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2 **Glocal tensions: Exploring the dynamics of intercultural communication through a language learner's vlog**

Tatiana Codreanu and Christelle Combe

<A>Introduction

Since the integration of the webcam into different screen-based communication tools, Internet users have been able to create, publish and share personal videos easily in online communities such as YouTube. Our research explores the characteristics of a video-blog (vlog), documenting the online practices of a learner of French as a foreign language. Part of a larger study (Combe 2014), this chapter focuses on this learner posting a YouTube video that elicits massive response from his viewership in the form of written comments. Our analysis addresses issues in informal language learning and evaluates the strengths and limitations of intercultural education in a vlogging context. Through a qualitative and semio-discursive analysis of a corpus (Develotte, Kern, and Lamy 2011), we attempt to highlight the learner's co-construction of an identity in a context of "superdiversity" (Vertovec 2007) through his language and cultural positioning. The chapter aims to discuss the divergences between, on one hand, a multicultural and multilingual globalized digital world in which users have no boundaries and can talk to each other by posting comments on a platform such as YouTube and, on the other hand, the verbal violence, clashes and nationalistic identities that arise when interlocutors talk about physical borders between countries or regions of the same country.

The chapter is divided into three parts. First, we will present our theoretical and methodological framework, then we will highlight the vlogger's self-constructed identity through his French as a Foreign Language practice and his digital presence on his first published vlog "Coucou" ("Hi"). Finally, we will discuss tensions in his expression of

identity in another vlog “Les differences entre la France et les USA” (“Differences between France and the United States”). From a pedagogical perspective, our approach will be based on what Kern (2015) calls a “relational pedagogy”:

A relational pedagogy aims to foster a reflective consciousness of how acts of reading, writing, and storytelling mediate and transform meanings, not merely transfer them from one individual or group to another. That is, it involves an ability to reflect on meaning-making practices broadly, but with particular emphasis on the role that materials and technologies play in processes of textualization and (re)contextualization (2015, 234).

We will consider the importance of working on these aspects with language learners, in order to enable them to exercise their critical reflection associated with vlogs and to make observations regarding this form of digital communication and its limitations or problems.

<A> Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework is based on previous research in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and its applications in the field of language teaching and research in intercultural communication.

 Computer-Mediated Communication and language learning

The CMC research field appeared in the 1990s with the development of the Internet. Since then, this research field has expanded and diversified. We present in Figure 2.1 Herring’s (2017) schematic representation of CMC as a field of investigation.

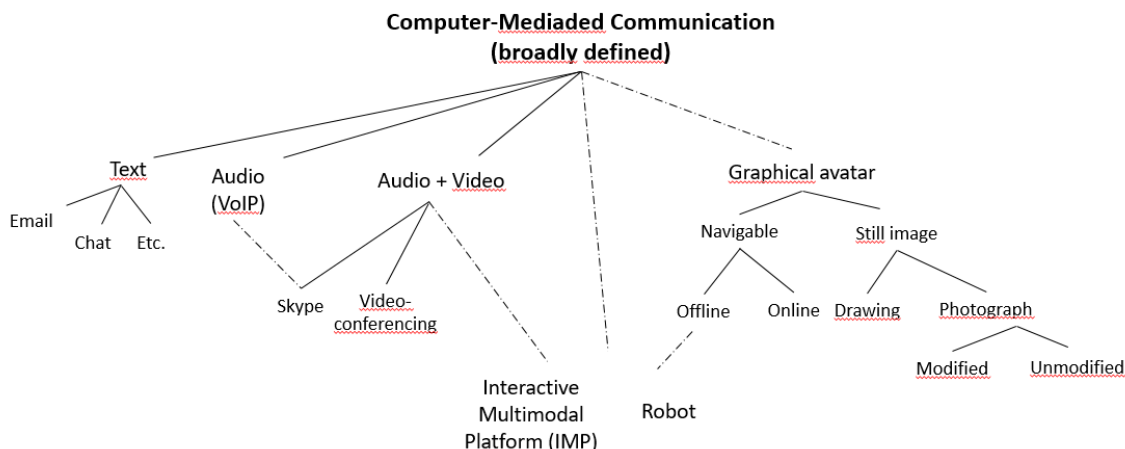


Figure 2.1 CMC and its different branches (Herring 2017)

Within Herring's schema, we will focus on the interactive multimodal platform YouTube, which we will describe later.

<C> Web 2.0 and Interactive Multimodal Platforms (IMP)

In the area of language teaching and learning, since 2000 and the development of the Internet, many institutional telecollaboration projects have been implemented, first by e-mail, and subsequently by forum and videoconference. Web 2.0 further multiplies the possibilities of communication and collaboration as Hughes (2010) elucidates:

People no longer simply consume online resources. It is increasingly a part of life to construct an online identity and present yourself online, to publish your thoughts and opinions, your photographs and your experiences, to form social groups, make friends and share parts of your life via the Internet (Hughes 2010, 252).

