing. The two corpora analysed included interviews with Berlusconi selected by his staff and published on the government’s website, and articles selected to show the kind of information the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* has imported from the UK and the USA.

Bani’s hypothesis does not seem to apply to the articles analysed. The compared reading of the two corpora – of which only a few examples are reported in this paper – suggests that the phenomenon of news as narration theorised by Loporcaro is still ongoing. Events are reported by focussing on people and not on their institutional role, reducing the problems to a personal series of episodes which may feed the demands of entertainment very well, but end up weakening the margins a country needs in order to be called democracy.

## References

- Amadori, A. 2002. *Mi consenta: metafore, messaggi e simboli: come Silvio Berlusconi ha conquistato il consenso degli italiani*. Milano: Scheiwiller.
- Bani, S. 2006. “An Analysis of Press Translation Process”. In *Translation in Global News*, Conway K. and Bassnett S. (Eds.), Coventry: University of Warwick, pp. 35-46.
- Bani, S. and Caimotto, M. C. 2010. “Veltroni, Zapatero and Obama. Inspirations and constraints in the 2008 Italian political campaign”. *International Journal of Translation*, Bahri Publications, pp. 93-105.
- Baumgarten, S. 2009. *Translating Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” – A Corpus-Aided Discourse-Analytical Study*, Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag.

- 
- Bayley, P. 2007. "Terror in political discourse from the cold war to the unipolar world". In N. Fairclough, G. Cortese & P. Ardizzone (Eds.), *Discourse and Contemporary Social Change*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 49-71.
- Bolasco, Galli de' Paratesi, Giuliano. 2006. *Parole in libertà: un'analisi statistica e linguistica dei discorsi di Berlusconi*. Roma: Manifestolibri.
- Caimotto, M. C. forthcoming. "Analysing News Translation and Political Discourse" *Proceedings of the 24° Convegno Nazionale della Associazione Italiana di Anglistica Challenges for the 21st Century: Dilemmas, Ambiguities, Directions*.
- Caimotto, M. C. 2010. "Translating foreign articles with local implications: a case study" in Schäffner C. and Bassnett S. (Eds.) *Political Discourse, Media and Translation*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 76-93.
- Campus, D. 2006 "The 2006 election: more than ever, a Berlusconi-centred campaign". *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 11: 4, pp. 516 - 531.
- Duguid, A. 2007. "Soundbites Bit. Contracted dialogistic space and the textual relations of the no. 10 team analysed through corpus assisted discourse studies". In N. Fairclough, G. Cortese & P. Ardizzone (Eds.), *Discourse and Contemporary Social Change*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 73-94.
- Edwards, P. 2005 "The Right in Power". *South European Society and Politics*, 10: 2, pp. 225 – 243.
- Fairclough, N. 2007. "The contribution of discourse analysis to research on social change." In N. Fairclough, G. Cortese & P. Ardizzone (Eds.), *Discourse and Contemporary Social Change*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 23-47.
- Garzone, G. & Santulli, F. 2004 "What can corpus linguistics do for critical discourse analysis?" In A. Partington, J. Morley & L. Haarman (Eds.), *Corpora and Discourse*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 351-68.
- Ginsborg, P. 2003. *Berlusconi: ambizioni patrimoniali in una democrazia mediatica*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Lakoff, G. 2002. *How Liberals and Conservatives think*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Loporcaro, M. 2006. *Cattive Notizie*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Luntz, F. 2007. *Words that work : it's not what you say, it's what people hear*. New York: Hyperion.
- Musso, P. 2008. *Le Sarkoberlusconisme*. Clamecy: Editions de l'aube.



- Nigro, L. 2009. “Berlusconi fa causa alle dieci domande” *La Repubblica*, 28 August
- Partington, A. 2004. “Corpora and discourse, a most congruous beast”. In A. Partington, J. Morley & L. Haarman (Eds.), *Corpora and Discourse*. Bern: Peter Lang pp. 11-20.
- Pasquino, G. 2007 “The Five Faces of Silvio Berlusconi: The Knight of Anti-politics”. *Modern Italy*, 12: 1, pp. 39 – 54.
- Stille, A. 2006. *Citizen Berlusconi: vita e imprese*. Milano: Garzanti.
- Taltac. Software for automatic lexical and textual analysis. [www.taltac.it](http://www.taltac.it)
- Una Storia Italiana*. 2001. Linea Azzurra, Mondadori Print.
- Van Dijk, T. A. 2006 “Discourse and Manipulation”. *Discourse & Society*. Vol 17(2): 359–383.
- Van Dijk, T.A. 2009. “Critical Discourse Studies; A sociocognitive Approach” In Ruth Wodak & Michael Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage, pp. 62-85.
- Vuorinen, E. 1995. “News translation as gatekeeping”. In Snell-Hornby, Jettmarová and Kaindl (Eds), *Translation as Intercultural Communication*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 161-172.



## Negotiating LGBT identities in Italy: an intercultural perspective

*Franco Zappettini*

### *Abstract*

*This paper examines the role played by culture in the social construction and performance of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)<sup>11</sup> identities in contemporary Italian society. Focusing on the debate surrounding the proposed introduction of a 'same-sex unions' Bill in 2008 and by looking at LGBTs as a (sub)cultural aggregate interacting with the Italian society at large, this study seeks to identify cultural factors that could possibly influence the integration process and that could be specifically ascribed to the Italian culture.*

*The research gathers both qualitative and quantitative data from different sources. A first source of data is represented by newspaper articles reporting the views of two high profile members of the Catholic Church at a crucial juncture of the political debate. Additionally data is retrieved from Internet forums where comments in relation to the debate were posted. Data is subsequently analysed with a phenomenological approach using an interpretive methodology informed by Hofstede's framework that relates acceptance of homosexuality to a country's masculinity/femininity dimension and to its religious views. In particular, discourse analysis is used to highlight how values are conveyed, concepts related and, more generally, how specific linguistic aspects are used to create 'social' meanings, sustain ideologies and support (or undermine) particular cultural messages.*

---

<sup>11</sup> In this paper, the term LGBT is used in its meaning of an umbrella that encompasses self-ascribed 'non-heterosexual' identities and the related culture. Although not consistently agreed upon, LGB has been *de facto* used instead of 'homosexual' since the '90s with the later inclusion of Transgenders as individuals whose gender does not conform to conventional notions of 'male' or 'female' regardless of their sexual orientation. In some cases, LGBTQ has also been used where 'Q' stands for Queer or Questioning.

---

*The findings suggest that the LGBTs quest for legitimization has been perceived (by a large part of Italian society) and portrayed (by the discourse in Italian media) as an attack on the institutions of marriage and family whose cultural significance in the Italian society can be usefully accounted for by the gender role division of the masculinity dimension (declined in its patriarchalist form). Finally, unlike most Western societies where acculturation ideologies have shifted from a marginalization of LGBTs towards their integration, Italian policies (or lack of them) have been instrumental in a radicalization and polarization of 'homophobic' and 'resistant' identities contributing to a separation of the two cultural aggregates.*

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Prof. Jeffrey Unerman for his constant support, Tricia Smart, University of Bedfordshire for her guidance and the reviewers for their valuable comments.

### 1. Introduction

The last few decades have seen some landmark changes in the recognition of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) civil rights by an increasing number of Western States exemplified by anti discrimination bills and recognition of same-sex unions. Although the process has been far from linear, it nevertheless suggests a shift in the attitudes and perceptions of most Western societies towards LGBTs. Furthermore the EU and the Council of Europe have increasingly provided a transnational political framework that, through the Social Charter of Human Rights (2000), calls for a policy convergence in the direction of social inclusion and equality of LGBTs.

In spite of this, little has filtered down into the Italian legislative system and Italy remains one of the few European countries that have failed to produce any piece of legislation on the matter (ILGA, 2010). In 2006 a bill that would have granted LGBTs some civil and social rights was debated for some time in the Italian Parliament where it was strongly opposed by a number of MPs and eventually abandoned in 2008 following the dismissal of Prodi II Cabinet (*La Repubblica*, 27/2/2008)<sup>12</sup>. Since then, about thirty Italian homosexual couples have provocatively applied for a marriage certificate with their local register office, all to be turned down on the grounds of a legal interpretation of 'couple' and

---

<sup>12</sup> The centre-left wing Prodi II Cabinet was in office from 17/5/2006 to 8/5/2008

‘marriage’ as incompatible with two same-sex persons. Their appeals were rejected as ‘unfounded’ by the Italian Constitutional Court, which indicated that it is a matter for the Italian Parliament to deal with it (that is to produce a law to allow same-sex unions) thus highlighting the legislative gap whilst reinforcing the vicious loop (*La Repubblica*, 14/4/2010). The debate on the social inclusion of LGBTs through legislative provisions has shown the polarisation of views in Italian society, with 50.6% of Italians considering homosexuality as “never justifiable” compared to 0.60% of Danes (World Values Survey, 2008).

Meanwhile, figures for homophobic attacks in Italy went from 75 (of which 9 were lethal) in 2008 to 123 (of which 12 were lethal) in 2009 (Arcigay, 2010). A proposed piece of legislation that should have made homophobic motivation a punishable “aggravating circumstance” to any attack failed to be passed in the Italian Parliament, attracting criticism from the UN (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 14/10/2009) and Amnesty International (9/10/2009). A 2009 report by European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Cowi) suggests that Italy has “high rates of social and institutional homophobia”. ILGA’s 2010 Rainbow Index Report (that rates European countries based on laws and practices affecting LGBTs) placed Italy in the bottom league with 1 out of 10 marks (ILGA Europe, May, 2010).

## 1.1 Aims and objectives

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to identify reasons why the emergence of institutionally recognised LGBT identities in Italy is proving so problematic (in relation to other countries). The objectives are:

- To investigate cultural factors impacting on the construction of LGBT identities which may be specific to Italy;
- To examine the intercultural dynamics between the two cultural aggregates (that is the LGBT culture and Italian society at large) and to explore the difficulties in finding common ground;
- To analyse the social construction of LGBT identities in the public discourse in the Italian society.

By achieving these objectives, this paper would thus contribute to the intercultural academic literature bringing, in particular, insights on the role of cultural values in the construction of identities.

The first section of this paper provides the theoretical framework for the main themes that will be discussed. The second section defines the methodology criteria. The third section critically evaluates analyses and interprets data in the light of the theoretical frameworks. The final section provides some concluding remarks attempting to answer the questions originally formulated in the objectives.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Although some psychological literature has investigated and explained the construction of LGBT identities according to an essentialist model (that would see individuals externalising what is intrinsically specific to them (Troiden 1989), from a sociological and anthropological perspective, identity has been accounted for by different theoretical models that emphasise the social interaction between individuals and the role played by culture in providing them with a systematic tool of social adaptation (Hall 1990; Ferraro 1994; Castells 2010). Turner et al. (1987), for example, suggest that individuals are socially encouraged to ascribe themselves to categories which are perceived as relevant to them, thus creating in-groups and out-groups whose differences sustain identities, whilst being expected to 'behave' according to their gender identity (for instance boys are expected to be assertive and dominant and girls nurturing and passive).

