Emotion communication and language socialization
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Introduction

“Ochs and Schiefflin have demonstrated that the process through which a child learns to speak cannot be analysed simply as language acquisition (i.e. an encapsulated process only of interest to students of languages), but instead constitutes a profound process of language socialization through which the child by learning how to speak in a community becomes a competent socialized member of his or her society.” (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992)

As foreign language teachers, we are deeply aware that the acquisition of linguistic forms is insufficient to prepare learners to function appropriately as members of the target language community, and the mere exposure to a language or culture class alone is insufficient to foster intercultural competence, that is the ability to interact successfully in a foreign culture. For not only does the teaching of language implicitly involve culture - and C. Kramsch (1993) rightly questions which or whose implicit culture do we teach? -, but the process of acquisition also involves social interaction with one another and with features of the language learning context, in particular the teacher who is the representative of the target language culture.

Several SLA researchers (reviewed in Breen, 2001) have emphasized the emotional and affective impact of this experience. Of particular interest in this socialisation experience, Norton (cited in Breen, 2001) has identified three intertwined communities in which language learners interact. First, there is the individual learner’s own biographical-historical community; secondly, there is the learning community of the classroom including its curriculum; and thirdly there is the wider speech community which the learners may aspire to join. In order to acquire the ability to be socially competent members of the target language group, learners must learn how to appropriately convey their feelings and recognise others’ feelings, since expressing affect by displaying sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others has a direct impact on social relationships, i.e. building rapport beneficial to learning or simply establishing and fostering ongoing relationships (Jung, 2005)
Our research on emotion communication adopts a cross-cultural pragmatics approach which focuses precisely on the interpersonal dimension of interaction, involving feelings and affect among three cultural groups namely Anglo-Australian, French and Italian. By cross-cultural pragmatics, we refer to Boxer’s definition (2002) who asserts that “Cross-cultural pragmatics […] takes the view that individuals from two societies or communities carry out their interactions (whether spoken or written) according to their own rules or norms, often resulting in a clash in expectations and, ultimately, misperceptions about the other group” (2002, p. 151).

The broad aim of our larger scale study is to identify the ‘display rules’ which regulate the sharing of negative emotions among these three groups. By display rule, following Ekman & Friesen (1969), we mean the cultural specific norms for when, how, and to whom to visibly express some specific emotion. Specifically, we have focused on the disclosure of anger because the communication of strong negative opinions and feelings generated by anger is considered face-threatening (Holtgraves, 1990), and particularly risky among friends, as it may cause conflict and even compromise relationships (Ricci-Bitti & Scherer, 1986). In doing so we hope that our study can contribute to the constitution of social knowledge on emotion and add to a growing body of data regarding the non-verbal expression of emotion within a cross-cultural perspective. However, within the scope of this symposium we wish to raise some of the issues that have emerged from this study in order to articulate the relationship between cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) and language socialization (LS). Hopefully, once clarified, this connection should help achieve a better understanding of what can be expected in the process of teaching and learning one aspect of L2 learners’ intercultural competence – the communication of emotion.

First, I shall briefly summarise our research so far, which has led to the design of a model, or framework, to analyse emotional scenarios for the communication of anger specifically, without going into detail of how we keep refining this model by testing the generality and limits of earlier patterns. Secondly, I would like to give an illustration of two or three scenarios taken from our data to demonstrate the applicability of this framework. Finally, I would like to highlight some issues in the relationship between CCP and LS that remain very much open for discussion.
Theoretical Assumptions

Our focus on the communication of emotion rests upon two major assumptions. First, it must be assumed that within the interactional perspective that we adopt, emotions are not manifested and interpreted in a vacuum, but necessarily occur in a context. It means that there is no way of recognizing a particular emotion based on its non-verbal display alone, for no firm criterion exist that allows one to identify a particular emotion (Archer and Akert, 1984, p. 118) without someone to interpret it in relation to the context that provoked the emotion. In our research we are not interested with the subjective emotional experience but look upon emotions as the product of “joint-configurations” (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p. 41). A gesture, a tear, a grimace are signs that need an interpretant to give it meaning.