In the context of language learning and teaching, Web 2.0 tools can be considered as privileged spaces to develop specific skills such as telecollaborating in a new language (Guérin, Cigognini and Petttenati 2010, 203). The preferred Web 2.0 tools in formal language teaching-learning contexts are mainly social networks, wikis and blogs, while media-sharing communities like YouTube tend to be less utilized (Guth and Thomas 2010). Yet these

interactive multimodal platforms are increasingly popular spaces, favored especially by digital natives. These interactive multimodal platforms (IMPs) are defined as follows:

An IMP minimally involves text plus one other mode (audio, video, and/or graphics); the modes may be synchronous or asynchronous. While IMPs are Web 2.0 sites, in that they are web-based platforms that incorporate user-generated content and social interaction, not all Web 2.0 sites are IMPs: Sites on which messages are mainly textual (excluding multimedia attachments), such as Wikipedia and Twitter, are not IMPs in their current form. One of the first IMPs was YouTube, which allowed users to comment on a shared video asynchronously, via either text or video (Herring 2015, 2).

Because the YouTube platform appears to be particularly likely to encourage the autonomous learning of an online language (Barton and Lee 2013), we chose to focus on its use in this case study.

<C> YouTube and language learning

Created in 2005, YouTube is a video hosting website where users can upload, view and share video clips. Since the creation of the webcam and its development and integration in various screen communication tools (laptops, tablets, mobile phones), home videos have become increasingly popular, and it is easy to publish and share them on YouTube. Videos can be public, private, or unlisted and it is possible to create a channel to which other users can subscribe, and be informed as new videos are posted. However, YouTube is not just a hosting site for videos, it is also an exchange platform for comments that users can post under the videos. As Barton and Lee (2013) point out:

Over the years, many YouTube users have perceived the affordances of commenting as a platform for critical debates and discussions, not only on the video per se, but on other topics arising from the original discussion (2013, 53).

YouTube is also often seen as a social media platform rather than a video sharing site (Barton and Lee 2013) because of the special relationship between those who post videos with those who view and comment on them. As Barton and Lee (2013, 40) underline, “YouTube is based on the visual and includes a great deal of interaction with strangers.”

Moreover, in the context of a multilingual Internet, YouTube offers significant potential for learning foreign languages. As Barton and Lee (2013) point out, its multimodal affordances allow language learners to practice speaking, writing, and listening, and it is particularly suited to autonomous and informal learning, since YouTube enables peer learning in a stress-free environment. We would add that YouTube is an important platform for discussions of language learning and intercultural exchanges, because it allows learners to innovate and express their individual creativity.

 Intercultural communication

In order to study intercultural communication in a globalized era we adopted the conceptual tools of “superdiversity” and “intercultural sensitivity.”

<C> Globalization and Superdiversity

As recalled by Blommaert and Rampton (2011, 1) “over the past two decades, globalization has altered the face of social, cultural and linguistic diversity in societies all over the world” and the concepts of migration and multiculturalism have gradually been replaced by what Vertovec (2007) calls “superdiversity,” characterized by increased diversity in the categories of migrants (their countries of origin, languages, religions, migration channels, immigration statuses, and gender) and increased diversity in the experiences, opportunities, constraints and trajectories that newcomers now face.

The emergence of new media is intensifying globalization and reinforcing this notion of superdiversity. Indeed, what do notions of nationality, ethnicity, language, and

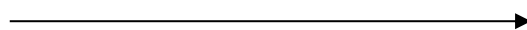
identity mean on the Internet, where borders are blurred and the notion of identity is redefined (Baldauf, Develotte, and Ollagnier-Beldame 2017)? Language use is medium-specific, as researchers such as Anis (1998), Crystal (2001) and Paveau (2015) have highlighted, demonstrating numerous technolinguistic and multilingual innovations.

On the level of phenomenology and materiality, theoretical reflection on the media has been enriched by the critical work of McLuhan (1962) and Stiegler (1996). McLuhan popularized the term “the global village” in 1962. However, in 1999, at the beginning of the Web 2.0, Wolton (1999) drew special attention to the difficulties of cultural exchanges in a globalized world where physical distances yielded to cultural distances. The first vlogs appeared one year later, in 2000 (Berry 2014). In order to analyze vlogs’ potential for supporting informal language learning and intercultural communication, we found Bennett’s (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) to be particularly useful.

<C> Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Drawing on our previous research (Combe and Codreanu 2016), in order to analyze personal reactions and better discern what it means to truly adapt to another culture in the vlog’s environment, we based the present study on Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986, 1993, 2004). Bennett presents a conceptual tool, based on a scale of six ranges of sensitivity to difference, aiming to underline individuals’ cognitive concepts of cultural experiences, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Development of intercultural sensitivity



Experience of difference

Ethnocentric stages	Ethnorelative stages
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Denial	Defense	Minimization	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration
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Figure 2.2 The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986).

Bennett's DMIS "is a model of changes in worldview structure, where the observable behavior and self-reported attitudes at each stage are indicative of the state of the underlying worldview" (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003, 3). As highlighted by Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman, "The DMIS constitutes a progression of worldview 'orientations toward cultural difference' that comprise the potential for increasingly more sophisticated intercultural experiences" (2003, 1). Bennett (2004) describes the six stages of the DMIS as follows:

The most ethnocentric experience was named the Denial of cultural difference, followed by the Defense against cultural difference. In the middle of the continuum the Minimization of cultural difference seemed to be a transition from the more virulent forms of ethnocentrism to a more benign form, leading to the ethnorelative Acceptance of cultural difference. At the heart of ethnorelativism was Adaptation to cultural difference, followed in some cases by the Integration of cultural difference into identity. The sequence of these experiences became the "stages" of the DMIS. (2004, 1)

Bennett introduces the concept of *in-group* and *out-group* distinctions (Bennett 1993) as a condition to generate ethnocentrism and negative stereotypes. From an evolutionary point of view, members of other groups have been perceived as potentially dangerous by virtue of being different from one's own group (Brewer and Caporael 2006; Navarrete, Kurzban, Fessler, and Kirkpatrick 2004). As a result, social categorization differentiating between one's own group, "us" (in-group), and another group, "them" (out-group), helped the human

brain to be efficient in creating distinctions (Mahajan et al. 2011). Consequences of social identification based on *in-group* bias and *out-group* characteristics, manifested in stereotypes and casual attribution, have been highlighted by previous research (Hogg, Abrams, Otten, and Hinkle 2004).