Similarly, Halperin (1990: 42) supports a 'constructionist' rather than 'essentialist' view of sexual identity, emphasizing how "configurations of desire vary enormously from one culture to the next". This means that whilst recognizing a biological (or 'essentialist') dimension in the construction of sexual orientation, for Halperin socio-cultural factors would represent a more significative dimension. Herek (1986) also regards sexual orientation as culturally constructed to the extent that, in modern societies, "what one does" has become "what one is". However, there are many examples that seem to suggest the modern specificity of this construction (Blackwood 1984; Whitehead 1981; Herdt 1982) whilst, by contrast, physical and emotional attraction between individuals of the same sex in the past was never seen an exclusive source of social identity (Yee 2003). For Foucault (1978), it was the normalization of sexuality by

---

governments (in particular with the introduction of ‘sodomy laws’ in the 19th century and the ‘heteronormative’ use of language) that was instrumental in creating sexual categorisation with the consequent labelling of non-normative groups.

Cultural subgroups (like LGBTs) are thus regarded as tending to exist within cultures although they are distinct from the dominant cultural groups as they provide members with relatively complete values and patterns of behaviour which are distinctive enough to support stand-alone subgroup identities, even if values may stem from the mainstream group’s hostility (Jandt 2004). The international movement that followed the Stonewall riots in 1969<sup>13</sup> saw in fact the emergence of a transnational LGBT (sub) culture that, in many cases, after the early ‘resistance’ and separation attitudes, has resulted in a gradual social inclusion of LGBTs reflected in most national policies. For example, a shift was generated in the public discourse from the ‘illness’ paradigm to that of civil recognition (exemplified by the removal of homosexuality from the Mental Disorders Manual by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973) in the wake of a ‘gay liberation’ campaign that called for a destigmatisation of “oppressed homosexuals”.

For Castells (2010) the recognition of civil rights has been primarily achieved through negotiation with and granted by the ‘dominant institutions’ in what he refers to as “identity legitimization”. Legitimizing actors “reproduce the identity that rationalises the sources of structural domination” (*ibid.*: 8) that is they are instrumental in the function and expansion of the ‘system’ in what Foucault (1978) sees as a ‘normalization’ of identities achieved through domination. Legitimizing identities would thus generate a ‘civil society’ by, on the one hand, contributing to the creation, extension and ‘hegemony’ of a “system of [state] apparatuses” and, on the other, embedding themselves into such institutions, thus “making it possible to seize the state without launching a direct, violent assault” (Castells 2010: 9).

Institutional legitimization through state policies can therefore represent a key indicator of the level of social acceptance of minority

---

<sup>13</sup> The Stonewall riots taking place in New York in 1969 saw the residents of the Greenwich Village rising against the police to stop the systematic homophobic raids they had been subject to and, more generally, to end a governmental policy of persecution of sexual minorities. The ‘gay rights’ campaigning that immediately followed in other US and overseas cities is conventionally seen as the first step of an international LGBT movement as we know it today (Duberman, 1993).

groups like LGBTs as well as the ‘spaces’ allowed to subgroups to actively participate in the civic debate and their cultural values to be recognised. Laws affecting LGBTs can thus offer examples of how ideologies vary considerably across the globe suggesting that ‘assimilationist’ and ‘separatist’ approaches have emerged between LGBT and non-LGBT cultures equally sustained on both sides. In general, policies in Western societies focus on promoting equalisation and/or protection of LGBT groups while African and Middle Eastern countries focus on encouraging penalisation, with the rest of Asian countries assuming an official stance of denial or neutrality on the matter (ILGA 2010). The separatist ideology, however, has in some cases been advocated by the LGBT community itself; for instance, in the early ‘90s ‘Queer Theory’ activists rejected the identity politics approach to gay rights in what Castells (2010: 9) refers to as an example of “the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded”.

If policies are informed by ideologies, ideologies, in turn, may be regarded as reflecting values. For Hofstede (2005: 8, 21) values are the “core of culture” and ideologies are related to ‘desirable’ rather than ‘desired’ values. Norms, thus, pertain to what is desirable or “ethically right”. Hofstede (2001: 317) continues asserting that politicians are usually expected “to stand for certain values dear to citizens”. Similarly, Bourhis et al., (1997), in analysing policy approaches to immigration, identify a continuum of value-related attitudes (from ethnist to pluralist) that sustain different governmental approaches regulating the inclusion/exclusion of migrant ‘outside’ groups.

Hofstede (2005) correlates acceptance of homosexuality with the Masculinity index. The Masculinity dimension refers to the distribution of gender roles in a society. Societies with distinct gender roles (that is where “men are supposed to be assertive ... and women modest” (*ibid*: 120) are called ‘masculine’ whereas a society whose members have blending or overlapping roles (that is both genders are supposed to be modest and caring) is called ‘feminine’. Hofstede (1998) argues that a country’s attitudes towards sex practices (including homosexuality) will be a function of the masculinity index; in particular, masculinity “is negatively related to the acceptance of homosexuality” (*ibid*: 166). Masculine oriented countries, thus, will reject homosexuality because it is perceived “as a threat to masculine norms” whilst feminine oriented countries consider homosexuality as “a fact of life”. Moreover, for Hofstede the masculinity-femininity dimension is closely related to



religious attitudes. God in masculine cultures is ‘tough’, whilst in feminine cultures is ‘tender’ and this would justify similar individual behaviours toward fellow humans and their degree of acceptance of non-normative groups in the society. According to Hofstede (1998), Christianity has shown mixed tough and tender values, with Catholic countries showing a prevalence of masculine cultural orientation and Protestant countries traditions more feminine values. Hofstede (1998: 179) also holds that the masculinity index can represent a reliable predictor of a country’s degree of secularization. It is important, however, to make a distinction between ‘official’ and ‘actual’ secularisation. Countries like Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland, Scotland and England all support official state religions whilst Italy (among others) is officially secularised as the State dissociated from Catholicism as the state religion in 1948. Paradoxically, the vast majority of officially un-secularised States have all allowed for same-sex marriages or partnerships (with Denmark being the world’s first country to do so in 1989). Furthermore, in Sweden (where Lutheranism was the official religion until 2000), the Church of Sweden has become the first major faith organisation to conduct same-sex marriages since October 2009 (BBC News, 22/10/2009). On the other hand officially ‘secularised’ Romania, Russia, Turkey and Italy have been the countries with the strongest opposition to homosexuality (Eurobarometer 66, 2006).

Seroul (2009) offers further insights in tracing back the *pater familias* figure of Roman culture. One very important aspect of *pater familias* was his ‘virility’ conceptualized as his desire to conquer and to prevail in both the public domain (politics, demagoguery, by force of arms and laws) and in the private domain alike where he was regarded as “an absolute master with unlimited powers” including the imposition of his sexual will” (Cantarella, 1988:131). By contrast, his own subjection to other individuals was culturally seen as a cause of shame and dishonour whether it occurred in the battlefield or in homosexual intercourse (although it was accepted with slaves because they were considered part of the master’s property and as long as the slave remained the ‘passive recipient’ in the eyes of the public (Williams 1999). Seroul argues that as the Roman Empire came to an end, the Church took over the power from it acting as a sort of ‘bridge’ in its commitment to preserve the ‘traditional’ Roman values as these were gradually absorbed into new political institutions, with the *pater familias* now shaping itself into new figures whose patriarchal authority and dominance would still be

traceable legacies. In this perspective, it would be plausible to recognize the Church's commitment to preserve the patriarchal arrangement of Roman society by making the institution of marriage a sacrament in 1215. As a legacy, for Catholicism (unlike Protestantism), the institution of marriage would thus become to represent a tangible symbol of God himself and, as such, "holier in masculine than in feminine countries" (Hofstede 1998: 159).

There are arguably very few concepts that are shaped by the specificity of culture more than marriage as, in fact, even its universality must not be taken for granted (Cia Hua 2008). Polygamy, polyandry, and endogamic practises have all, at some stages and in different societies, been culturally acceptable and indeed desirable (Scheidel 1996). Despite this variety of cultural significance, however, marriage has generally come, at least in modern societies, to culturally signify a legitimized commitment to a union that typically starts a family through procreation and involves regulation of the spouses' patrimonial and sexual lives (D'Andrade 1984). Historically, legitimization was initially provided by socially recognized public ceremonies; however, with the spread of Christianity, the validation role was soon taken over by the Church which, in Catholic countries remained the only authority entitled to officially ratify marriages.

It was only in 1929 with the ratification of the Lateran Pacts between the Italian State and the Catholic Church that civil marriage as a provision of its own (similar to what had been available in Protestant countries after the Reformation) became possible for the Italians. It is still customary though that, although they are two separate entities, both the religious and civil ceremonies take place at the same time, in virtue of an Italian legal provision ('matrimonio concordatario', Act 121/1985 amending Act 810/1929) that allows a religious authority such as a priest to act as a state officer in celebrating marriages, thus enabling a religious function to have civil effects.

## **2.1 Methodology**

This paper reports on an interpretive study that makes use of both qualitative and quantitative data in a flexible, non-experimental and phenomenological oriented approach capable of illuminating cultural dynamics. It was felt that a phenomenological approach would fit

particularly well the function of investigating social constructs by providing useful insights into perceptions, meanings, attitudes and beliefs of the aggregates and individuals involved.

### 3. Document analysis

Italian newspaper articles were searched that could potentially provide insights on the national debate about same-sex unions. These tended to concentrate within a specific time frame (February 2007) coinciding with the date the Bill proposal called DI.CO.<sup>14</sup> had been approved by the Council of Ministers (8/2/2007) and was going to be discussed in the Parliament for final ratification.

For this analysis two articles were extracted and examined for their significance: an interview with Bishop Anfossi and one with theologian Velasio DePaolis published on *La Repubblica*, 12/2/2007 and *La Stampa*, 18/2/2007 respectively.

One first consideration is that, as the Bill was designed to recognise both heterosexual and homosexual cohabiting couples, the debate conflated two related but distinct arguments: one was the possibility for heterosexual couples to opt for a legal status alternative to marriage; the second was the first legal recognition of homosexual couples by the Italian state. Whilst the public discourse has generically referred to ‘coppie di fatto’ (de facto couples), specific recognition of LGBT couples was often referred to as ‘gay marriage’ in the media, although marriage as such was never an option that the Bill would have made available to LGBTs. This linguistic insight, however, is important because it reflects the scope of the ideological clash over the notion of marriage.

Currently, 9 countries worldwide have legal provisions allowing for same-sex couples to enter the same marriage contract that has always been available for heterosexual couples, with an increasing number of countries having recently introduced legal institutions that, under different names (civil unions or civil partnerships) and to different extents, allow same-sex couples to enter a legal contract comparable to heterosexual marriage (ILGA, 2010). Crucially, in some cases (the

---

<sup>14</sup> DI.CO. (named after *Diritti e Doveri di Coabitazione* – ‘Cohabitation Rights and Duties’) would have introduced a status recognition to same-sex partners and derived a set of entitlements and obligations from it.

Netherlands, Norway, Sweden), provisions originally introduced as civil unions or partnerships were later on equalized with gender-neutral marriage. Interestingly these countries constitute the ‘backbone’ of feminine-oriented cultures, featuring in the bottom ranks of Hofstede (2005:121) Masculinity Index league.