To emphasize the social nature of emotions, Rimé et al. (2002) provide solid research evidence of a quasi-universal need to share an emotion with one another. In other words, emotions are complex processes that do not simply manifest themselves as individual experience, but are the result of social phenomena. As a consequence we must be willing to accept that emotions can be acted out, or posed, for example when interactants want to hide their true feelings. Accordingly, this makes our interpretation task even more difficult, for we must rely on several cues to identify what counts as an emotion and it is suggested by Archer and Akert (1984, p. 123) to go about this process through a series of combination and elimination, in order to reach some reliable interpretation.

Secondly, it must also be assumed that the process of emotion communication follows some prototypical patterns that vary from one cultural group to another. This is evidenced by the different social expectations of behaving which can be witnessed in cross-cultural contact situations when the rules are broken by individuals from a different group. This may result not only in misunderstandings, but also in negative person or group perception. These observations entail that emotion communication is not only a social phenomenon but also a cultural one that is implicitly learnt during the L1 socialisation process (Shiefflin & Ochs, 1986), and that it needs to be made explicit for learners of another language if they wish to become full members of the target language community.
Unfortunately, existing differences are rarely recognized by the interactants themselves (Hecht et al. 1994) and rigorous data on cultural scripts regulating emotional disclosure among the three cultural groups we investigate is scarce, besides the stereotypical emblematic gestures and stereotypes which abound in language text books. Furthermore, research which documents these in naturalistic settings is practically inexistent. Therefore more empirical research is needed to clearly identify and understand cultural scripts regulating emotional communication in the three groups considered.

On the basis of these assumptions, which need no further elaboration for our present purpose, the design of our analytical framework emphasizes the strategies adopted by the recipient of an emotional act, rather than the expression of the emotional act itself, and aims to clarify cultural trends, or emotional scripts that are culture-specific.

The elaboration of a model for the expression of anger

At the onset of our research on the communication of anger, as we were looking for possible analytical tools, we were struck by the lack of them. This could be explained by the methodological complexities involved in studying these socio cultural display rules which operate mainly at a subconscious level. Also, much of the research in the area of emotion experience and display has been conducted through self-report or laboratory experiment, while only recently has the study of emotion communication begun to be of interest for pragmatics and communication scholars.

As a starting point, therefore, we relied on a series of prototypical responses to anger expression, particularly those that have been identified in the research literature by Canary, Spitzberg & Semic (1998), and Gaines et al (1998) among others, who provide a summary of a number of studies in this area. According to Gergen and Gergen (1998), for example, a prototypical anger script or scenario is sequenced as follows: antecedents – reactions (expression of anger) – consequences. And according to Andersen & Guerrero (1998) “…emotional communication involves a series of moves and counter-moves that can either intensify or de-intensify the emotions being experienced” (p.82).

Although these studies represent a valuable starting point, rigorous empirical data is scarce. Thus, in order to proceed we decided to start from a taxonomy of interactional
moves, or as Fiehler (2002) prefers to call them ‘emotion processing strategies’, looking not only at the expression or communication of emotions but also – and especially- to their processing through interaction, and therefore to the strategies enacted by the recipient and to the unfolding of interactional moves that follow.

The model that we developed ([Lyon2005\anger_chart_2_revised.pdf](#)) serves as a basis for the study of the non verbal behaviour of recipient’ responses to anger communication. It makes a distinction between direct and indirect means of communication, that is, between verbalisation and nonverbal disclosure. This is because, although anger can be made the topic of verbal exchanges, negative feelings are often communicated exclusively through non verbal behaviour. In fact, as Gaines and others have observed, ‘disappointment often is communicated via non-verbal behaviours or lack of overt communication’ (Gaines et al. 1998, p. 519).

Our model also makes a distinction between strategies of engagement and non-engagement. Within non-engaging strategies, we distinguish between ignoring -- which attempts to neutralise a potential source of conflict, and deflecting, in which the recipient considers the disclosure as non-threatening and uses humour to deflect the situation. Both of these will be clarified further in our discussion, as they are most often expressed through non-verbal means and are thus more likely to be misinterpreted in cross-cultural exchanges.