<A> Method

In this part, we present the object of our study—a vlog created by a learner of French as a foreign language—and describe the corpus, the research questions, and the methodological approach adopted to address them.

 Corpus

The vlog we studied was created by Michael, a North American learner of French.¹ The elements comprising the language vlog² have been presented in a previous study (Combe 2017). All of these elements are subject to ongoing modification and are thus dependent on the digital environment in which they are located. If we access the vlog when the reader of this chapter reads our study, we will find that many items are no longer the same. This is one reason among many that the study of digital discourse poses significant methodological issues. Digital discourse analysis needs to be approached from an ecological point of view, as Paveau highlights:

The technodiscursive nature of this kind of utterance, defined by a complete integration of technology with language, forces us to modify our views and to focus

¹ We have not disguised Michael's name because he has established a public presence on YouTube and other social media sites. See discussion in the Qualitative Analysis section.

² <https://alsic.revues.org/3094#tocto2n5>

our analysis not on linguistic elements in a logocentric perspective, but rather on the entire technodiscursive environment from an ecological perspective necessary for computer-mediated discourse analysis. (2015, 2)³

The researcher who studies this kind of ecological data is therefore faced with the difficulty of making observations *in situ*, that is, online, in order to preserve the ecology of discursive production. As a result, the researcher is forced to work with unstable data and to make arbitrary decisions about defining corpus limits, as we will see later.

After we first discovered Michael's vlog, we explored all three of his public channels on YouTube and his presence on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Google+). Given the large scale of the data and the constantly shifting nature of multimodal online corpora, we determined that we needed to work with a clearly delimited corpus. We chose to focus on two videos from Michael's French channel *texfrançais*,⁴ as this was the first channel that he opened. As of 9 May 2016, the broader corpus consisted of 39 videos, ranging in duration from 10 seconds to 15:56 minutes, published between June 28, 2011 and May 8, 2016, along with the written comments they inspired. These videos cover topics as diverse as Michael's learning of French and his difficulties, cultural differences between France and the United States, his love life, and current events. Table 2.1 summarizes the features of the two videos we focus on in this chapter.

³ Our translation

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/user/texfrançais/videos>

	Coucou !	Les différences entre la France et les USA
Link	https://youtu.be/LWB7zAnamSM	https://youtu.be/IIQa5sPPIql
Published	28/06/2011	09/01/2013
Duration	1'55	5'34
Comments	115	1628
Views	34,736	141,616
I like this	511	3,738
I dislike this	6	80

Table 2.1 Features of the videos “Coucou” and “Les differences entre la France et les USA” (as of May 9, 2016).

“Coucou” is Michael’s first published video in which he presents himself. “Les differences entre la France et les USA” is a video he made two years later, following his return from a six-month exchange program in France, in which he presents differences he noted between France and the United States. We selected these two YouTube videos and the viewer comments that ensued because they deal with two important aspects of Michael’s co-constructed identity.

The research question: *How is a vlogger’s identity formed in an intercultural digital communication environment context?* was answered based on the selected corpus identified in the sub-questions below:

- *How does the vlogger introduce himself?* We analyzed the existing body of his social networking presence as well as the vlog “Coucou.”

- *How do users react to the vlogger's identity?* We analyzed the comments posted by participants on the vlog "Coucou."
- *How are cultural differences presented by the vlogger perceived by participants?* We analyzed the vlog "The differences between France and the USA" and participants' comments.

 Qualitative analysis

Fieldwork, as defined by Wolcott (1995), is a form of inquiry that requires a researcher to be immersed in the social activities of individuals. In our research protocol of ethnographic data collection, we have studied ongoing social activities of YouTube users. We prefer to work without a research hypothesis, attempting to describe and understand the discursive behavior of vlog users engaged in multimodal communication. We characterize our methodology as techno-semio-discursive analysis (Celik and Develotte 2011), here focused on the two vlogs described above.

We engaged in two cycles of qualitative analysis. We first analyzed the vlogger's discourse. In studying the videos, we used Cosnier's (2012) concept of "totext," which includes symbols, co-verbal gestures, coordinators, and extra-communicative gestures in the analysis of communicative acts. Cosnier shows that gestures and/or vocalizations have a quasi-linguistic form and conventional use. We were also interested in discourse markers and the ways users referred to Michael. Finally, from the video "Coucou" we performed a keyword search (American, Texan, Asian) of the words used by the vlogger to express his identity across all the comments to observe how the YouTube viewers reacted to these words. We also performed a preliminary reading of all comments based on what YouTube calls Top

Comments.⁵ Top Comments are interesting examples of techno-discourse since they feature a system of ranking by YouTube that gives them a greater visibility irrespective of their date of publication. We then manually tracked the number of polylogues, the number of responses they generated, and the number of users who took part in each interaction. We gave priority to the polylogues of the vlog “The differences between France and the USA” because they echoed themes Michael emphasized in his videos (food, cigarettes, relationships with women, television, etc.), and because they generated the most comments from the most varied participants, allowing us to study emotional reactions between in-groups and out-groups.

