

Cross-Cultural Pragmatics at a Crossroads

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Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Research: Pitfalls and Possibilities

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Introduction

Aim

- To reconsider our research approaches & methods
- To consider criticisms
- To explore possibilities for improvement/new directions

Introduction

Overview

- Who?
- Why?
- An example of data
- What?
- How?

Introduction

Terminology

- ‘Cross-cultural’ and ‘Intercultural’

Who?

- Different national groups and/or different ethnolinguistic groups?

Criticisms

- Too much variability to treat as one group
- Culture is said to be constructed in interaction, rather than pre-existing

Who?

Blommaert (1998):

... 'culture' in all its meanings and with all its affiliated concepts, is situational. It depends on the context in which concrete interactions occur. Studying speech conventions of certain groups of people, and then contrasting them with those of other groups of people, is of little use to the study of intercultural communication.

Who?

Holliday (1999: 248):

When a researcher looks at an unfamiliar social grouping, it can be said to have a small culture when there is a discernible set of behaviours and understandings connected with group cohesion.

Who?

Cultural Regularities:

- Basic assumptions and values
- Beliefs, attitudes and ideologies
- Conceptions of role relationships, including role rights & obligations
- Behavioural rituals conventions & routines (linguistic & non-linguistic), and understandings/interpretations of them
- Choice and use of artefacts and products

Why?

Blommaert's (1998) viewpoint

Three assumptions:

- Comparative research should be of applied relevance
- Purpose of comparative research is to predict behaviour
- Emotional feelings in interaction are unrelated to cultural issues

Why?

Importance of Applied Relevance

Why is our research mainly ignored/overlooked by ICC practitioners?

Two likely reasons:

- The places we publish in
- The style of our reporting

Why?

Importance of Applied Relevance

How can we enable our research to have greater impact?

Two possibilities:

- Join organisations like SIETAR and take an active part in them
- Re-think how to communicate our findings

Why?

What is the Practical Relevance of our Research?

NOT to predict behaviour

BUT to inform our understanding of intercultural competence:

- How the interpretation of meaning is accomplished
- How cultural factors can affect that process
- How problems can be prevented, minimised and/or managed more effectively

Why?

Tannen and Walleet (1987: 206)

[interaction involves] the stability of what occurs as a consequence of the social context, & the variability of particular interactions which results from the emergent discourse. On the one hand, meanings emerge which are not given in advance; on the other, meanings which are shaped by the [participants'] prior assumptions (as we will argue, their knowledge schemas) may be resistant to change by the interlocutor's talk.

A Multimodal Example

What?

What kinds of data do we need?

1. We need BOTH cross-cultural AND intercultural pragmatic data

What?

Weaknesses of much cross-cultural research

- Low number of respondents
 - *Make sure our sample size is adequate*
- Too much reliance on student samples
 - *Be cautious of generalising to other members, & use others where possible*
- Too much focus on speech acts
 - *Widen our scope of research foci*

What?

What kinds of data do we need?

2. Multimodal Data

(see Goodwin 2000: 1490 quote)

What?

Multimodal Data

Semiotic resources:

- Lexico-semantic resources
- Prosody (pitch and stress)
- Gestures
- Body movement and gaze
- Physical elements of the environment (e.g. hopscotch grid, Munsell chart)

What?

Multimodal Data

Goodwin's (2000) analyses show:

- Participants use a range of different sign systems to communicate meaning
- The semiotic resources are instantiations of historical, socio-culturally constructed structures, and thus need to be interpreted

What?

Multimodal Data

Use of video data:

- Problems of access
- Analytic challenges (see Gu 2006)

What?

What kinds of data do we need?

**3. Interactional Data + Post-event
Reflective Data**

How?

How should we analyse our data?