The engaging responses to face-threatening acts differ in the model by their degree of intensity, ranging from mild irritation, cold to hot anger, and include other negotiating strategies such as analysing and calling into question, and an affiliative strategy which we called entering. Examples of these within the mild response category are, for Analysing: character B invites A to explain or reframe by typically raising eyebrows showing surprise or puzzlement; for Calling into question: character B looks away and shakes head, showing disapproval. Finally Entering corresponds to character B signalling agreement, remorse or sympathy, accompanied by prototypical nonverbal behaviours such as nodding, looking down or touching other respectively.

Due to time constraints, it is impossible to elaborate further. However, more detail on the framework is available in our recent publications (Mrowa-Hopkins & Strambi, 2005; Strambi & Mrowa-Hopkins, forthcoming), and can be provided during the symposium, if requested. We would like now to move on to the discussion of our
attempt at testing this framework. However, before I start, I need to talk briefly about the data sources that make up the small corpus which we selected for this purpose.

The Data

As our main source of data, we selected contemporary films, one for each cultural group, which contain numerous examples of emotion communication and have male friends as their central characters. The commonality of relationship type and gender of the interactants allowed us to limit the amount of variation in contextual variables that could influence the communication of anger.

The three films we selected were the following:

1. The Anglo-Australian film is a TV-movie production titled *Secret Men’s Business*, to which I will refer as *Secret Men*.
2. The French film is *Le Coeur des Hommes*, hence referred to as *Le Coeur*.
3. Finally, the Italian film is *Marrakech Express*, hence referred to as *Marrakech*.

In general terms, in selecting film sequences we focused on acts of emotional disclosure which can be considered problematic because of their potential to initiate conflict between interlocutors. In particular, we were interested in strategies used to “manage” such disclosures in a way that is consistent with socio-cultural expectations, so as to avoid interpersonal clashes.

Again, I shall not expand on the rationale behind the choice of fictional sequences as a basis for our corpus (which is discussed in details in Mrowa-Hopkins & Strambi, 2005). For the purpose of this presentation, suffice it to say that for practical and ethical reasons these were more accessible than authentic data.

Let me stress once more that since we were unable to find specific information in the available literature as to how norms regulating the communication of anger, and especially those related to the non verbal cues that accompany negative emotional disclosure, may vary across the three groups considered, it was necessary to approach this topic with a very open mind and wide focus, in order to identify what could actually be significant and therefore requiring further investigation. The three films are initial samples that allowed us to isolate aspects of the emotion communication process that could be especially significant. In this respect, the corpus must be looked
at as a starting point that is useful for posing questions, rather than for arriving at
definite answers.

*Analysis*

Our preliminary analyses point to a few aspects which concern the role of
smiles, topic switches, third party listeners’ intervention, and kinesics, including
gestures, mimics and posture.

*Smiling* as a way of masking mild anger or irritation and to come across as “nice”,
that is to pretend that the exchange is still on friendly terms (refers to Goffman’s
notion of saving face), seems a more powerful script in the Anglo-Australian film.
Indeed we could identify only one sequence in which this behaviour is displayed in
response to the communication of anger in the French film [Le Coeur 15] and none in
the Italian film.

Irony and teasing, on the other hand, are very prominent in the French and Italian
films as a way of minimising the risk of open conflict. In many scenes, in fact the
recipient of an anger outburst tries to ‘lighten up’ the situation by making ironic
comments in an effort to defuse a potential source of conflict. In our model this
behaviour corresponds to the strategy of *deflecting*.