Regarding the anonymization of data and image rights, we repeatedly tried to contact the vlogger through various media to which we had access (YouTube, Facebook and Twitter), but were unable to get a response. We decided not to disguise Michael’s name given that his channel is public and our study is not of a sensitive nature. Although it is important for our semiotic study to include gestures, facial expressions, postures, and the techno-discursive environment, we decided not to reproduce these features in images because of permissions issues. The reader may consult the links provided in Table 2.1 to view the vlogs in question. We refer readers interested in the methodological and ethical issues encountered in research on interactive multimodal platforms to Combe (2016). The present chapter nevertheless presents all indications of techno-discursive forms essential to the analysis in the

⁵ Top Comments is a ranked view that highlights comments from the video creator, comments generating the most discussion from viewers, and comments that have been voted up by the community.

translated version of the comments. We reproduced all the comments with any pre-existing errors in French and English.

Additionally, we applied the DMIS to the YouTube comments generated by Michael's videos in order to explore to what extent those comments fell within Bennett's scale. As Bennett (2004) points out, the development of intercultural sensitivity follows a line of continuous progress. There are inevitable movements toward and away from attitudes of openness, with regressions to stages of resistance and hostility. The continuum of stages is thus not static, as opposed to the written comments on YouTube, which, once posted, appear to be a definitive statement unless they are clarified or contested by users. It may happen that individuals develop and regress in turn depending on the circumstances, however if the comments posted on YouTube are not reflecting these changes, they will be perceived by other users as representative of a static view or reaction to a cultural difference.

In the following section, we present the results of our analysis.

<A> Results

In this section, we will see how Michael's identity is constructed through his multiple digital identities spread across his social networks. He is Michael, but he can also be identified through the pseudonym *texfrançais* (referring to his home state of Texas and his status as a learner of French). We observe how YouTube viewers perceive his identity, and how his identities crystallize when sensitive cultural points are discussed in "The differences between France and the USA."

 A self-constructed polydigital identity

In this section, we will study how Michael's identity is constructed within the different digital environments.

<C> Michael: a polydigital French language learner

On his YouTube channel, we can observe several identity indicators. First, there are three YouTube channel names that reflect identity: Channel 1 (*texfrançais*) indexes a Texan who speaks French, Channel 2 (*vacheur*) indexes a cowboy by attempting to adapt the word “vache” in French for “cow,” and Channel 3 (*EveryJour*) reflects a mixture of French and English. These designations show Michael’s creativity in using the technological platform to extend his self online (the medium allows him to “spread” himself by creating as many channels as he wants).

We noticed a number of icons indexing his social presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, and Snapchat. On Twitter and Facebook, he was “Michael,” but on his Facebook page, we noticed he didn’t choose to publish his full real name, but instead created a separate Facebook page and chose the fictional character category. There, one sees different portraits of him and maps of his travels to Europe (and especially France) as well as a cover picture with labels in French. In his Instagram names, he is more mysterious, with monikers such as “Slut” and “le Boston” (because he lived in Boston during his studies). We also noticed that two of Michael’s YouTube channels and his Facebook page are directly linked to his practice of French as a foreign language.

<C> “Coucou”: An introductory video

In “Coucou,” Michael introduces himself from three different points of view: that of the French language, that of his nationality, and that of his personal family history.

In terms of the French language, the title “Coucou” is a colloquial word that could lead viewers to assume he is French. As Michael introduces himself, he begins by talking about francophone countries using a negative sentence: “Je suis pas Français ni Québécois” (*I’m neither French nor Quebecker*). He may have chosen *Québécois* because he sounds American but speaks French as well. It is interesting to note that immediately afterwards, he

highlights his physical difference: “Je suis sûr que vous pouvez voir ça” (*I’m sure you can see that*). Michael’s physiognomy and especially his pronunciation marked his difference of nationality in viewers’ comments. In those comments, we find more occurrences of the term “accent,” but always associated with a positive adjective or verb as in the following examples: “Ton accent est mignon ^^” (*your accent is cute ^^*), “Tu as un peu un accent québécois ! x)” (*you have a little bit of the Quebec accent! x*), “J’adore ton accent” (*I love your accent:*) (3 times), “Ton accent fait craquer” (*Your accent drives me wild*). This kind of staging of himself may bring Michael compliments and face flattering acts from his viewers and induce a certain narcissistic reinforcement.

Michael continues his self-presentation by talking about his nationality, origin, and current geographic location: “Je suis Américain” (*I am American*), “Je suis né au Texas” (*I was born in Texas*), “mais maintenant j’habite à Boston” (*but now I’m living in Boston*). From this, the meaning of his YouTube channel’s name (*texfrançais*) becomes clear to his followers: it indexes his Texan origins as well as his francophilia, which Michael explains in terms of the complexity of his French and Vietnamese family origins: “Je suis un petit peu français en fait comme le grand-père de ma grand-mère quelque chose comme ça.” (*I’m a little bit French, in fact like my grandmother’s grandfather, something like that*). “Il était français, mais pour la plupart je suis vietnamien” (*He was French, but I’m mostly Vietnamese*). Michael produced squinting eye-gestures as he said this, which could indicate difficulty in positioning his identity as he tried to recall his family history. Michael concludes this first part of the presentation about his love of the French language: “Moi j’aime beaucoup la langue française et je l’apprends depuis sept ans” (*I really like French language and I’ve been learning it for seven years*). This love of French, combined with his family history and the imagination linked to it, will be central to his vlogging.