In the article entitled “DICO: a Trojan horse for gay marriage”<sup>15</sup> (*La Stampa*, 18/2/2007) such possibility is strongly opposed by the Church in a pre-emptive expression of concern that “society will be de-Christianized” as “the values that it stands for (family and marriage) are being attacked”. In response to this threat, the Church feels a moral obligation to defend “the idea of family envisaged in the Italian Constitution ... that of the Christian anthropology”. LGBTs are perceived as “against” or at least incompatible with a certain notion of family and therefore excluded from it because their recognition would destabilize a pre-constituted order opening up unacceptable scenarios. For Bishop Anfossi (*La Repubblica*, 12/2/2007):

“The Church has always relied on the institution of marriage for its strong symbolic and ideal value...[the Bill] is not acceptable because it would upset a long-term established anthropological and cultural balance”.

To envisage what would happen if “the balance shifted” one would have to interpret the term “anthropological balance” according to the Christian theological view that marriage represents the legitimization of “two fleshes (bodies) that become one” (*ibidem*) to generate life thus justifying the use of sexuality finalized to procreation. Hofstede (2001) suggests that whilst there are two aspects to human sexuality (those of reproduction and pleasure), masculine Roman Catholicism rejected sex for pleasure “institutionalizing celibacy for priests, the cult of the Virgin Mary, and marriage as a sacrament with the purpose of procreation” (*ibid*: 329). In the absence of the procreation element (at least in a traditional sense) in homosexual relationships, their use of sexuality cannot be publicly recognized but, indeed represents a “weak and deviant” practice (as Pope Benedict XVI defined it) that makes LGBTs anthropologically lower and socially destabilizing (Seroul 2009). One therefore could look at the argument that the Church’s opposition to a

---

<sup>15</sup> Original title: “Dico, cavalli di Troia per arrivare ai matrimoni gay”. Personal translation.

Bill granting LGBTs access to a legal recognition (that could potentially redefine the established notion of marriage) would “shift the balance” of civil society towards a more inclusive notion of non-conforming identities. In the wake of this, the fear that recognizing LGBT unions “would break the family apart” (Anfossi, *La Repubblica* 12/2/2007) suggests that the ‘shift’ (and related perceived ‘attacks’) could, in fact, affect the Church’s legitimacy to power. This institution, like most hierarchical systems, has relied on its members’ compliance with ‘moral rules’ and high power distance for a structured, reliable, and predictable functioning. As Hofstede (2001: 147) suggests, rules represent a strategy of uncertainty avoidance which, in turn, would be the main rationale for world’s religions. For Hofstede (2001: 329) humans have sought religious traditions (and adhered to rules) as a source of certainties in the face of the “unpredictable risks of human existence”. This theme is clearly evident in Anfossi’s (2010) comment: “The role of the church is providing certainties in the face of sentimental uncertainties that young people are encountering nowadays.” At the same time acceptance of rules (based on alleged ‘natural’ or ‘divine’ sources) has sustained the power entitlement of authorities and power relations.

Another concern expressed by Bishop Anfossi (*ibidem*) is that “There is a risk that global culture shifts its axis from a principle of collective responsibility in favour of a concept of total and absolute individual freedom”. The important message that is inferable from this is the ideological opposition to individualism. Hofstede (2001: 209) refers to the individualism/collectivism polarization to define whether values are shaped around the self or the group. This view would have particular relevance to family arrangements and family dynamics, since, as Hofstede argues, in individualist societies everyone is expected to have a high degree of independence and rather loose ‘clan’ ties whereas, in collectivist ones, individuals are part of much more cohesive in-groups (usually extended families) to which they are bonded by mutual assistance and loyalty expectations. Hofstede correlates low levels of individualism with high levels of power distance and masculinity; however Italy does not seem to fit this pattern as it shows high scores in all domains. Instead, the patriarchalist paradigm perhaps should be looked at to interpret the Italian data.

Patriarchalist societies are characterized by the rooting of “the institutionally enforced authority of males over females and their children in the family unit” and by the influence of such cultural set up

---

in every aspect of life from interpersonal relationships to politics (Castells 2010:192-193). The patriarchal paradigm has also strongly shaped the Catholic Church since its origins. Crucially, the Church came to be structured as a patriarchal institution through a male-dominated hierarchical system that nevertheless has strongly fostered and relied on the cult of the family (North 1995). On a social level, for most European societies, patriarchalism has represented a cohesive model of family organisation until the occurrence and intensification of patterns of industrialization and globalization typically described as modernization (Giddens 1992). Social shifts resulting in adjustments in the family arrangements have, in most cases, caused a weakening of the patriarchal system (Castell, 2010:193). In particular, the female condition has emerged empowered as ‘breadwinner’ and, more importantly, in control of the reproduction process. As a consequence, Giddens (1992: 154-5) suggests that one aspect of modern society has been an increasing dissociation of sexuality from marriages. This shift would appear to have affected most Western countries with Northern European societies showing a “wide ranging diffusion of informal unions and extramarital births” (Rosina & Fraboni, 2004:150).

However, in recent years, Southern European countries, and Italy above all, have shown very different patterns. Whilst the period between 1991 and 2008 has seen an overall decreasing trend in the number of marriages celebrated in Italy (ISTAT 2008), ‘marriage’ as an institution is still regarded as the event that officially sanctions leaving the parental home (Rosina & Fraboni 2004). Rosina & Fraboni (2004:154) suggest that cohabitation and arrangements alternative to marriage are scarcely attempted not because of moral prescriptions against it but fundamentally because of “the strong ties between parents and children that are anthropologically rooted in the Italian society”. Marriage would thus become loaded with significance out of necessity, almost like an inescapable rite of passage. Whilst this is not necessarily the case with all layers of the Italian population (for instance, cohabitation is widespread in large urban areas in the North) and DeBeer et al. (2000:115) believe that Italy is only a late-comer in what is a “European common transition process”. This attitudinal difference could well account for the demographic and cultural gap between Italy and Northern European countries.

The implications of this argument would thus point to a greater consideration of the social construction of marriage in Italian culture,

where such institution takes on the specific cultural meaning of a ‘necessary’ rite of passage that retains a deeper significance for the Italian society than its Northern European neighbours.

### 3.1 Comments posted on internet forums

This section analyses a list of comments posted on YouTube<sup>16</sup> and OneTivu.it<sup>17</sup> in relation to the television programme *Domenica 5*<sup>18</sup> during which a live debate was held on the subject of the recognition of gay couples. These forums were selected because it was felt they could integrate the newspaper article analysis with more informal and discursive data.

In general, it was possible to broadly identify the discursive tones of comments posted by either side on a range from ‘soft’ to ‘hard’. At one end, comments with ‘hard’ tones tended to convey more polarised opinions more directly, with more frequent verbal abuse, offensive language and derogatory terms. Furthermore a higher frequency of discourse construction in terms of ‘you’ and ‘us’ suggests an ideological in/out group division and a greater discursive tension. At the other end of the spectrum, ‘soft’ tones were characterised by a language mediated by pragmatic strategies that suggest non-confrontational approaches. The majority of postings on YouTube were characterised by ‘hard’ discursive tones (even more so considering that some postings were removed by the moderator as deemed ‘not appropriate’) whilst most comments on OneTivu.it, on the other end, seemed to contain ‘softer’ tones.

One recurrent idea in both forums was the natural/unnatural view of homosexuality that would determine the ‘eligibility’ of LGBTs to aspire to some sort of recognition. For some, the ‘non-conventional’ use of sexuality by LGBTs is incompatible with certain religious positions and it would therefore justify a rejection of LGBTs calls for legitimization reaffirming, at the same time, a conceptualization of family in an exclusively patriarchal sense. As one commentator put it [personal translation]:

---

<sup>16</sup> (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fn11PgIeCEM>)

<sup>17</sup> (<http://www.onetivu.it/20/10/2009/rissa-sullomosessualita-a-domenica-cinque/>)

<sup>18</sup> Broadcast on Canale5 on 17/10/2009

---

A family is about two people growing into a new human being, which cannot happen with you...a gay couple cannot produce a tangible fruit of their love, but only personal and reciprocal pleasure ... God created man and woman to be together and a family will always be a father, a mother and their children and he who calls himself a good Catholic and goes to church every Sunday cannot possibly accept certain demands [made by LGBTs].

Interestingly, another theme emerges in the document that would point to an alternative or additional reason for opposing LGBT couples. In support of one commentator who wrote: “if you’re gay there’s no need to flag it up, just live your life ...” another commentator posted the following:

Let me just make it clear that I won’t tolerate this ostentation and your demand for same rights as heterosexual couples. Yes, homosexuality may well have always existed but it seems to me that lately you [LGBTs] have become very complacent and ostentatious. Such transgression is going to f\*\*k up the world’s morality. I WON’T HAVE IT!<sup>19</sup> [capital letters used in the original].

This comment seems to encapsulate well the idea so deeply rooted in one part of the Italian society that homosexual behaviour will be tolerated as long as there is no obvious mention or representation of it, as this would be a cause of scandal, reminiscent of the *pater familias* expectations of virility. At institutional level, this attitude has meant that, historically, homosexuality has been negated rather than repressed by the Italian State, because the repressive function has always been delegated to the ‘moral’ teaching performed by the Catholic Church (De Beaufort et al, 2008). The supposed separation of powers that the Lateran Pacts was aiming to introduce, has possibly only exacerbated the impasse exposing the difficulty (or unwillingness) of the Italian State to adopt ‘LGBT friendly’ policies as this would indicate a radical change of direction from Catholic to secular values.

On the contrary, the perception of LGBTs as non-conformist identities that could potentially undermine the rules or implicit ‘moral’ prescriptions on which the Italian social system is founded has, in some cases, over spilt into openly homophobic attitudes (exemplified by the surge in homophobic attacks). This view would be consistent with Castells’ analysis that homophobia has been the response of certain patriarchal societies in the wake of the perceived threat brought about

---

<sup>19</sup> In the language of Internet forums writing in capital letters indicates shouting.



upon them by non-conformist identities and non-traditional family arrangements. For Castells (2010) the diversification of family arrangements experienced by modern society (including same-sex couples but also a dissociation of the reproduction function from the upbringing function through IVF techniques) has inevitably changed the ‘power system’ of patriarchy which has been traditionally based on “taboos, sexual repression and compulsory heterosexuality” (*ibid.*: 216). Consequently, this destabilization, whilst allowing for new and more varied identities, has resulted in some cases in forms of “fundamentalist restoration” (*ibid.*: 301) with clear homophobic tones, as exemplified by one of the comments posted on the *You Tube* forum:

[Various derogatory and homophobic terms] What tolerance? [swearword] you’re worth fewer rights than slaves! I enjoy insulting you in the street! Am I a homophobic? Well, then I’ll be a homophobic forever.

Radicalized positions are equally found among LGBTs which in Castells’ (2010) framework would suggest the construction of *resistance identities*. For Castells (2010: 9), resistance emerges as a viable alternative to the ‘oppressing’ conditions that ‘dominant’ society has imposed on LGBT individuals through their systematic alienation, stigmatization and devaluation. This would lead to separation and rejection of the ‘other’ culture. The ‘resistance’ paradigm that underpinned the early ‘gay liberation’ movement would thus appear to be still present in the Italian LGBT culture as exemplified by the comment:

We [LGBTs] have no rights ...we have nothing. All we have is never-ending homophobia, what kind of life are we supposed to conduct? We’ll carry on fighting our war until people wake up.