Here is an example of how smiling is used first as an attempt to bring closure to an
exchange (that is *Ignoring* in our model), then to mask cold anger. In this scene Andy
has just announced that he is getting married. His friends are upset because they had
no prior warning and start to verbally attack him: *Secret Men’s*

*(Ahead of watching the video extract during the presentation, here follows the
transcript)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MIKE</th>
<th><em>You see that’s why you piss me off Andy you never tell us anything I mean come on why didn’t you tell us anything</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANDY</td>
<td><em>(Angry disclosure)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAN</td>
<td><em>I just told you</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDY</td>
<td><em>(Entering)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAN</td>
<td><em>Congratulations</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDY</td>
<td><em>Thanks mate</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
@they shake hands, Andy keeps smiling

WAZZ  No now who is she I am assuming she is a woman right you are not batting for the other side  
(Teasing)

ANDY  No not yet her name is Margot

MIKE  (...) I got the impression she was a hundred or something

ANDY  She is forty

WAZZ  Oh  
@ mimics: screwing his face, hand to face (as in pain)

MIKE  Same thing isn’t it she’s ten years older than you  
You’ve been smoking these silly cigarettes again  
(negative evaluation+teasing )  
@Laughter

ANDY  Ten years Michael that’s ten years it’s nothing for me it’s nothing for her  
I don’t know why you’re getting so fussed about  
@keeps smiling, hand gestures, lowers head  
(Analysing)

WAZZ  Look can I just can I clear this up for a second  
Andy you’re giving up acting you’re moving up to somebody. what a farm? to marry your mother? this isn’t you Andy you are the greatest what’s going on?  
(Negative Evaluation)

ANDY  @keeps smiling while listening  
Wazza she is the greatest too mate you are going to love her you’ll meet her at the wedding  
(tries to avoid confrontation, Ignoring)

(...)  

WAZZ  Ah ah No no I get it I am with you you sly dog hey she is loaded right  
(Insinuating that Ian has self-interested motive)

ANDY  Not wrong  
@smiling and head nods

MIKE  You see Andy the thing is you can’t raise another man’s kids it’s against nature you’re gonna have to sell them in a slavery or something (.)  
@Pause  
(Provocation)

ANDY  That’s pretty funny Michael (.) I’ve had a gut’s full (.) Ok so let’s get off
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MIKE</td>
<td>All I am saying is you’re famous if you think about what you are doing (continues to question Ian’s decision to get married)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDY</td>
<td>[Mike you’re not listening I say I like the farm and I like Margot () OK it’s my life and I am not going to pretend to be anyone else ()] Cold anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAZZ</td>
<td>@ Mike turns away, raises his bottle and drinks up Ignoring Oysters and champagne @ gets up and claps hands (topic switch)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In any ordinary conversation, smiling is a backchannel cue used by the listener to acknowledge and encourage more disclosure. It seems that, in anger scenarios, smiling is used by the recipient to mask mild anger. So the question that comes out of this is: Is this reaction more prominent in Anglo-Australian exchanges, compared to French or Italian interactions?

The second aspect that we think is of some significance concerns *Topic switches*. In our corpus, we found it to be the preferred realisation for the *Ignoring* strategy used by the Australian characters as a way to end or refuse to engage in open conflict. In particular, it seems that the characters of *Secret Men* want to terminate as soon as possible any exchange involving negative disclosure which could lead to open conflict. Unless a character is really forced to respond angrily, he will either ignore a threat to his self-image or invite the “offender” to stop [Andy “Look, I don’t know why you are getting so fussed about”]. In the French and Italian films, on the other hand, characters seem to engage in longer exchanges, to negotiate any difference of opinion, to argue their point more strongly, often disagreeing, until some form of consent is reached. In some cases a conversation that started off as slightly confrontational resolves itself as the characters change their tone and continue the exchange on much more relaxed terms. [As an example of this, time permitting, a scene from *Marrakech*].
The main difference in the use of the *Ignoring* strategy is that the French and Italian characters seem to ignore other character’s negative disclosures simply because they do not consider them as threatening of their self-image or of their relationship with the discloser. From this point of view, *Ignoring* is more similar to *Deflecting*, in that it signals that insults, or otherwise potentially aggressive behaviour, are not taken seriously. In contrast to this, in *Secret Men*, *Ignoring* is often used by irritated or hurt characters who feel threatened by other characters’ behaviour, but decide not to respond so as to avoid an argument which might endanger the relationship.