<C> Avatar or superstar? Michael: an almost fictional character

As we have seen, Michael's multiple existence on digital networks sometimes takes the form of avatars. Vloggers who attract large numbers of subscribers and comments also enjoy a certain celebrity status that was previously only reserved for personalities using broadcast media (e.g., TV, radio, cinema).

In his first video, "Coucou," Michael points with his fingers to a superimposed clickable word (*ici* [here]) and a smiley, which is a link to subscribe to his channel (Figure 2.3). With this icon, he shows users how to subscribe to his channel in an animated way that reflects not only his mastery of the technical interface but also the discursive aspects of this type of technolanguage.



Figure 2.3 Clickable word with a smiley

Michael's use of media and discourse make him similar to a fictional movie character, but with whom YouTube users can interact. He appears simultaneously near and far away, like a familiar star who invites his audience into his daily life. Some users comment on his video by speaking of him in the third person, while others flirt with him, using second person address: "Tu es trop beau c'est fou!!!" (*You are too cute it's crazy!!!*); "c'est vrai qu'il ressemble à un coréen ! et pourtant je m'y connais bien mon chéri est vietnamien" (*it's true he looks like a Korean! and I know what I'm talking about, my boyfriend is Vietnamese*).

 Towards identity tensions

We now move to the next phase of our analysis, which involved studying the polylogues generated by the community of participants in Michael's vlog. Viewers generated numerous comments and polylogues, some of which included strong emotional reactions and racial insults, and we studied these to explore global tensions, local tensions and intercultural sensitivity between YouTube participants.

<C> A co-constructed identity

While Michael self-constructs his identity by his choices of what to include in his vlog, his online identity is also co-constructed with his viewers, who post comments in response to his vlog. It is interesting to note that only two elements are identified and retained by his followers: his Asian ethnicity and his American accent, as we can see in the following examples.

Alors tu est vietnamien (^o^)/... tu a l'aire d'un coréen :3 so cute ^^ j'ai un ami qui a une grand mère vietnamienne xD (*So you're Vietnamese⁶ (^o^)/... you look like a Korean :3 so cute ^^ I got a friend who got a Vietnamese grand-mother xD)*

c'est vrai qu'il ressemble à un coréen ! et pourtant je m'y connais bien mon cheri est vietnamien” (*That's true he looks like a Korean ! And however I am very familiar, my boyfriend is Vietnamese*)

An Asian guy speaking French? Yum.

So your accent is beautiful (je suis franco américaine) je suis partie au USA and c'est tellement beau la bas !!” (*So your accent is beautiful (I am French American) I was in the USA and it is so beautiful there!!*)

⁶ underlined by the authors of this study

Hey ! Tu es "so sweet" :D J'adore ton accent américain” (*Hey! You are so sweet :D I love your American accent*)

From such comments about his Asian ethnicity and American accent, Michael’s YouTube viewers appear to narrow his identity to stereotypes. As we will see in the next section, in the context of practicing a language on YouTube, learners may also be confronted with stereotypes that they must learn to manage by engaging in a form of intercultural education, which can sometimes prove to be somewhat violent in interpersonal exchanges.

<C> Global and local tensions

Upon his return from a five-month stay in France, Michael recounts a few examples of what surprised him in this confrontation with French culture as he perceived it as an American learning French. His use of the webcam, recorded speech, and intonation are all part of Michael’s discourse. Our framing analysis shows a centered close-up framing (Codreanu and Combe Celik 2013) that influences the image Michael wants to convey about himself to the YouTube community.

We observed gestures of positive and negative experience as Michael compares his experiences in France with those he has had in the United States—for example, differences in television, bread, and food, among other things. These hand gestures (beats with each word while listing different kinds of fast food in the USA) and vocal gestures (sighs, mocking laughter) represent fundamental emotions whose bodily expression could potentially be perceived as face threatening acts by YouTube viewers who identify with the practices of the culture that such gestures question. We can observe a technique to modulate his discourse and highlight his subjectivity in front of his audience. He produced a long self-contact gesture during the utterance “A mon avis, c’était difficile de parler avec des Françaises” (*In my opinion, it was difficult to talk to French girls*), a gesture that he repeats as he explains the

statement. His facial expression appears “embarrassed” when he makes statements that can be perceived by his audience as face threatening acts: “Aussi la télévision en France c’est nul” (*Also in France television it’s awful*) (expression and smiles of embarrassment).

Furthermore, we observe that the debate Michael launched on an international level elicited reactions on a local level (France and its regions). Four polylogues provide examples of differences in opinion about Paris and the rest of the France (“us versus them”).