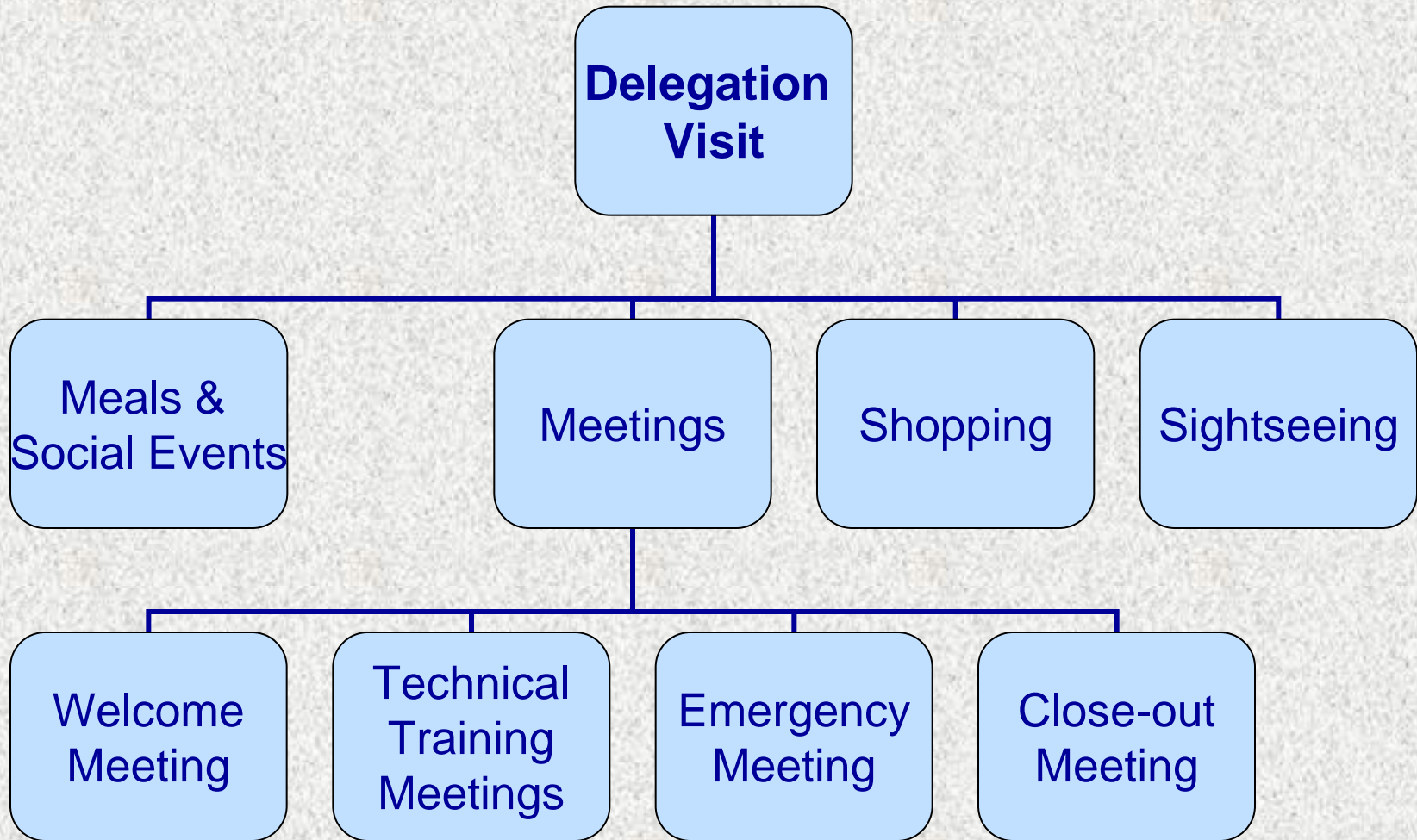
What Units of Analysis can we use?

How?