Furthermore, in terms of language, a number of postings suggest that the LGBT resistance is expressed to ‘match’ homophobic comments in the same use of derogatory and aggressive tones, this time, typically aimed at the State and the Church:

[Italy] is a sh\*\*\*y medieval country, not a democracy... I’ve had enough of you all f\*\*\*\*\*g God fanatics! F\*\*k off!

---

#### 4. Conclusions

This study started out as a quest to shed a light on the social identities of LGBTs in the Italian society and to gain a better knowledge of their construction and performance from the advantage point of a specific case framed in the legislative context of legitimizing same-sex unions. The crucial role of culture was highlighted in the notion that identities rely on dynamics involving social interaction and cultural negotiation.

The findings proceeding from the analysis would suggest that the overall acceptance of homosexuality in the Italian society is comparatively low, in line with Hofstede's (1998) predictors that would correlate acceptance of homosexuality with one country's religious views and its masculinity index.

However, the role of religion seems to go beyond the sanction of moral conduct guidelines, as the analysis has suggested that religion has taken on a major cohesive cultural role in the Italian society through the preservation of traditions embodied in certain 'rites of passages'. This would be consistent with the direction of causality from values to religion argued by Hofstede. The religious discourse of condemnation of LGBTs based on their 'unnatural' and 'non-procreative' behaviour could be interpreted as the Catholic Church's rejection of non-conforming identities that are seen as undermining a hierarchical system relying on adherence to rules and norms to guarantee the 'uncertainty avoidance' function that Hofstede (2001) sees as the rationale for all religions. Furthermore, along with the religious explanation, patriarchy was crucially highlighted as a framework to make sense of the specificity of the Italian case, arguing that, for part of the Italian society, allowing the legitimization of LGBTs has been interpreted as an attack on the patriarchal family arrangement, a long standing social system validated by the Church through the institution of marriage which has come to assume for Italians the meaning of a 'necessary' rite of passage.

In the wake of this, the difficulties faced by LGBT couples in the debate over their legal recognition were multiple but can be conveniently summed up into two major arguments. The first argument is that the quest for legitimization (shared with heterosexual couples) through any form outside the traditional institution of marriage has been perceived (and portrayed) as an attack on marriage itself by a significant part of the Italian population which share the notion of marriage as invested with certain cultural values. These values would appear underpinned mainly

by religious values; however, as discussed, the cultural and anthropological components play fundamental roles in making marriage a much more significant construct for the Italian society than most other Western societies. The second argument is represented by a straightforward opposition to homosexuality with strong evidence of religious views being directly related to negative attitudes. However, also in this case, we have been able to trace the rationale for such views in the specificity of Italian cultural values, hypothesizing the difficulty for LGBTs to emerge as non-conformist identities against the backdrop of a patriarchal society. On an institutional level the historical attitude of the Italian legislation to negate rather than repress homosexuality has been highlighted. This has effectively contributed to delegating the repressive function to the Church. As this status quo of tolerance was achieved at the expense of the visibility of LGBTs, when recently faced with pressure from the European institutions, the Italian state's attitude of denial has become increasingly unsustainable exposing the gap with other Western countries where the transition of LGBTs from 'resistance identities' to 'legitimizing identities' has occurred comparatively painlessly; and acculturation dynamics have, by and large, followed a parallel pattern moving from separatist and marginalizing ideologies to more integrative ones reflected in specific legal provisions.

By contrast, in the Italian society, the shift towards the social inclusion of LGBTs has proved more difficult than other countries and it has resulted in an ideological clash over 'core' cultural values with various implications. On the one hand, legitimization denied by the Italian state has been sought through other institutions that have appeared more willing to provide such validation, such as the European Union (although this path might prove more time-consuming and uncertain). On the other hand, the debate seems to have exposed the exacerbation and radicalization of ideologies on both sides with certain homophobic and LGBT resistance positions clearly emerging from some of the documents analysed, suggesting that separation is still very much the favourite solution for a certain part of the Italian society.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the findings may contribute to understanding and explaining the phenomenon of social integration of LGBTs in the Italian society. However, it is also felt that this research carries some limitations, primarily related to the interpretive nature of the analysis and the specificity of the case studied; so it cannot claim a generalization of the findings and it does not lend itself to replication.

---

For this reason, it is felt that more exploration could be undertaken and further research is encouraged that, in particular from an intercultural perspective, would possibly look at related issues, outside the scope of this research, capable of promoting a more comprehensive understanding.

## References:

- Amnesty International (9/10/2009) reported in <http://www.amnesty.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDP/agina/2669>
- Arcigay Italia Rapporto Omofobia 2008-2009 Available from: <http://www.arcigay.it/report-omofobia-italia-2008-2009> Accessed 14/7/2010
- BBC News 22/10/2009 available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8321502.stm> Accessed 19/07/2010
- Blackwood, E. 1984. "Sexuality and gender in certain Native American tribes: the case of cross-gender females". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 10, pp. 27-4.
- Cantarella, E. 1988. *Second Nature - Bisexuality in the ancient world*. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- Castells, M. 1997, second edition, 2010. *The Power of Identity, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. II. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Cai Hua 2008. *A Society without Fathers or Husbands The Na of China* (Translated by Asti Hustvedt Cambridge), MA: Zone Books.
- COWI 2009. *The social situation concerning homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in Italy*; Danish Institute for Human Rights.
- D'Andrade, R.G. 1984. "Cultural Meaning Systems," 88-119 in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, R.A. Shweder and R. LeVine (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Beaufort, F., Hägg, I., van Schie, P. (eds.) 2008. *Separation of Church and State in Europe. European Liberal Forum*. Available online: [http://www.liberalforum.eu/tl\\_files/publications/Separation%20of%20church%20and%20state%20in%20Europe.pdf](http://www.liberalforum.eu/tl_files/publications/Separation%20of%20church%20and%20state%20in%20Europe.pdf) Accessed 28/7/2010.

- De Beer J., Corijn M., Deven F. 2000. "Summary and conclusions", in De Beer J., Deven F. (eds). *Diversity in Family Formation: The 2nd Demographic Transition in Belgium and the Netherlands*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Duberman, M. 1993. *Stonewall*. New York: Dutton.
- Eurobarometer 66 2006, available online: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66\\_highlights\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_highlights_en.pdf) Accessed 12/7/2010
- Ferraro, G. 1994. *Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*, West Publishing Company: Eagan MN
- Foucault, M. 1978. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (R. Hurley trans). Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Giddens, A. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity
- Hall, S. 1990. "Cultural identity and diaspora" in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: community, culture, difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Halperin, D. 1990. *Homosexuality: A Cultural Construct*, Chicago: Routledge
- Herdt, G. 1982. *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea*, University of California Press.
- Herek, G.M. 1986. "On heterosexual masculinity: Some psychical consequences of the social construction of gender and sexuality". *American Behavioral Scientist*, 29 (5), pp. 563-577
- Hofstede, G. 1998. *Masculinity and Femininity: The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures*. London: Sage
- Hofstede, G. 2001. *Culture's consequences: comparing values, behaviours, institutions, and organizations across nations*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hofstede, G. and Hofstede, G. J. 2005. *Cultures and Organizations Software of the Mind*, New York: McGraw Hill.
- La Repubblica, Genova, 5/1/2010 "Sciopero della fame in diretta web. Siamo gay. Vogliamo sposarci" Available online: <http://genova.repubblica.it/dettaglio/sciopero-della-fame-in-diretta-web-siamo-gay-vogliamo-sposarci/1821155>.
- La Repubblica, 12/2/2007 "Dalla Santa Sede nessuna interferenza tra il ddl e i Pacts troppe somiglianze" Available online: <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/02/12/dalla-santa-sede-nessuna-interferenza-tra-il.html> Accessed 10/7/2010
- La Repubblica, 27/2/2008 Immigrati, Cus, droga, riforma tv tutte le leggi rimaste nel cassetto, Available online:

- 
- <http://www.repubblica.it/2008/02/sezioni/politica/crisi-governo-7/leggi-slatate/leggi-slatate.html?ref=search> Accessed 15/7/2010)
- La Repubblica, 14/4/2010 "Matrimoni gay, no della Consulta ai ricorsi Materia di competenza del Parlamento" Available online: [http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/04/14/news/consulta\\_matrimoni\\_gay-3344318/](http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/04/14/news/consulta_matrimoni_gay-3344318/) Accessed 15/6/2010
- La Stampa, 18/2/2007 "Dico, cavalla di Troia per arrivare ai matrimony gay" available online: [http://www.forumfamiglie.org/allegati/rassegna\\_8226.pdf](http://www.forumfamiglie.org/allegati/rassegna_8226.pdf) Accessed 6/6/2010
- Il Sole 24 Ore (14/10/2009) available online: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Italia/2009/10/ondiritti-umani-italia.shtml?uuid=7161ba8c-b8e3-11de-aca8-54b9b3d67ee0&DocRulesView=Libero>
- ILGA, *Lesbian and Gay rights in the world*, available online <http://ilga.org/ilga/en/article/1161>. Accessed 21/7/2010
- ISTAT, *Dati sul Matrimonio in Italia*, available online: <http://demo.istat.it/altridati/matrimoni/index.html> Accessed 4/8/2010
- Jandt, F.E. 2004. *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication: Identities in a Global Community*, Fourth Edition: London Sage Publications.
- North, G. 1995. *Baptized Patriarchalism: The Cult of the Family*, Tyler, TX Institute for Christian Economics.
- Rosina, A. and Fraboni, R. 2004. "Is marriage losing its centrality in Italy?" in *Demographic Research* vol. 11, Article 6, pp. 149-172 Available online: <http://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol11/6/11-6.pdf>
- Scheidel, W. 1996. "Brother-sister and parent-child marriage outside royal families in ancient Egypt and Iran: A challenge to the sociobiological view of incest avoidance?" in *Ethology and Sociobiology*, Volume 17, Issue 5, pp. 319-340.
- Seroul, E. 2009. "Italie est-elle homophobe?" Available online <http://erace-lestis.com/pages/2010/02/14/%E2%99%A6-e-litalia-omofobica/> Accessed 18/7/2010.
- Troiden, R. R. 1989. "The formation of homosexual identities", *Journal of Homosexuality*, 17(1/2), pp. 43-73.
- Turner, J.C. et al. 1987. *Rediscovering the social group: A Self-Categorization Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

- Whitehead, H. 1981. "The bow and the burden strap: a new look at institutionalized homosexuality in Native North America". In *Sexual meanings: the cultural construction of gender and sexuality*, S.B. Ortner & H. Whitehead(eds.), New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, C.A. 1999. *Roman Homosexuality Ideologies of Masculinity In Classical Antiquity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- World Values Survey 1981-2008 Official Aggregate v.20090901, 2009. World Values Survey Association ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)). Aggregate File Producer: ASEP/JDS, Madrid.
- Yee, N. 2003. "Catching The Phoenix: The Social Construction of Homosexuality". Available online: [http://www.nickyee.com/ponder/social\\_construction.html](http://www.nickyee.com/ponder/social_construction.html) Accessed 21/6/2010.