Polylogue	Responses	Interactants
1	38	11
2	11	5
3	11	8
4	6	5

Table 2.2 Four polylogues: number of responses and users

One polylogue relaunches a familiar French debate centered on the opposition between Paris and the French provinces. Some users have French names, others use a pseudonym, but they seem to position themselves as French nationals. The initial comment is: “attention !!! PARIS n'est pas la FRANCE !!!!! les parisiens têtes de chiens , parigots têtes de veau !!!!! lololololol il ne faut pas juger les français et les françaises à PARIS mais en dehors de PARIS !!!!! [...]” (*Careful!!!PARIS is not FRANCE!!!! Parisians are heads of dogs, parigots (old fashioned term for a person living in Paris) heads of veal !!!!! Lolololololol don’t judge French by Paris, but outside PARIS !!!!! [...]*)

In the following responses, we highlight the interactional violence between people who do not know each other and who are anonymous by virtue of their pseudonyms.

Dolce Gusto : Paris fait parti de la France que tu le veuilles ou non.

M Tr : +Dolce Gusto mais paris n'est pas la france que tu le veuilles ou non.

Dolce Gusto : +Traynor Malcolm Je ne comprends pas le sens de cette remarque .

Parisiens sont des français non !?

M Tr : Mais paris nest pas la france entiere

Dolce Gusto : +Traynor Malcolm Et alors ? Personne n'a dit le contraire. Si il a envie de parler des différences entre la France et les USA grâce à son vécu à Paris, je vois pas où est le problème.. Car les parisiens sont des français comme les autres.

[...]

nicolas renou : +marco miaou vive paris ! et si sa te plait pas c'est que tu n'est pas Français !

Shiori Fuminori : +nicolas renou Bullshit, si on aime pas Paris on est quand-même français on s'en tape de la capitale c'est quoi ce conformisme

Dolce Gusto: Paris is a part of France whether you like it or not

M Tr: +Dolce Gusto But Paris is not France whether you like it or not

Dolce Gusto: +Traynor Malcolm I don't understand your answer. Parisians are French, right?

M Tr: But Paris is not the entire France

Dolce Gusto: +Traynor Malcolm So what, nobody says so. If he wants to talk about the differences between France and the USA due to his experiences in Paris I don't see the problem. Parisians are French like everybody.

[...]

nicolas renou: + marco miaou vive paris ! and if you like it, you're not French !

Shiori Fuminori: +nicolas renou Bullshit if you don't like Paris you are French anyway and who cares it's the capital, what is this conformism

The ethnocentric attitudes of denial (Bennett 1993), or refusal to admit that Paris is representative of French culture, are created and maintained through defensive strategies. Some participants generated negative stereotypes and established boundaries on the basis of French regional origins that divided them into *in-group* and *out-group* cohorts (Bennett, 1993). However, as highlighted by comments above, other participants questioned these points of view and invited Michael and others to consider cross-cultural experiences between French people. Although it might be interesting to know that *in group* and *out-group* groups rely solely on French nationality, on the internet it is difficult to associate a particular nationality with names and pseudonyms, as these are the personal choice of the user and may not reflect his or her real nationality.

Another participant develops the argument that the French capital is not at the same level as other European capitals such London or Berlin, ending his post in English: “haters hate me now ! ;)”. His comment is toned-down by the wink emoticon. Two other participants reacted to his comment:

“Pardon mais... D’où sors-tu toutes ces conneries?” (*Sorry ... what is this bullshit*)
and

“Moi aussi je peux troller...Nègre, retourne travailler dans les champs de coton de l'oncle Sam. ;-) (c’est de l’humour je précise...) Nan, si on oublie cette blague de mauvais gout...Comment peux tu prétendre connaître les français en te contentant de Paris ? Vous êtes les premiers à gueuler quand on résume votre pays à NY, mais c'est ce que vous faites avec le notre !’ (*Me too I can troll ... Negro, go back to uncle Sam’s cotton fields. ;-) (I must say it’s a joke...) Nah, if we forget this joke of bad taste ... How can you pretend knowing French limiting yourself to Paris? You are the first ones to be outraged when we reduce your country to NY, but it’s what you are doing with ours!*)

This participant displays feelings of resentment related to perceived divisions between the *in-group* (Paris, NY) and *out-group* (France, USA). The verbal violence and the racist insults are perceived by other participants as a troll, as they do not answer this particular message, despite its initiator's efforts to explain it as a joke (indexed by the addition of a smiley/wink).

The next message "Il y a une grosse différence entre la France et Paris ! hehe" (*There is a big difference between France and Paris! hehe*) generated 4 violent polylogues:

coline thomas: c'est moi j'habite en campagne il y a beaucoup moins de pollution qu'à Paris.

Mkmc94: rarement entendu quelque chose d'aussi con ! Encore un plouc frustré ; avant on avait les fameux « parigot tête de veaux » aux abords des routes et maintenant on à ça... Quel unité national...

Simon Maillot: oh le parigot pollué, il se calme

Mkmc94: je suis pas parisiens idiot !

coline thomas: *it's true, I live in the countryside and it's less polluted than Paris.*

Egloin 49 : *Rarely heard bullshit like this! Another frustrated redneck, before we had the famous "parigot head of veal" on the road-side sign boards and now this. what a national unity...*

Simon Maillot: *Oh you polluted parigot calm down*

Mkmc94: *I'm not from Paris idiot!*

In the above exchange, the tension among participants is evidenced through the use of violent terms such as *idiot*, *frustrated redneck* and *parigot*, while the sentence *what a national unity* implies that the user laments the lack of national unity in France. He mocks and aligns himself with the tone of derision unfolding in the other messages. This might highlight the extent of what one can say with impunity, and the limits of vlogs' moderation.