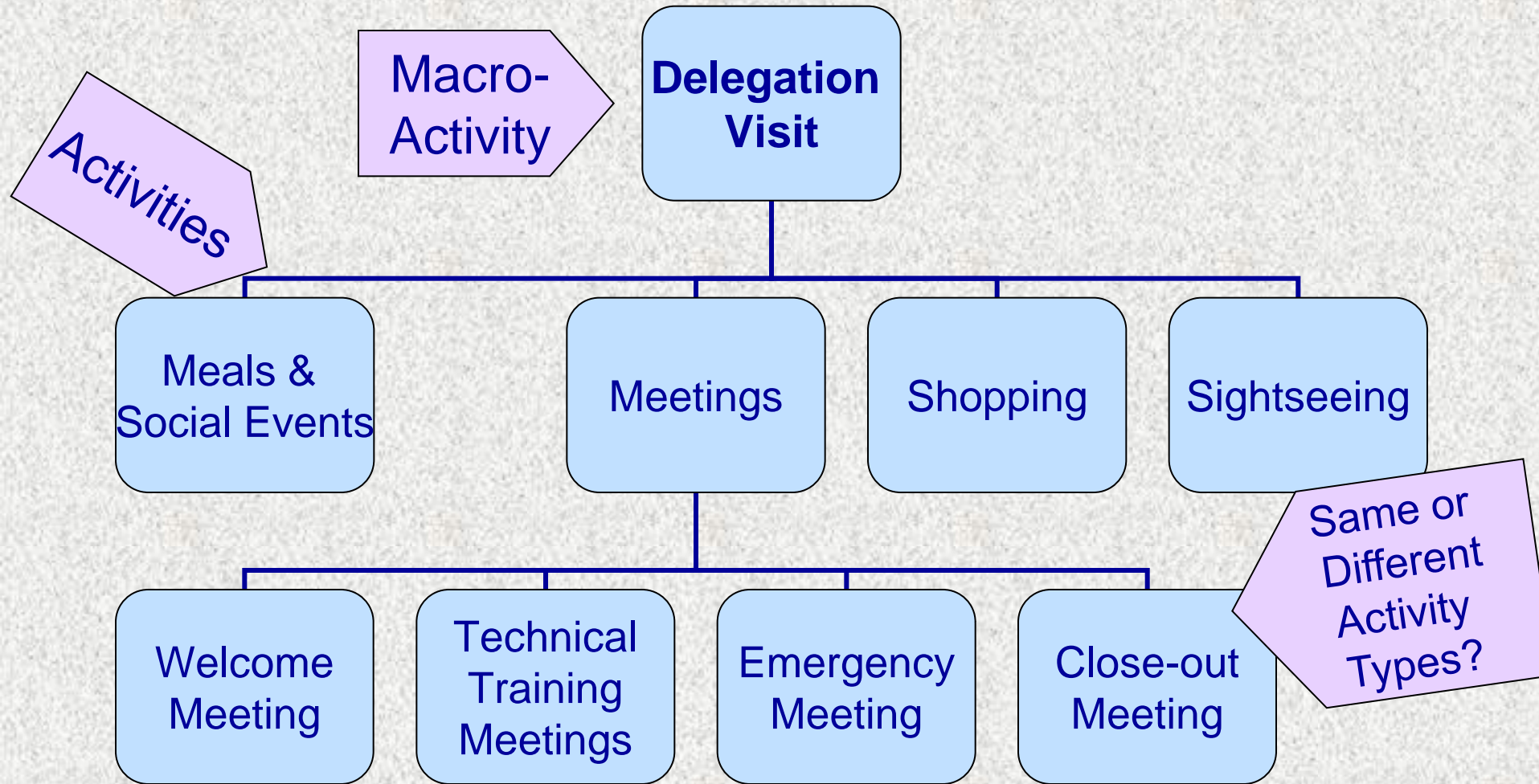
Activity Types (Levinson (1979))

I take the notion of an activity type to refer to a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded events with *constraints* on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions. Paradigm examples would be teaching, a job interview, a jural interrogation, a football game, a task in a workshop, a dinner party, etc.

How?