Interestingly, in some cases, the French and Italian characters who have been the recipients of negative disclosure feel that they have a right to be angry, and will react accordingly to the point where they seem to play the role of the angry person, overemphasising their true feelings. By applying Ekman & Freisen’s terminology, we could say that they use the strategy of intensifying their felt emotions, as opposed to Australian characters who would rather de-intensify or mask on many occasions.

[video] Here is an example from the Italian film *Marrakech* in which the four friends are lost in the desert, looking for their missing friend Rudy and his girlfriend Cristina, who has disappeared with their car and money. Paolo was leading the group, but admits to having lost the way, while Cedro is kneeling on the ground looking at the map. Ponchia’s frustration erupts and Paolo tells him to shut up. Paolo throws himself against Ponchia and hits him. Marco attempts to calm everyone down using a loud voice but with a calm and soothing tone. Ponchia, acting as if he is deeply hurt, walks away, while the others invite him to take it easy and come back. We can say that Ponchia is “acting-out” the role of the angry character, with visibly exaggerated non-verbal behaviour.

This tendency toward over-emphasising one’s angry feelings to inspire guilt and trigger an apology by the “offenders” is confirmed by the fact that the apparently furious character can suddenly resume his “normal state”, if something else intervenes to distract him, as is the case in this scene from *Le Coeur*, [video] where Jeff, who has lost money at Loto-foot, lashes out at his friends whom he accuses of being responsible for his loss. The recipients in this case enact an entering strategy since they acknowledge that their behaviour has caused Jeff’s anger. On another level, however, they know that the acted-out is not “real”, it is just an act they expected and that it will soon be over, and everything will be back to normal. This is why they tend
to ignore or deflect the angry characters’ insults or personal attacks, simply because they do not interpret them as actual aggression.

We would like to stress once again the fact that these observations are very preliminary and await confirmation through more in-depth research. An important set of questions however arises from our exploratory analyses: Do the French and Italian characters engage in open confrontation more often, in order to argue their point? Are Italian and French exchanges in which characters communicate anger longer than the Australian ones, due to a greater number of turns that tend to overlap? Conversely do Anglo-australians employ ignoring strategies more often or otherwise attempt to bring the potentially face-threatening exchange to an end more abruptly?

Indeed, these observations find support in a study conducted by Corsaro and Rizzo (1990), which compared disputes among Italian and North-American pre-school children. These authors found that the Italian participants engaged in much longer and elaborated exchanges, and concluded that, since early childhood, Italian children seem to have been socialized into the rituals of "discussione" i.e., argumentation to express opposing views, as a social practice that is part of Italian culture. These authors also note that: "Italian children produce and enjoy discussione as an end in itself. Artful, creative participation in discussione is a valued skill. ... But there is, in addition, running through the production of all disputes among the Italian children, an emphasis on style. It is not simply that the children want to participate to the fullest. For the Italian children the doing, the participation, the absorption in discussione is the thing." (p. 64).

In our data, we also found that the role of third party listeners was also significant for the unfolding of the exchange. We noted, for example, that the Anglo-Australian characters seem to intervene less often, and when they do, they tend not take side with either of the characters who are involved in the exchange. Instead they tend to try and deflect by using topic switches, as was evidenced in the first extract, or they express their disapproval through non verbal behaviour, for example looking away and remaining silent. In the Italian and French films, however, there seem to be more occasions in which a third party becomes engaged in the exchange, by expressing their opinion and taking side, thus becoming involved in the argument.
[video] Here is an example from *Le Coeur* in which Antoine is angry because his wife has left him. Jeff responds using the strategy of *Analysing* to force Antoine to talk things out; Antoine becomes even angrier and threatens Jeff. At this point Jeff calls his behaviour into question by saying that Antoine has no right to talk about things he doesn’t know. Antoine continues by disclosing what Jeff thought to be a secret – that his wife had had an abortion without telling him, many years back. There is stunned and embarrassed silence by the other two friends who are present to the scene. As both Jeff, who is visibly hurt (tears in his eyes), and Antoine (who bites his lip) attempt to end the conflict, a third character, Manu explodes. His intervention brings the scene to a close as all friends acknowledge that things have gone too far.