## **Hofstede's cultural dimensions: Italian national identity in ELF usage**

*Costanza Cucchi*

### *Abstract*

*Originally devised to account for national differences in work-related values, Hofstede's model (2003) offers a convenient way to grasp cultural differences related to national identity on the basis of five dimensions. Recently the model has been applied by various scholars to the study of communicative and linguistic differences linked to cultural differences both across languages and in the study of English as a lingua franca within such diverse genres as calls for papers, business letters, e-mails, advertisements, commercials, websites, parliamentary speeches and doctor-patient consultations.*

*After examining the correlations between Hofstede's dimensions and language in previous literature, the present paper applies Hofstede's model to the comparison of native English and English as a lingua franca as used by Italians, an area as yet unexplored in the literature, with particular regard to two comparable websites of potato crisp manufacturers, Walkers and San Carlo. The results of the present study confirm the relevance of power distance and uncertainty avoidance, already shown in a cross-linguistic perspective (Cucchi 2010; Katan 2006), to the study of ELF usage by Italians in websites, and indicate the importance of individualism/collectivism. The study therefore shows that Hofstede's model is a valid approach to predicting and explaining linguistic differences on the basis of national identity.*

---

## 1. Introduction

Starting from the premise that “nations [...] are the source of a considerable amount of common mental programming of their citizens” (Hofstede 2003: 12), Hofstede attributed a score to over fifty countries along five dimensions representing the problems faced by people of all nationalities - individualism/collectivism (IDV/COL), power distance (PD), uncertainty avoidance (UA), masculinity/femininity (MAS/FEM), long-term/short-term orientation (LTO/STO). The resulting five-dimension model provides a convenient way to grasp cultural differences on the basis of national identities, thus making comparison among the countries possible.<sup>20</sup>

Although the link between the cultural dimensions and language is not a primary concern of his work, on various occasions Hofstede (2001; 2003) mentions communicative styles and language choices. Recently Hofstede’s dimensions have been utilized to formulate hypotheses on and to account for specific communicative and linguistic choices across countries and languages (Cucchi 2010; Dekker, Rutte, Van den Berg 2008; Katan 2004, 2006; Koeman 2007; Meeuwesen, van den Brink-Muinen and Hofstede 2009; Smith, Dugan, Peterson and Leung 1998; Vishwanath 2003; Wolfe 2008; Zhao, Massey, Murphy and Fang 2003). The model has been used, although less frequently, to compare native and non-native English (Bjørge 2007; Clyne 1994; Hatipoğlu 2006; Kang and Mastin 2008).

Since only a few studies are concerned specifically with Italian (Cucchi 2010; Katan 2006) and none, to the best of my knowledge, with English mediated from Italian, the present paper aims to test the predictive and explanatory power of Hofstede’s dimensions in this particular case, through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the English version of the website of *San Carlo*, an Italian potato crisp manufacturer, and a comparable website of an English company, *Walkers*. The present analysis was inspired by Turnbull (2008), who

---

<sup>20</sup> Scores for each country along the five dimensions are available at <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>, a website developed by *Itim International*, a consulting organization utilizing Hofstede's concepts. The link “Compare your home culture with your host culture” enables users to compare the scores of any two countries.

compares British websites to the English versions of Italian websites<sup>21</sup>. Although no reference was made by the author to Hofstede's dimensions for the interpretation of her findings, the cultural dimensions seem to help contextualize them within a broader cultural framework.

Section 2 presents a critical review of the literature with the aim of examining which features were associated to Hofstede's dimensions and of verifying whether the dimensions proved to be a successful predictive and explanatory device of communicative and linguistic choices. Long-term/short-term orientation is not discussed in the present study since this dimension has not as yet been investigated in relation to language to my knowledge. Dekker, Rutte, Van den Berg (2008: 444) report, for example, that "this dimension is difficult to apply and understand". In section 3 Hofstede's model is applied to the analysis of *San Carlo* and *Walkers* websites. Section 4 comments on the results and indicates areas for future research.

## 2. Cultural dimensions and language

In this section past studies relating Hofstede's model to communicative and linguistic choices are reviewed. The purpose of such a review is, on the one hand, to verify whether the cultural dimensions have proved effective in predicting or explaining specific communicative and linguistic choices on the basis of nationality. On the other hand, the examination of past literature will suggest hypotheses to be tested on the two websites which are the object of the present study.

### 2.1 Individualism / Collectivism (IDV/COL)

As indicated by Hofstede (2003: 51) "[i]ndividualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose", while "[c]ollectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups". Generally,

---

<sup>21</sup> Turnbull (2008) offers an extensive analysis of *Glenmorangie*, the website of a Scottish whisky producer, and *Zonin*, an Italian wine producer. A few examples are taken from other British companies, such as *Twinnings* and *Walkers*, which has been chosen for analysis in the present paper.

---

“there is a strong relationship between a country’s national wealth and the degree of individualism in its culture” (Hofstede 1991:53), the most individualist country being the United States. Hofstede himself (2001:237) points out, on the basis of Kashima and Kashima (1998), that countries where the language allows first person pronouns or second person pronouns to be omitted generally score lower on IDV compared to countries where omission of these pronouns is not possible. This finding applies, for example, to Italy and Great Britain: Italy, where sentences like *vado e a che ora arrivi?* are normal, scores lower on IDV compared to Great Britain, where it is necessary to state the subject (*I’ll go; What time are you coming?*). Hofstede (2003:60; 2001:212) also suggests the existence of a link between IDV/COL and a preference for low and high context communication respectively.

IDV scores were found to be reliable predictors of the content, of the people taking part -and of the form of communicative events. In doctor-patient communication, more exchange of psychosocial information – as opposed to biomedical information – was observed in high IDV countries (Meeuwesen et al. 2009). In addition, in these countries physicians gave more backchanneling (‘hm’) and more information, but asked fewer questions (Meeuwesen et al. 2009: 63). In virtual teams working via chat, e-mail, audio and video conference, members of high IDV countries held individuals, rather than groups, responsible for the success of the communication (Dekker et al. 2008). In addition, more direct communication – i.e. more lyrics about the product or brand, more references and repetitions of the brand, and more slogans – was reported in the commercials of high IDV countries (Koeman 2007). In collectivist countries, instead, less direct communication was observed: in organizations disagreement was reported to be settled more on the basis of rules and regulations, considered as impersonal sources, thus avoiding direct confrontation (Smith et al. 1998).

In cross-linguistic studies IDV/COL has proved effective in predicting the occurrence of specific linguistic features. Zhao et al. (2003: 78) reported that the presence of “such personalising words as ‘I’, ‘my’, ‘you’ and ‘your’” was much more frequent in homepages of American websites than in Chinese websites, in line with U.S.’s higher IDV (91) compared to China (20). Wolfe (2008) found that American sales/product promotion letters contained more references to the self as a single individual (‘I’, ‘my’, ‘me’) than references to the self as a member

of the company (e.g. name of the company, ‘our company’) compared to letters written in Russian (Russia’s IDV=39).

While in the studies mentioned so far hypotheses were made on the basis of Hofstede’s dimensions, other studies referred to them in the interpretation of their findings. Hatipoğlu (2006: 36) claimed that the higher presence of expressions such as *Dear colleague*, *Dear Linguists*, *Dear participants* in conference calls for papers written in English by Turkish writers compared to calls for paper by native English was possibly due to Turkey’s lower IDV (37) compared to Great Britain’s (IDV = 89), reflected in the need of Turkish writers “to show to their interlocutors that writers and readers belong to the same group” (Hatipoğlu 2006: 35). Kang and Mastin (2008) found that tourism public relations websites in English of high IDV countries had more animated quizzes/games and humorous videos.

## 2.2 Power Distance (PD)

PD is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede 2003: 28). Countries where Roman languages are spoken score medium to high on the PD scale, while countries where a Germanic language is spoken score low (Hofstede 2003:42). In low PD countries children may contradict their parents, at school students feel free to disagree with their teachers, to intervene in the lessons and ask questions (Hofstede 2003: 32-34; 2001: 100-101). In the workplace, “[s]ubordinates expect to be consulted before a decision is made which affects their work” (Hofstede 2003: 34).

Low PD has proved to be a generally successful predictor of more interacting roles and more symmetrical relationships among the participants in the speech event. Members of teams working via chat, e-mail, audio and video conference from low PD countries considered it important to include and invite team members to give their contribution (Dekker et al. 2008). In high PD countries, more fixed roles in doctor-patient interaction were observed (Meeuwesen et al. 2009). In sales/product promotion letters written in American English (U.S.’s PD = 40) there were more attempts to “continue the conversation” by means of expressions such as ‘I enjoyed our visit’, ‘from our conversation’, ‘as promised’ compared to letters written in Russian

---

(Russia's PD = 93), where generic titles like 'Colleague' or 'Principal' were avoided, since they might challenge the power status (Wolfe 2008).

As suggested by Katan (2004: 274), low PD has proved a reliable predictor of a low level of formality. In the e-mails to their professors written in English as a lingua franca, it was found that low PD students were more likely to use informal greetings and closings (Bjørge 2007). In EU parliamentary discourse more occurrences of the English informal expressions 'et cetera' and 'and so on' (U.K.'s PD = 35) were observed compared to their Italian equivalents (Italy's PD = 50) (Cucchi 2010). In tourism public relations websites in English, low PD countries showed a preference for casual narratives, thus developing more personal relationships with visitors, while high PD countries favoured more authoritative narratives (Kang and Mastin 2008: 55).

### **2.3 Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)**

Hofstede (2003: 113) defines UA as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations". Examples of high UA countries are Latin American, Latin European and Mediterranean countries, while Anglo and Nordic countries score low (Hofstede 2003: 114). High UA implies a greater need for predictability and safety, for rules and regulations, for precision and formalization (Hofstede 2003: 113, 122) and it seems connected to difficult language, in that "some of the great gurus from [...] high UA countries write such difficult prose that one needs commentaries by more ordinary creatures explaining what the guru really meant" (Hofstede 2003: 119-120). Like high PD, therefore, high UA seems to be associated with a high level of formality.

Regarding the need for predictability and safety, high UA was indicated as an explanation for longer turns and the higher frequency of explanations, apologies, confirmations, repetitions and reformulations in workplace discourse (Clyne 1994). In Italian advertisements for private pensions, Italy's higher UA (75) was considered as a possible reason why the word 'sicurezza' was preferred to 'independence', favoured in British ads (Great Britain's UA = 35) (Katan 2006). High UA proved also to be an accurate predictor of the greater amount of details perceived as desirable in on-line eBay auctions (Vishwanath 2003) and in EU parliamentary discourse (Cucchi 2010) and was considered an accurate

---

explanation for the fact that the Italian equivalents of ‘No smoking’ or ‘Thank you for not smoking’ notices are “more detailed and legally binding” than British ones (Katan 2004: 242).

