

Downscaling Culture

Downscaling Culture:

Revisiting Intercultural Communication

Edited by

Jaspal Naveel Singh, Argyro Kantara
and Dorottya Cserz 

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*This volume is dedicated to the memory of the family members we lost
during our time in Cardiff*

*Zoe
Joginder
László*

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In a way, this book is a testament to the years we spent together in Cardiff working on our PhDs. We all started in 2012 and we shared all the highs and lows that come with the process. The Downscaling Culture conference in 2014 was certainly one of the highs, and we were very excited to find out that we will have the chance to develop the ideas shared during those two days into an edited volume.

We came up with the concept of downscaling culture during a long discussion where we tried to figure out what all three of us had in common in terms of our research interests. Although we are in the same department, it was much easier to see the differences than the similarities and it was challenging to find something that would link not only two, but all three of us. It was clear that the only option was to find some sort of tool that we could apply to our diverse research interests (hip hop culture in India, broadcast talk and political elections, and video-mediated communication). We tried and discarded many ideas, but when we came up with ‘downscaling culture’, it clicked for all of us. All that was left was to figure out what that means and how it can be used...

The conference exceeded our expectations. We invited scholars from around the world and everyone was willing to engage, and after the closing session it really felt like we had achieved something through our collaboration. The publishers expressed interest in an edited volume, and several would-be authors were already on board. We invited additional chapters from researchers who had not been at the conference, and the book started to take shape. We were very lucky to have eager authors on board, who made it possible to complete the work in what counts as record time in the publishing world. They all made an effort to incorporate the notion of downscaling culture into their own research, which we know was at times not as straightforward as we had first thought.

We would like to thank all our authors for sharing our enthusiasm and ideas as well as being willing to experiment with the notion of ‘downscaling culture’, taking further our initial ideas. We are extremely thankful to our wonderful copy editor, David Schönthal, who was untiringly patient and helpful throughout. We also owe thanks to Frances Rock and David James for supporting our grant application without which this project would not have been possible. We thank the Economic and Social Research Council

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Although we are at different stages in our PhDs and careers, we have all learnt a great deal from organising the conference and editing the book and have certainly gained a lot more than ‘just a publication’. We hope that you will see our enthusiasm as you read this book and that it will provide inspiration and food for thought—just as it did for us.

D.C., A.K. and J.S., Cardiff, January 2016

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

ARGYRO KANTARA, DOROTTYA CSERZŐ
AND JASPAL NAVEEL SINGH

Revisiting Intercultural Communication Research

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, the empirical examples shown in this volume demonstrate that interactants have certain amounts of control over the contextualisation of cultural elements and cultural difference. It seems they are not merely interacting in a way that is appropriate to 'their' cultural script, a kind of reflex to their socialisation, but they are creatively contextualising a multitude of cultural identifications, cultural differences and also cultural hybridity, which can each operate on higher and lower scales of argumentative power and meaning. Moreover they do this not statically, but dynamically, emphasising, downplaying and erasing cultural contextualisation within any one interaction. In brief, they are interacting within a multi-scalar context, and they can creatively jump between various scales, or rescale, to negotiate meaning with their interlocutors.

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

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

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

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

Structure of the Book

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

Firstly, *Jaspal Naveel Singh* sets the tone in Chapter 2 by developing the concept of ‘downscaling culture’. By this he means an analytical downscaling to be followed by researchers, with an aim to attend to the members’ rescaling processes that occur in intercultural communication. His chapter offers the theoretical backdrop for the rest of the chapters

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

Part I: Forming Small Cultures

In the first part Argyro Kantara, Marta Wilczek-Watson, Mabel Victoria, and Mariana Lazzaro-Salazar examine encounters of intercultural communication that have ‘traditionally’ been viewed as potential sites of miscommunication, because of the interactants’ different cultural backgrounds. By adopting a downscaled perspective and carrying out micro-analyses of participants’ talk-in-interaction all four authors invite us to rethink intercultural (mis)communication in, at least, two ways. Firstly, by examining culture not as a static notion but as a product of the unfolding interaction, they challenge essentialist conceptions of culture and instead regard culture as a collaborative interactional process. In this light, all four authors not only challenge the widely held assumption that culture is the reason behind any potential miscommunication in intercultural encounters, but also invite us to rethink what culture is. Secondly, by describing the formation of a small or ‘third’ culture as created by the participants themselves all four authors play with perceived notions of cultural differences, indicating that even if these are made relevant by participants in the interaction, they empower rather than disempower people. Their research covers a range of intercultural

encounters, spanning from interactions between housemates (Kantara), to couples (Wilczek-Watson), to employment seekers (Victoria), to professional colleagues (Lazzaro-Salazar).

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

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

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

Finally, *Mariana Lazzaro-Salazar* in Chapter 6 examines the workings of a community of practice comprising professionals (nurses) from different national and ethnic backgrounds. By adopting a downscaled perspective she examines the cultural aspects that define this group of professionals through their display of a shared set of beliefs, discursive

practices and ways of doing things. These reflections and negotiations of professional practice, she argues, indicate how this group of nurses constructs multiple alignments at local and higher community scales that in turn help them build their professional accountability. Her research, in a similar way as the previous three authors' studies, highlights the way interactants move between different—in her case professional—scales in order to build and make sense of both their small culture and the larger professional community they belong to.