Since comments from Mkmc94 have disappeared from the platform, we don't know if they were removed by a moderator or if the user closed his account.

Respondents' willingness to address differences in an aggressive way show a shared attitude of ethnocentrism (Bennett 1986). It should also be noted that, unlike negotiation in a conversation, individuals here seem to remain intransigent in their positions. Their purpose is not to agree, but rather to enjoy the freedom to freely oppose another person's view. From a learning perspective, it is important to make students aware that the argumentation is biased and that that bias is not discussed in these comments.

<C> From denial to integration

In this section, we try to make sense of written messages posted by YouTube viewers through Bennett's scale of intercultural sensitivity.

We have seen that Michael's subscribers reacted to his videos. The topic of TV channels generated a polylogue with seven responses: "C'est faux il y a des milliers de chaînes en France, tu vas sûrement que la TNT. J'imagine que ça fait longtemps que t'es pas allé en France il y a beaucoup de nouveaux programmes qui se sont créés depuis !" (*It's NOT TRUE, there are thousands of channels in France, you probably only had TNT. I imagine it's been a while since you were in France plenty of TV programs have been created since then!*) The user shows an interesting start of denial, the defense stage, which trigger reactions from other participants, who engage as self-appointed representatives of dominant groups supporting Michael's statement or protecting their "TV culture." The initial comment starts by a statement in capital letters, which represents the "shouting-out" behavior in written digital communication and could potentially highlight his annoyance with the vlogger's comment because of the exclamation mark.

The following three comments show different points of view corresponding to acceptance:

On paye les redevances télé pour rien en France car c’ets toujours à chier” (*We pay TV tax for nothing in France because it’s shit as usual*)

progressing towards minimization:

quand tu dis qu’il y a des milliers de chaînes... Tu pousses pas le bouchon un peu trop loin ? Maintenant il doit y avoir 30 chaînes gratuites sur la TNT, une moyenne de 2 chaînes locales par département et beaucoup de chaînes payantes. Mais ça ne dépasse surement pas 500. (*When you say there are millions of channels... This may be like ‘swearing in a church’? Now there are maybe 30 free channels on TNT, an average of 2 local channels per greater communities and lots of paying channels. But surely no more than 500.*)

and finally, towards a national stereotype:

“On aime bien exagérer sur tout et n’importe quoi... T’es marseillais ? :p” (*We really like to exaggerate whatever... Are you from Marseille? :p*)

These comments underline national stereotypes between French regions in an international digital context of communication that was a prevalent attitude among YouTube viewers as we will see below.

Michael’s comments on food and baguettes was rejected by a participant as something he had not personally experienced while he associated Michael’s experience with a “foreigner” stereotype: “Ca fait 2 ans que je suis à Paris et je croise jamais personne avec une baguette. C’est un gros cliché” (*It’s been 2 years that I have lived in France and I never passed by a person with a baguette. It’s a big cliché*), whereas another user introduced

another example of denial defending his own culture and simultaneously stereotyping the “other” culture:

on ne mange pas beaucoup pour mieux apprécier :) et je pense que les américains mangent trop et trop mal (c'est peut être un cliché) (*We eat less in order to appreciate food :) and I think Americans eat too much and bad food (this may be a cliché)*).

Another comment on fast food triggered responses on the assumed superiority of different French regions. The user gave example of the menu of a family meal from Normandy. He sees himself as a model of a particular regional culture (that of Normandy), however the listed menu is quite ordinary in France (steak, potatoes, green beans, and salad). And the “comté” cheese or the “saucisson” presented as specialities are not from Normandy. We can observe the weaknesses of the information destined to become knowledge for Michael.

Other participants show attitudes of ethnorelativism such as acceptance:

I really like your video but everyone doesn't smoke in France lol je sais pas si tu as compris ce que j'ai écrit je voulais dire que tout le monde ne fume pas en France et heureusement ! Mais il est vrai que beaucoup de jeunes fument j'ai beaucoup de mes amis qui fument et c'est pas bien pour eux ni pour nous. [...]. You are Lucky to have so Many TV (chaînes)! !!! I'll be so happy to speak English as you Speak French !
 Im happy to see your vidéos I like your American accent when you're speaking French it's so cute 👍 je comprends ce que tu veux dire par rapport au service clients, [...]. vous êtes mieux organisé dans vos universités que chez nous lol ce système est aussi fatiguant pour nous !

(It's true that lots of young people smoke in France and lot of my friends too, which is not good for them or me. [...]. You are lucky to have so many TV channels!!! I'll be

happy to speak English as you Speak French! I'm happy to see your videos I like your American accent when you're speaking French it's so cute I understand what you are saying about customer service [...] you are more organized in your universities, in our country this system is exhausting for us too.)

The topic of food however triggers ethnocentric attitudes of defense, denial or minimization as shown below. The following participants show different stages of ethnocentrism from denial, to defense and minimization through the usage of smileys and acronyms: “A propos de la "portion" de nourriture en France, certaines personnes parlent de leur voyage au USA et disent l'inverse de toi, que tout est en taille XXL ! xD ” (*Regarding food portion in France some people talk about their trip to the US and say the contrary, everything is XXL! xD*).