Similarly, in the Italian film, characters seem to intervene in the conflict, often taking part in it by contributing their opinion, rather than simply trying to calm the others [as can be seen in the scene previously shown]. We found no cases in which spectators indicate their disapproval through non-verbal means and remain silent, which occurred quite often in the Australian film.

The question which arises for further investigation is: to what extent do the rules of engagement of third parties in conflict situations differ across the three cultural groups considered? And what are the consequences?

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the role of gestures, albeit briefly, as we need to refine our study to include a more in-depth analysis of these. Our observations so far reveal that recipients of negative disclosure use gestures to relay the intensity of the emotion in negotiating strategies. The engagement of the whole body is particularly noticeable in the Italian film where the recipient often leans his body forward, touches the angry character to attract attention and invite to reframe (*Calling into question*) using several repetitions (e.g. “*Is anyone going to say anything?*”).

Body contact also occurs quite frequently in the French film, in comparison with the Anglo-Australian film, but as a sign of sympathy or solidarity rather than as a response to anger. Besides using more gestures, the Italian characters address each other in what may sound as rather irritated tones that seem to be in stark contrast with the Anglo-Australian characters, whose tone of voice remains polite when engaged in negotiating strategies: compare the Italian shout “*No, shut up a second*” or the French
“vous me faites chier” with the Australian “Do you guys mind, it’s really none of your business”.

Finally, the French make use of a greater number of facial mimics, such as imitating the angry look of the discloser several times, to be intended as humour in deflecting strategies.

The question which warrants further inquiry here is: How does the greater variety of gestures and facial expressions used by the Italian and French impact upon the perception of others in cross-cultural encounters?

Summarising, these are the questions that emerged out of our preliminary analyses: Is smiling used to mask mild anger more often in Anglo-Australian exchanges, compared to French or Italian interactions? Do the French and Italian characters engage in open confrontation more often, in order to argue their point? Are Italian and French exchanges in which characters communicate anger longer than the Australian ones, due to a greater number of turns that tend to overlap? Conversely do Anglo-Australians employ ignoring strategies more often, or otherwise attempt to bring the potentially face-threatening exchange to an end more abruptly? How does the greater variety of gestures and facial expressions used by the Italian and French impact upon the perception of others in cross-cultural encounters?

As previously observed, our corpus is far too small for making any kind of wider generalizations. In fact, the questions that we have posed could lead to unclear answers if we only based our answers on this corpus. Also, we are aware that our observations, drawn from fictitious characterisation, may well be influenced by the storylines and the character construction.

In order to be able to clarify the answers to these questions in a reliable fashion, firstly we need to expand the number of films used and the scope and depth of our analyses, to identify not only processing strategies but also patterns of disclosure as they relate to contextual variables, and secondly we need to obtain more data by recording interactions containing emotional disclosure in naturalistic settings.

**Points which need further consideration**
The methodological complexities involved in studying these socio cultural display rules which operate mainly at a subconscious level is the first issue that needs to be highlighted in the relationship between cross-cultural pragmatics and language socialization. The challenge for language teachers is not just “to identify” how emotions and feelings are expressed in the language they teach, but, to go one step further, how to react appropriately with reference to L2 norms, an ability which is deemed to be a crucial component of pragmatic competence (see the Intercultural Competence Assessment project, INCA).

In drawing out cultural scripts for emotion communication from a corpus of selected semi-naturalistic interactions, our aim is to identify these cultural scripts and make them explicit to language learners. It must be pointed out that teaching about norms regulating emotion communication is made all the more difficult because of the lack of available data. Without any empirical basis, we incur the risk of going back to teaching about the target culture based on anecdotal evidence, or worse, stereotypical notions. In the relationship between CCP and LS, reflection and critical skills should be the core of the knowledge based content, rather than a specified cultural program or curriculum which lists items of culture to be acquired or taught.

Evidently, much remains to be done and our research on emotion communication and language socialisation should be considered as work in progress.

References