Part II: Managing Intercultural Education

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

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

Christian Abello-Contesse and *María Dolores López-Jiménez* in Chapter 8 analyse and evaluate the content of 10 textbooks that are being used to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) at Spanish-English bilingual schools in Andalusia, Spain as part of the *Bilingual Schools*

programme within the broader *Multilingualism Promotion Programme* introduced in the region in 2005. By connecting the official, institutional objective of intercultural education attached to the programme with the descriptive background put forth by recent approaches regarding the relationship between ‘language and culture’ in foreign/second language teaching, their findings indicate that the intercultural content of the textbooks examined is unlikely to promote students’ intercultural understanding, challenging thus both the way intercultural content and the aspired students’ intercultural competence are dealt with in these textbooks.

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

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

Part III: Mediated Encounters

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

be used to achieve downscaling in practice in the context of public representations of immigrants (Porsché), and video-mediated communication (Cserző).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER TWO

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

JASPAL NAVEEL SINGH

Abstract

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

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

* The ideas presented in this chapter have benefitted considerably from my collaborative research with Dorottya Cserz  and Argyro Kantara, who also helped me formulate these ideas in an earlier version of this chapter and made comments on the present version. Equally I would like to thank Adrian Holliday for reviewing this chapter and providing critical and constructive comments. All remaining flaws remain my own of course. I also very much profited from reading and reviewing the individual contributions of this volume and from the invaluable discussions we had during our meeting in Cardiff in September 2014.

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

2. Aggregation

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

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

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

Although scholars often provide disclaimers to avoid absoluteness when writing about the values of a specific culture, and sometimes report that aggregations are problematic and contradictory (Smith, Peterson and Thomas 2008, 7), and although critical research has pointed out that aggregations contribute to the essentialisation of culture (Ma 2004; Baraldi 2006; Halualani and Nakayama 2010; Wagener 2012; Hua 2014; Dervin and Machart 2015), aggregation is a common practice in social science research. By using abstract macro-labels of nations, researchers can

operate with an etic terminology that is valid across the globe and is thus better suited to guarantee comparability (Hofstede 1980, 40–42). This national label is, as Hofstede (1980, 14) knows, a “construct” that does not exist, but that “[w]e define [...] into existence” for analytical purposes. Baskerville (2003) therefore suggests that Hofstede did not actually study culture, at least not in an anthropological and sociological sense, but rather studied well-quantifiable socioeconomic features. This has consequences for the more popular uptake of such intercultural communication research. Holliday, Hyde and Kullmann (2004, 146) note that although researchers like Hofstede define these nation-level aggregations as constructs, they “are interpreted as ‘facts’ by writers of the numerous popular guides for those visiting, living in and working in ‘foreign’ cultural contexts”. Even more unwaveringly, Piller (2011, 73) declares that a “large segment of the intercultural communication advice literature is nothing more than an instantiation of banally national ways of seeing”. In line with these critical approaches, it is the systematic deconstruction of abstract macro-aggregations as facts that interests us in this volume, and we attempt to advance our critical agenda by developing the concept of scales. In particular this volume suggests that intercultural communication has to analytically downscale big-C Cultures and attend to the micro-interactive processes that emerge in communication.

3. Analytical Stereotyping

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

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

Through reification culture begins to exist beyond purely analytical purposes. Culture becomes a “causative agent” (Keesing 1981, 72) or a “*deus ex machina*” (Bond, Žegarac and Spencer-Oatey 2000, 50) that explains communication in intercultural settings. And crucially, it is not only culture that becomes an explaining agent but also the very notion of interculturality itself, i.e. the imagination that there exists a difference between cultures and that this difference plays out in communication.

Sarangi (1994, 413) calls such ideological processes ‘analytical stereotyping’: “analysts operate with a prior definition of the situation and the participants as (inter)cultural and subsequently play upon a principal of cultural difference in accounting for instances of miscommunication”. This process runs the risk of being circular: “If we define, prior to analysis, an intercultural context in terms of ‘cultural’ attributes of the participants, then it is very likely that any miscommunication [...] is identified and subsequently explained on the basis of ‘cultural difference’” (Sarangi 1994, 414). Sarangi’s anti-essentialist perspective critiques that misunderstandings in intercultural communication are seen as manifestations of the difference in norms, expectations, values, beliefs of the interlocutors, and that these are caused by the differences of the cultures the interactants are said to belong to.

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

4. Small Cultures

Sarangi’s anti-essentialist proposal is echoed in Holliday’s (1999) notion of ‘small cultures’ (see Holliday 2011; 2013 for newer accounts and a formulation of a tentative “grammar of culture”). The turn towards small cultures critiques the aggregationist, categorisational and character-lending trends of constructing large cultures, or big-C Cultures, for explanatory force. Such a shift was certainly already articulated in the 1980s, for instance in the pioneering work of Gumperz (1982) and Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) on contextualisation cues and interethnic communication in professional settings. Yet, Holliday’s small-culture formation makes explicit that large cultures are predominantly