## 2.4 Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS/FEM)

In masculine societies “men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success whereas women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life”, while in feminine societies “social gender roles overlap (i.e. both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life)” (Hofstede 2003: 83). Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark are the most feminine countries, while Japan, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and West-Germany are the most masculine ones. As claimed by Hofstede (2003: 79; 2001: 315), the high masculinity score of the U.S. (MAS = 62) may explain why “[American] CVs are written in superlatives, mentioning every degree, grade, award, and membership to demonstrate their outstanding qualities”, while the Dutch (Netherlands’ MAS=14), usually “write modest and usually short CVs”.

Few studies have referred to MAS/FEM to predict or explain language choices. Clyne (1994: 186) observed that this dimension “was not very useful” for the interpretation of his data. Similarly, Kang and Mastin (2008:55) maintained that MAS/FEM “demonstrated comparatively lower power in explaining difference in website items”. When predictions or explanations about linguistic choices on the basis of MAS/FEM are formulated, the findings seem contradictory. Meeuwesen et al. (2009) found, contrary to their expectations, that in medical communication:

[t]he more masculine a country was, the more social talk, backchannelling and facilitation [paraphrasing and clarification] the patients gave. However, the more feminine a country was, the more information patients gave, and the more biomedical talk (Meeuwesen et al. 2009: 63).

On the other hand, Hatipoğlu (2006), who found that the great majority of English calls for papers did not contain any salutations and closings, claims that this could be associated to a ‘report’ view of

---

language, i.e. language being viewed mainly as a tool for exchanging information, in line with Britain's higher MAS (66) compared to Turkey (45), where a 'rapport' view of language was prominent.

## 2.5 Correlation among the cultural dimensions

As highlighted by Hofstede (2001: 60), the dimensions are independent and "their country scores should not be systematically correlated". Yet, across the wealthier countries, UA is significantly correlated with IDV, PD and MAS, therefore functioning "as a kind of summary index" (ibidem). Although authors have generally related specific linguistic communicative and linguistic features to single dimensions, the correlations between the dimensions are pointed out in some of the studies reviewed. For example, Vishwanath (2003: 585) treats UA as a summary index, as indicated by Hofstede, and Smith et al. (1998: 352) highlight "a strongly significant tendency for individualist countries to score low upon [...] power distance", while "[m]ost collectivist countries also scored high on power distance". With regard to EU countries, Meeuwesen et al. (2009: 59) observe that in many of them "a larger power distance goes hand in hand with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance [and] with more collectivism".

Concerning Italy and Great Britain, Katan (2006: 68) points out that Italy is indicated by Hofstede as an example of the dimension mix "strong UA, high PD", represented by the metaphor "pyramid of people", as opposed to Great Britain, which exemplifies the dimension mix "weak UA, low PD", condensed in the metaphor "village market". In the author's words, "[t]he pyramid of people clearly relates to the chain of command and solid certainty in the face of changing situations, whereas the village market is a metaphor for the negotiated, consultative ad-hoc form of organizing, which depends very much on the particular situation" (Katan 2006: 68). Cucchi (2010) observes that the predictions on language usage made on the basis of Italy's and Great Britain scores on PD and UA are the same, in line with the fact that UA and PD are in some way related, since "differences among countries on uncertainty avoidance were originally discovered as a by-product of power distance" (Hofstede 2003: 111).



### 3. Cultural dimensions in the *San Carlo* and *Walkers* websites

Since Hofstede's model has proved to possess predictive and explanatory power with regard to communicative and linguistic choices on the basis of nationality, in the present section it is applied to the websites of two companies, the British company *Walkers* and the Italian *San Carlo*, of which the English version is examined. The study aims to verify whether differences between the two websites could be explained on the basis of nationality and, more generally, whether Hofstede's model could successfully be applied to English used as a lingua franca by Italians. MAS/FEM is not considered for two reasons. Firstly, Italy and Great Britain are close on this dimension (70 vs 66) and, secondly, the review in the previous section has not indicated the existence of any clear links between this dimension and language.

Following Turnbull (2008), who studied websites of food and drink companies, the two websites analyzed in the present study belong to local companies of the food sector. National identity is in fact assumed to be more manifest in food and drink, "which by its very nature is culture-specific" (Turnbull 2008: 18), and consequently in the texts related to them. In addition, two local companies were preferred to multinationals selling national brands, in that in this latter case "their national identity may have been 'diluted' in some way" (ibidem). Lastly and more significantly, it is hypothesized that the website texts of local companies retain more of the discursive style typical of the nation.

While it is reasonably assumed that the texts in the *Walkers* website are written by native speakers of English, the English version of *San Carlo* may be qualified as a translation from Italian, with some adaptation, as can be seen from a comparison between the excerpts in example (1), taken from the "history" section, in the original Italian and in the corresponding English version:

- (1) Siamo nel 1936 e Francesco Vitaloni apre a Milano, in via Lecco 18 (angolo via Casati), un negozio di rosticceria che, in onore della vicina chiesetta, viene intitolata [sic] a San Carlo. Vi si frigge un po' di tutto, dal pollo al vitello, dal pesce alla verdura. Ma, in special modo, la "Rosticceria San Carlo" si distingue ben presto per una specialità a quei tempi rivoluzionaria, "le patatine croccanti" che il Sig. Francesco, coadiuvato dalla moglie Angela e dal figlio Alberto, fa distribuire ogni giorno alle panetterie e ai bar del circondario. La produzione è

---

inizialmente limitata, venti chili di patatine al giorno, ma è subito successo: tutti le vogliono. Saranno destinate a fare molta strada.<sup>22</sup>

In 1936, Francesco Vitaloni opened a rosticceria (deli selling roast meats) at 18, via Lecco (on the corner with via Casati). He named his deli in honour of the nearby church, thereby founding San Carlo. On offer there was little of everything: from chicken and veal, to fish and vegetables, but the rosticceria San Carlo had a unique speciality, revolutionary for the times; each day Francesco, assisted by his wife Angela and son Alberto would distribute potato chips to bakeries and bars in the area. Initially, production was limited to around 20 kg of potatoes per day, but it became an instant success, and soon everybody wanted them. They were destined to make some big progress.<sup>23</sup>

Following Toury's (1995) descriptivist approach to translation, also adopted by Garzone (2009), who analyses the English versions of the websites of the Italian and the Spanish tourism boards, the English version of *S. Carlo*, though mediated from Italian, is taken as an autonomous text, independently of its Italian original. In addition, the English version mediated from Italian is considered as a text in English as a *lingua franca* in that English is used in this case "not only to address native speakers e.g. Britons or Americans, but principally to communicate with an international audience" (Garzone 2009: 34).

A mainly qualitative analysis was conducted on the English version of the *San Carlo* website, available at <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/>, and on *Walkers*, at <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/>. An attempt was made to save these sites with htrack-3.43-7.exe, a freeware offline browser utility which downloads World Wide websites from the Internet to a local directory. However, while the *San Carlo* website was downloaded successfully, the programme could not save the *Walkers* one. Therefore, the accessible version of the site, a graphically simplified version available at <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessFlavours/index.html>, was saved in txt format for quantitative comparison with the *San Carlo* website, which was subsequently carried out using WordSmith Tools 4. Regarding the products, only the texts about crisps were selected from <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/> and included in the corpus, discarding the

---

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/it/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>

texts in the sections ‘snacks’, ‘aperitif’, ‘bread’ and ‘cakes/pastries’<sup>24</sup> in order to make the corpus more comparable to <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/>, where only crisps are dealt with. The difference in the range of products does not affect the content of the other sections, which in both websites are dedicated to crisps. Due to the way the website is constructed, *San Carlo*’s “history”<sup>25</sup> section could not be included in the corpus and was therefore examined only qualitatively.

### 3.1 Individualism/collectivism (IDV/COL)

Since Italy scores lower on IDV (76) compared to Britain (89), less emphasis on single individuals is expected in the *San Carlo* website. In line with this hypothesis, Alberto, the company’s owner, his father Francesco, the founder of the company, and his wife Angela are only mentioned in the section about the history of the company. *Walkers*’ owner, Gary, is often portrayed in photographs, has a section in his name – “Gary’s Great Trips”<sup>26</sup> – and even talks to the visitors in the section “Do us a flavour”<sup>27</sup>, where one can get personal descriptions of the six people who invented *Walkers*’ new flavours. This is illustrated in example (2):

(2) Catherine dreams of chillies lounging on beds of chocolate. Psychologists probably find it signifies something worrying. We just think she's creative<sup>28</sup>.

On the basis of Zhao et al. (2003) and Wolfe (2008), a less personalized style is expected in *San Carlo* compared to *Walkers*, which was confirmed by the fewer occurrences of first and second person pronouns and adjectives. This result, obtained using Wordsmith Tools 4, is illustrated in Table 1.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/prodotti.asp?ArticleId=3>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/garysgreattrips/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high#/flavours/section=breakfast&view=4acts>

1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> person pronouns and adjectives	Total number of occurrences in <i>San Carlo</i> (6.868 tokens)	Normalized data per 100 tokens in <i>San Carlo</i>	Total number of occurrences in <i>Walkers</i> (7.869 tokens)	Normalized data per 100 tokens in <i>Walkers</i>
I	0	0	41	0,52
Me	0	0	0	0
My	0	0	14	0,18
You	10	0,15	145	1,84
Your	3	0,04	75	0,95
We	8	0,12	47	0,60
Us	1	0,01	34 <sup>29</sup>	0,43
Our	5	0,07	39	0,49
Total	27	0,39	395	5,01

**Table 1.** 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> personal pronouns and adjectives in *San Carlo* and *Walkers*.

The absence of a FAQs section<sup>30</sup> in *San Carlo* explains the absence of ‘I’, ‘my’, ‘you’, which in *Walkers* appear in sentences like:

**(3) Can I change my vote once I have submitted it?**

Er No. Just like a proper election, once **you** have submitted a vote, **you** can't change that vote.<sup>31</sup>

However, there is no apparent reason in the website content which may explain the higher frequency of ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’, which are always used in *Walkers* to refer to the company, as in:

**(4) We're** proud to have the Carbon Reduction label on our packs to show how far **we've** come and how committed **we** are to keeping up the good work.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> 21 occurrences of ‘us’ are in the name of the competition “Do us a Flavour”.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessFlavours/faqs.html>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessFlavours/faqs.html>

<sup>32</sup> [www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessWalkers/nationsFavourite.html](http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessWalkers/nationsFavourite.html)

In line with Kang and Mastin's (2008) findings that websites of nations high on IDV contain more fun elements, *Walkers* has sections offering games and quizzes, called "Fun Stuff"<sup>33</sup>, "Flavour Fun"<sup>34</sup> and "Fun Area"<sup>35</sup>, which have no equivalent in *San Carlo*. Personalization and humor are linked in "Spudyourself"<sup>36</sup>, where Gary, turned into a potato, explains how visitors can upload their photos, thus becoming potatoes, and send their friends personalized vocal messages through the website facilities.