Some participants address other participants' opinions minimizing their *in-group* and *out-group* division (France and US) and interestingly creating new *in-group* and *out-group* divisions in France, where the *out-group* is present through media and French integration of a perceived universal American behavior. They talk about Michael in the third person (he).

We noticed that, as a consequence of having family in Chicago, and comparing identities, a participant demonstrated the last stage of Bennett's scale, integration: .

Je vais tout les 3 mois au USA j'ai de la famille laba (Chicago) [...] la mentalité des américain est vraiment cool [...] j'aime vraiment mon pays la France [...] mais si j'avais le choix j'aurai préférer etre américain” (I go every 3 months to the US I have family there (Chicago) [...] Americans are more open minded compared to French [...] I love my country, France [...] but if I had the choice, I would prefer to be American).

Strong verbal violence developed in the example of France vs. USA vs. Asia. The distinction between them and us relied upon simplified stereotypes, including racial insults (which would be the last stage of Bennett's scale): “tu n’est ni américain ni français tu n’es qu’un pauvre asiatique bridé la France a inventé ton pays.....0 histoire que du sperme européen” (*You are neither American nor French you’re a bloody Asian, France invented your country 0 history, just European sperm*)

Some irony concentrated on cultural differences between *in-groups* (Paris and Texas) engaging exclusively with members of their own *in-group*: “Et pour les gays il y a peut-être plus de gays dans la ville de Paris [...] que dans son petit village texan !! C’est normal donc comprenez-le !” (*Hey guys, there are more gays in Paris (...) than in his little Texas village, you have to understand him!*)

Michael finally answered in English by underlying his own values and identity, as a Texan living in Paris.

I never said French culture sucks compared to the USA. Obviously as an American there are things that I don't understand in France. This video wasn't just to pick on France - I love France - it was just to list differences that I saw, through my eyes, during my 5 months there. Fashion? Very different. Girls? Seemed a bit more unapproachable. TV? Sure there may be many channels but a lot of what I saw were US TV series. Fast food? Not a lot in Paris, but in reality that's a good thing.

Michael attempted to talk to his audience showing his willingness to address differences and any problems emerging from his cultural perceptions and possibly to solve cultural misunderstandings.

Following up on these comments, Michael produced a video entitled “je sais pas” (*I don’t know*) in which he explained his “Les différences entre la France et les USA (*The*

differences between France and the USA)” video and showed his love of France. He justified his approach by saying “je vous aime. ne l'oubliez jamais.” (*I love you, never forget this*). It is as if he was trying to calm the violence he involuntarily generated with his video. He seemed overwhelmed by the vlog tool and especially the polemical power of comments.

<A> Conclusion

In this case study, we were particularly interested in the vlogger’s and the participants’ co-construction of identity, and how cultural differences were perceived. We found that the vlogger we studied has created multiple identities on social networks and on his YouTube channel. The distribution of his online identities across multiple sites allows curious visitors to discover more about him by viewing his various online profiles. The vlogger seems to be close to the audience through the personal device screen, yet also distant because of his status as a quasi-public figure.

Today, the production and reception of vlogs has become an increasingly common social practice that cannot be ignored. It is not only possible but also increasingly easy to produce content on the Internet, whether textual, graphic, audio, video or a mixture of all these modalities. Tutorials offered by the platforms or by a community of users are freely available. However, it might be argued that Web 2.0 tools only provide a platform for ethnocentric behavior, especially the first two stages of Bennett’s scale, denial and defense. Our study shows that, even if Web 2.0 tools may diminish technological boundaries, national and regional borders tend to persist in the minds of participants, and these can lead to extremely tense interactions.

It appears that a topic such as “The differences between France and the US” crystallized global identity tensions among those who presented themselves as Michael’s French audience, who commented on what they perceived to be an American identity, French identity, and regional identities in France. These constructed identities, however, were

perceived in a more superficial way by his audience, who appeared to characterize him as an individual with an American accent and Asian origins, apparently based on their own experiences and interests. However, identities on YouTube are subjective and transitory. Consequently, this study represents only a snapshot of reactions to Michael's videos at one particular point in time. Although we make no claims regarding the generalizability of the results, this study has highlighted the various levels of intercultural sensitivity, ranging from denial to integration attitude, among YouTube participants following Michael's channel. Attitudes of denial and defense emerged at an international, but also at a local level, where intra-national differences between Paris and the provinces were expressed by the audience, who went so far as to generate intense discourse that included verbal, racial, and xenophobic slurs in some cases. It appears that the vlog environment affords that kind of discord by virtue of its structure, and that any controversial topic risks triggering such conflict.

From a pedagogical point of view, it would be interesting to present language learners with language learning vlogs in order to familiarize them with these possible identity crystallizations and to show them how confrontations of representations arise and how to respond on interactive multimodal platforms. When introducing language learners to vlogging, teachers must help students understand the unique context in which they are practicing their language ability, while also developing their digital literacy skills and creativity. The technological skills developed will be in creating and remixing videos, but even more important are the skills in managing their private life and their reputation online and especially their socio-emotional skills in their interactions with other users (including conflict management).

As highlighted by this study, vlogs have the advantage of allowing learners to speak and write with people around the world. In addition to practicing their language and cultural skills, language learners also develop digital literacy skills. Encouraging learners to produce a

vlog on cultural issues and to give them the experience of receiving comments should be of interest to universities and schools to build intercultural competence and cultural sensitivity across national borders.

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