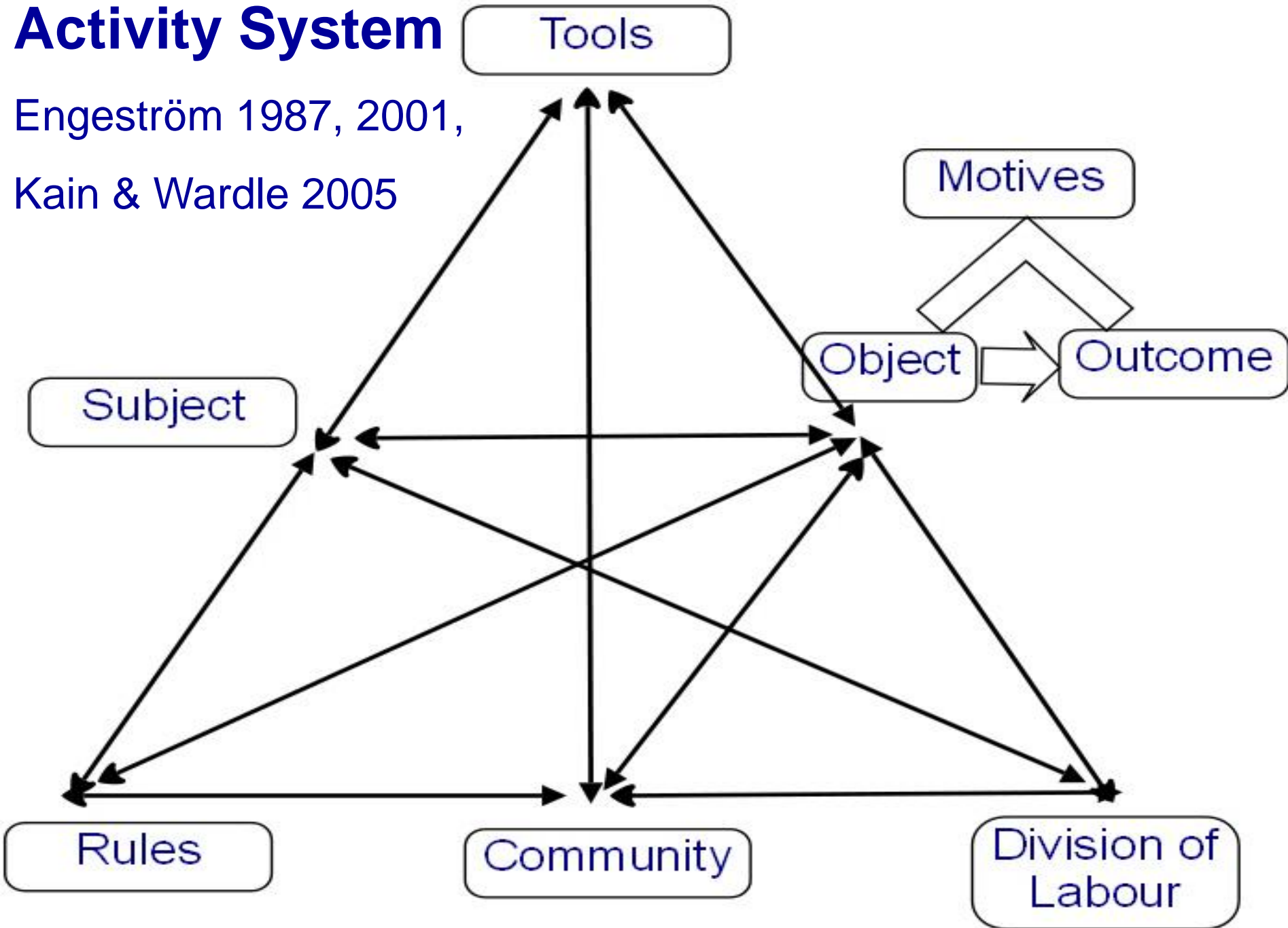


How?



Activity System

Engeström 1987, 2001,
Kain & Wardle 2005



How?

Activity Type	Activity System
Participant Goals	Object + Motives & Outcomes
Allowable contributions	Rules
Expectations re Gricean maxims, politeness maxims, turn-taking, topic control, manipulation of pragmatic parameters	[Conventions element of rules]
	Community
	Tools/Instruments
	Division of Labour

Cross-Cultural Pragmatics Research