### 3.2 Power Distance (PD)

Since Italy's PD score (50) is much higher than Britain's (35), less flexible role relationships are expected in *San Carlo*. This is apparent only once, when the company's founder is referred to as *signor*:

(5) It was in the 1940 that *signor* Vitaloni transferred all the activities to Greco, a location more suitable for building a continually growing activity.<sup>37</sup>

However, the setting up of more rigid role relationships is clear when *San Carlo* is contrasted with *Walkers*, where visitors can fling edible things at "our friend"<sup>38</sup> Gary in the game "Fling the Flavour", and Gary is turned into a cleaner, sweeping the floor after the "Do us a flavour" competition, while telling the visitors about the results. Visitors are given a "chance to create and decide the next great flavours for the public to try"<sup>39</sup>, thus performing tasks usually carried out by specialized staff.

Possibly due to Britain's low PD, the inventor of the flavour Onion Bhaji, is even jokingly compared to the romantic poet Wordsworth:

---

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high#/flavours/section=breakfast&view=facts>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/garysgreattrips/#funArea>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/funstuff/spudyourself.html>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/fun-stuff/flip-a-flavour>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high#/howitworks/>

---

(4) Carole loves onion bhajis so much she even wrote a poem about them as her inspiration. Well, **it's no sillier than writing about daffodils...** And so much tastier!<sup>40</sup>

This shows a tendency to egalitarianism even clearer in *Walkers'* section "Working with farmers" (example 6), celebrating the farmers' work, which has no equivalent in *San Carlo*:

(5) There's nothing quite like the sights, the sounds (and the smells!) of the British countryside. **But who is it that keeps this land so green and pleasant? Our farmers.** They're the **unsung heroes who are up at dawn every day, braving everything the British weather can throw at them** to produce top quality food.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the content features illustrated so far, the preference for less symmetrical role relationships in *San Carlo* possibly due to Italy's high PD may also explain the reduced personalization and the lack of humor in *San Carlo*. Such a tendency, however, which reflects a general trend found typical of Italian websites (Turnbull 2008: 20), may also be attributed to Italy's lower IDV as shown in the previous section.

In line with Kang and Mastin's (2008) findings, *San Carlo* features authoritative narratives, which may reflect Italy's high PD. For example, in the "History" section – a title suggesting an objective report – the whole history of the company is covered, divided into five parts: 1936, '40, '50/'80, '90, from 2000 up to now. In the section about the '50/'80 the authoritative tone is given by the presence of references to *San Carlo* in the third person – 'the company' and 'the firm' - of dates and of semi-technical lexis ('turnover', 'distribution'):

(6) In the '50s son Alberto took up the reins of the company. In this **30** years period, from the **50s** to the **80s**, **the company** saw a steady growth in **turnover**, thanks to the widening geographical **distribution** and the expanding range of products, not just crisps but also savoury snacks, cakes and sweets. From **1970**, **the firm**

---

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high#/flavours/section=onion&view=facts>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/nations-favourite/working-with-farmers>

---

adopted the official name of *San Carlo Gruppo Alimentare* and the head office relocated to via Turati.<sup>42</sup>

The corresponding *Walkers'* section has a more subjective title, "Our story" and offers a much more casual narrative, which starts out like a children's story and ends with a saying. The narrative features informal words such as the discourse marker *well*, the vague noun *things* and the vague quantifier *loads of*, as well as repetitions, exclamation marks and suspension marks, which are characteristic of an informal, relaxed style:

(7) **Long, long** ago (**well**, the 1880's) in a Midlands town **not so far away** (Leicester!), a butcher named Henry Walker opened a new butcher's shop and for a while **things** went well...

But by 1945 meat was so scarce that Henry branched out and began cooking slices of potato. They sold well and in 1954 the first flavoured crisps were created, Cheese and Onion was born! Henry Walker became Walkers and by the 1980's, we had **loads of** great flavours and chose Leicester's favourite son Gary Lineker to help sell our tasty wares to the world...

**And the rest**, as they say, **is history**.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.3 Uncertainty Avoidance

As shown in the previous sections, both Italy's lower IDV compared to Great Britain's and its high PD may explain *San Carlo's* less personalized style compared to *Walkers*. However, this could also be interpreted as reduced attention to rapport building, which may be related to Italy's higher UA (75) compared to Britain (UA = 35), in line with Meeuwesen et al. (2009). As for the tendency to authoritativeness in *San Carlo*, reflecting the need of Italian companies to "establish their position as experts" found by Turnbull (2008: 20) to be typical of Italian companies, it could be associated both to Italy's high PD, as shown in the previous section, or to Italy's high UA.

Attempts to achieve exhaustiveness and precision, as is expected by experts, are evident in *San Carlo's* section "Nutritional information", which amounts to 5.551 words and comprises the subsections

---

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>.

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.walkers.co.uk/?page=nutritional\\_info](http://www.walkers.co.uk/?page=nutritional_info).

“Ingredients”, “Quality”, “Nutritional information” and “How to read the label”. The section “Ingredients”, for example, reports botanical facts about potatoes and contains a very detailed “history of the potato”, subdivided into “the origin”, “the arrival in Europe” and “evolution”. The lexis is very technical, some terms are in languages which may be unknown to visitors, and long lists are provided:

(8) The potato, whose scientific name is **Solanum tuberosum**, is a **herbaceous** plant belonging to the **Solanaceae** family, whose distinguishing characteristic is a **starchy tuber**.<sup>44</sup>

There are 150 varieties used in industrial processing and usually those that store better during the winter are favoured, the following are among the more well-known: **Bintje, Hertha, Desiree, Caspar, Erntestolz, Ukama, Marijke, Aminca, Premiere, Prima, Avanti, Spunta, Costante, Manna**.<sup>45</sup>

Tables show the types of vitamins<sup>46</sup>, minerals<sup>47</sup> and antioxidants<sup>48</sup> found in *San Carlo*'s products, even a source is quoted, as one would do in an academic article. *Walkers*' section “Nutritional info”, instead, is very synthetic: it offers a table<sup>49</sup> indicating the nutrition information contained in *Walkers*' products. Similarly, *Walkers*' accessible version is far shorter compared to *San Carlo*, amounting to just 254 words. Only two features of the crisps are mentioned, lower fat and lower salt content. The purpose of the section, therefore, does not seem that of being exhaustive: rather, the company aims to reassure consumers:

(9) It's amazing **how little salt it takes** to make something taste great. That's why **we've been able to reduce the amount of salt** in our crisps, without reducing the irresistibility.<sup>50</sup>

In line with Italy's high PD, emphasis on the company expertise in *San Carlo* leads to highlighting complexity and conformity to rules and

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=29>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=28>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=68>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=69>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=70>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/nutritional-info>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessWalkers/nutritionalInfo.html>



---

regulations, as shown in example (10), taken from the beginning of *San Carlo*'s section "Manufacturing process":

(10) When the truck arrives at the factory **tests are carried out** on samples of potatoes before unloading **in order to verify that they correspond to the established required criteria** and only after that, are they accepted for production.

Before the potatoes are stored, earth and stones are cleaned off and the spotted ones **below the required standards** are discarded. At this stage, those considered suitable for processing are collected and stored in wooden boxes.

The storage stage is very critical, so the **closest attention is paid in every minute detail**: lighting, ventilation, humidity, and temperature.<sup>51</sup>

On the contrary, in *Walkers*' section "From field to crisp" the emphasis is on simplicity and naturalness:

(11) Ever wondered, while tucking into a bag of Walkers, how our crisps are made? Well, **we'd love to be able to pretend that it's a terribly complicated process like rocket science**, so that you'd be really impressed with how clever we are... But the fact is that **making our crisps is fairly simple**.

1. Plant a potato seed and pray for some good old British weather!
2. Pick, and double check it's a top quality spud
3. Wash, peel and slice it
4. Cook in SUNSEED® Oil – naturally lower in saturates
5. Season with a sprinkle of magic!

**And that's it.** From farmer's field to your taste buds **in five simple steps! We said it wasn't rocket science...**<sup>52</sup>

In order to further explore the importance of complexity and simplicity in *San Carlo* and *Walkers*, a search of the words 'complexity', 'complex', 'complicated', 'difficult' and 'easy', 'easily', 'simple', 'simplicity', 'simply' was carried out with Wordsmith Tools 4.0. Only this latter search yielded significant results, showing that, in line with Britain's

---

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=17>

<sup>52</sup> [http://www.walkers.co.uk/?page=nutritional\\_info](http://www.walkers.co.uk/?page=nutritional_info).

low PD, simplicity is a valued quality at *Walkers* and characterizes both the products and the competition “Do us a flavour”, as shown in table 2 and in example (12).

Words indicating simplicity	<i>San Carlo</i> (6.868 tokens)	<i>San Carlo</i> Normalized data	<i>Walkers</i> (7.869 tokens)	<i>Walkers</i> Normalized data
Easy	1	0,01	3	0,04
Easily	1	0,01	0	0
Simple	1 (simplest)	0,01	6	0,08
Simplicity	0	0	2	0,03
Simply	1	0,01	4	0,05
Total	4	0,04	15	0,20

**Table 2. Words indicating simplicity in *San Carlo* and *Walkers*.**

(12) Bags of taste – that’s what our crisps are all about. They’re a **simple** combination of great British potatoes and fantastic flavours.<sup>53</sup>

The key to the success of our Ready Salted crisps is their classic **simplicity**.<sup>54</sup>

**Simply** Salted. A lighter way to enjoy the classic **simplicity** of tasty potatoes [...].<sup>55</sup>

Cheese & Onion. [...] They say that it’s the **simple** things in life that are the most satisfying and these might just prove that point!<sup>56</sup>

You will **simply** need to include the exact spelling of the keyword for the flavour you wish to vote for. **Easy**.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/our-range/walkers-crisps>

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/our-range/walkers-lights>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/our-range/walkers-max>

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessFlavours/faqs.html>

---

if you have a facebook profile, **simply** visit the 'Do us a flavour' fan page [www.facebook.com/flavourelection](http://www.facebook.com/flavourelection), add the voting application and vote for your favourite flavour.<sup>58</sup>

The flavour with the most votes from the public will win.  
**Simple!**<sup>59</sup>

The six finalists were judged by a team against the following criteria: [...] **simple**, straightforward and fun [...].<sup>60</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The studies discussed in section 2 and the comparison of *San Carlo* and *Walkers'* websites in section 3 confirm, in the specific case of Hofstede's dimensions, that "the dimensions of cultural variability [...] can be used to explain and predict systematic similarities and differences in communication across cultures" (Gudykunst and Matsumoto 1996: 19-20). While most of the studies examined in section 2 have used Hofstede's dimensions to compare native languages across cultures, other studies and the analysis in section 3 have shown that it is possible to utilize Hofstede's dimensions to study English as a lingua franca, which may as such reflect specific national discourse styles. Although differences in comparable websites like *San Carlo* and *Walkers* could be related to corporate culture rather than to national culture, the present analysis confirms Turnbull's (2008) results, which indicate different discourse styles in British English websites as opposed to websites where ELF is used by Italians, and shows that discourse choices may be explained on the basis of national identity. In particular, IDV/COL, PD and UA, already used in the literature for predicting and interpreting linguistic differences on the basis of cultural differences, have proved effective also in the comparison of English used by Italians as a lingua franca and British English.

A relevant finding of the present study is that the same communicative and linguistic features may be related to different

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

---

dimensions. In the case of Italy, lack of humor may be due both to lower IDV compared to Great Britain and to high PD. Similarly, lower personalization may be attributed to lower IDV, to high PD and to high UA. Finally, reduced role flexibility, more formal language and expert attitude may be put down to high PD as well as to high UA. The fact that it is not easy to establish a correlation between linguistic choices and single cultural dimensions is probably due to the correlation among the dimensions themselves, which in the case of Italy and Great Britain reflect what typically happens in many EU countries, where “a larger power distance goes hand in hand with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance [and] with more collectivism” (Meeuwesen et al. 2009: 59). This set of dimensions enable one to make similar predictions about the way language is used, thus proving the strong interrelatedness of language and culture. In order to confirm the present findings, research should be extended to ELF used in other European countries.

## References

- Bjørge, A. K. 2007. “Power distance in English lingua franca email communication”, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 17 (1), pp. 60-80.
- Clyne, M. 1994. *Intercultural Communication at Work: Cultural Values in Discourse*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cucchi, C. 2010. “Vague Expressions in the European Parliament: A Marker of Cultural Identity?”. In G. Garzone & J. Archibald (Eds.), *Discourse, Identity and Roles in Specialized Communication*, Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 85-107.
- Garzone, G. 2009. “Identity in Tourist Communication on the Internet, Italy’s and Spain’s Web Sites Contrasted”. In G. Garzone & P. Catenaccio (Eds.), *Identities across Media and Modes Discursive Perspectives*, Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 29-58.
- Dekker, D. M., C. G. Rutte & P. Van den Berg 2008. “Cultural differences in the perception of critical interaction behaviors in global virtual teams”, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32, pp. 441-452.
- Gudykunst, W. B. & Y. Matsumoto 1996. “Cross-Cultural Variability of Communication in personal Relationships”. In W. B. Gudykunst, S. Ting-Toomey & T. Nishida (Eds.), *Communication in Personal*

- relationships Across Cultures*, Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications, pp.19-56.
- Hatipoğlu, Ç. 2006. "Computer mediated Language and Culture: salutations and Closings in British and Turkish 'Call for papers' Written in English", *Studies About Languages (Kalbu Stuidijos)*, 8, pp. 31-38. Available at <<http://www.cceol.com/asp/SearchArticles.aspx>>
- Hofstede, G. 2001. *Culture's Consequences. Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Hofstede, Geert 2003 (first published 1991). *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind, Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival*. London: Profile Books.
- Kang, D. S. & T. Mastin 2008. "How cultural difference affects international tourism public relations websites: A comparative analysis using Hofstede's cultural dimensions", short communication, *Public Relations Review*, 34, pp. 54-56.
- Kashima, E. S. & Y. Kashima 1998. "Culture and Language: The case of cultural dimensions and personal pronoun use", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 29 (3), pp. 461-486.
- Katan, D. 2004. *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Katan, D. 2006. "It's a Question of Life or Death: Cultural Differences in Advertising Private Pensions". In N. Vasta (Ed.), *Forms of Promotion Texts, Contexts and Cultures*, Bologna: Pàtron Editore, pp. 55-80.
- Koeman, J. 2007. "Cultural values in commercials: Reaching and representing the multicultural market?", *Communications*, 32, pp. 223-253.
- Meeuwesen, L., A. van den Brink-Muinen & G. Hofstede 2009, "Can dimensions of national culture predict cross-national differences in medical communication?", *Patient Education and Counseling*, 75, pp. 58-66.
- Smith, P. B., S. Dugan, M. F. Peterson. & K. Leung 1998. "Individualism: collectivism and the handling of disagreement. A 23 country study", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 22 (3), pp. 351-367.
- Toury, G. 1995. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin.
- Turnbull, J. 2008. "Language and Culture in Corporate Websites". In J. Bamford & R. Salvi (Eds.), *Business Discourse: Language at Work*, Roma:

- Aracne, pp. 17-34.
- Vishwanath, A. 2003. "Comparing Online Information Effects: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Online Information and Uncertainty Avoidance", *Communication Research*, 30 (6), pp. 579-598.
- Wolfe, M. L. 2008. "Different cultures - Different discourses? Rhetorical patterns of business letters by English and Russian speakers". In U. Connor, E. Nagelhout & W. Rozycki (Eds.), *Contrastive Rhetoric. Reaching to intercultural rhetoric*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 87-120.
- Zhao W., B. L. Massey, J. Murphy & L. Fang 2003. "Cultural Dimensions of Website Design and Content", *Prometheus*, 21 (1), pp. 75-84.

---

## Notes on contributors

Dr. **Milton Bennett**, co-founder of the Intercultural Communication Institute (Portland, Oregon, USA) and director of the Intercultural Development Research Institute (Milan, Italy), has a Ph.D. in intercultural communication and sociology from the University of Minnesota (USA). He taught courses in intercultural communication and consciousness studies for fifteen years at Portland State University, in Oregon, his home state. He subsequently served on the executive training faculty of Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business, Smith College, Boeing Leadership Center, Motorola University and the Stockholm School of Economics. In addition he has provided consulting and training for over 60 major companies, including Motorola, Boeing, and Eni (Agip). He has also advised universities worldwide on intercultural learning in international education. His most recent paper, delivered this year at the International Congress on Higher Education in Havana, is in fact on "Creating an Interculturally Competent Campus to Educate Global Citizens." He is married to Ida Castiglioni, professor of the sociology of cultural processes at the University of Milan Bicocca.

**Anna Bianco** has a PhD in Foreign Languages and Literatures from the University of Bari. Being half-Polish, she initially concentrated on comparative literature but, after attending a post-graduate course in Translation Studies at the University of Warwick in 2003, her interests shifted from literature to language and translation. Since becoming a full-time research assistant at Bari University, her research has focused on Italian, British and American newspaper writing (*Bush, Blix, Blair, e Saddam nei titoli della stampa inglese*, 2006, *La campagna elettorale inglese e italiana in prima pagina*, forthcoming), while also working on a contrastive analysis of the pragmatic/discourse features of Italian and English instruction leaflets.

**Patrick Boylan**, past professor of English for Intercultural Communication at "Roma Tre" University, Rome, is a pioneer in the teaching of languages as culture, i.e. as new "wills to be" producing new

---

"wills to mean". He was in fact the first to theorize hometown-based ethnography, Stanislavskian techniques, and ethnomethodological breaching experiments both in university language teaching and in teaching cross-cultural communication to business and government negotiators. He holds a degree in English and psychology from Saint Mary's College in his native California, a DES in literary stylistics from the Sorbonne and a specialization in audio-visual FLT methodology from the École Normale at Saint-Cloud. An invited lecturer at numerous universities in Italy and abroad, Boylan has served for years on the Board of the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (Europe). He is also co-founder and vice-president of SIETAR-Italia and past Board member of the International Association of Language and Intercultural Communication, and the Italian Association of English Studies. He has just completed with success PICTURE, an 18-nation European Union research project on intercultural communication

**M. Cristina Caimotto** is a Lecturer of English Linguistics at the University of Torino (Faculty of Political Sciences) and the University of Genova (Faculty of Foreign Languages). She completed her PhD in 2007 with a thesis about News Translation and carried out research in the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Warwick. Her research focuses on Translation and Politics, Political Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. She is interested in the applications of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies. She also works as a freelance translator.

**Costanza Cucchi** has a PhD in Applied Linguistics and Communication and is a Tenured Researcher in English Language and Translation at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Catholic University, Milan. She teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English Linguistics and holds seminars in intercultural communication. Her current interests are non-native English, vague language and EU parliamentary discourse, which she has investigated from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective and on which she has presented papers at national and international conferences. Her recent publications include: "Translation, rewriting and recontextualisation: forms of mediated discourse", with M. Ulrych; "Spoken discourse and identity in



---

EU parliamentary debates”; “Vague expressions in the European Parliament: A Marker of Cultural Identity?”, *Parole in corso: L'apprendimento del lessico inglese in Internet*.

**Jane Jackson** is Professor in the Department of English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong where she also serves as the Postgraduate Linguistics Coordinator. Prior to CUHK, she was the Director of the TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) Centre at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Canada. Jane received her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto and her Master of Education degree (M.Ed.) from the University of Calgary. As well as Hong Kong, she has held academic positions in Canada, Egypt, Oman, and the United States. She has also worked as a consultant on English language teacher education/curriculum projects in Beijing, China.

Her teaching interests are in the areas of second language acquisition, intercultural communication, English for specific purposes (ESP), curriculum design, research methods in language learning, and case-based pedagogy in teacher education/ business education.

**Niamh Kelly** works at the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University. Her research interest are: Lexical Innovation Processes in Japanese Secret Language, The Moraic Theory and Japanese Secret Language, Japanese English Translation Foreign Language Pedagogy Morpheme Order Studies, Linguistic Diversity in Irish Primary Schools, Second Language Acquisition.

Italian-born **Franco Zappettini** has been working as a language and intercultural trainer in London for several years. He holds a BA (Hons) in European Studies from the Open University and a Master's Degree (Distinction) in Intercultural Communication from the University of Bedfordshire. He is currently researching the impact of multilingualism on the construction of a transnational European identity for a PhD degree in Applied Linguistics at Birkbeck College, University of London. His main interests include language and identity, sociolinguistics, intercultural relations and language planning. He is a fellow member of

---

the Societas Linguistica Europaea, the Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research (UK) and the Birkbeck College Applied Linguistics Society.

---

## GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

All manuscripts of the final version of the article must be word-processed in **Garamond** font, single spaced throughout on B5 paper (176 mm x 250 mm) justified, with the following set margins:

**Page Setup:** Top 25 mm; Bottom 25 mm; Left 25 mm; Right 25 mm  
Double space between paragraphs. Page numbers on all pages.

### **Format of the article:**

**Title:** Font 14, bold, italic, centre

Name & Surname: Font 12, bold, italic, centre

**Abstract:** Font 12, italic

**Main headings:** Font 12, bold

**Body text:** Font 12. Quotations included in double inverted commas. Italics to indicate foreign words and neologisms.

**Footnotes:** Font 10. Footnotes are to be numbered consecutively throughout the article and used only if they contain some essential explanation that does not fit in the main text.

**Tables & Figures:** They are each to be numbered consecutively to correspond to the order in which they are referred to in the text of the article. Each table and figure must carry a title (Font 11) and should appear in the main body of the text. While illustrations for the printed version of the journal are in black and white, the online version can be in colour.

You must have gained permissions for all illustrations and photographs before submission.

**Bibliography:** Font 12. References: Please note that, due to constraints on the number of pages in each issue, we discourage lengthy academic references. You should try to keep any such references to 12 or less with an absolute maximum of 25 references.

References to sources should be included in the text in parentheses — e.g. (Smith 1992: 25).

In case of more than one publication of the same author with the same date, add an alphabetical sequence (1993a, 1993b, etc.). References, to be inserted at the end of the text, shall be structured as follows:

Books as a whole – Stubbs, M. 1986. *Text and Corpus Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Books referred to in part – Varantola, K. 2003. “Translators and disposable corpora”. In F. Zanettin, S. Bernardini, & D. Stewart (Eds.), *Corpora and Translator Education*, Manchester: St. Jerome, pp. 57-70.

Article published in a journal – Barlow, M. 1996. “Corpora for theory and practice”. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 1 (1), pp. 1-37.