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## **Building scalar frames of understandability in ‘trans’ practices within a Catalan *Global StoryBridges* site**

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### **Introduction**

While the *Global StoryBridges* project’s overarching aims are to promote critical cosmopolitan and transmodal communications between youth at different global sites, significant exchanges in relation to these goals also emerge within sites. In this chapter we zoom in on interaction occurring locally during a project session at the site in Catalonia (Spain). We examine how the participation of a graduate researcher from China in the facilitation and research at the site prompts meaningful possibilities for learning and communication by the youth and adult members. Analytically, we draw on the notion of sociolinguistic scale – or the ‘spatiotemporal scope of understandability’ – to enquire into how participants build scalar frames in their discourse (Blommaert, Westinen & Leppänen, 2015). We also employ the notion of transidiomatic practices to consider the ‘comingling of localized, multilingual interactions and technologically mediated, digitalized communication’ (Jacquemet, 2016: 8), as site participants deploy full linguistic repertoires and digital and embodied modes in constructing meaning. The ethnographic data we analyse include video-recordings of interactions and participant observations. The chapter contributes an understanding of how participants build understandings of themselves and others as they confront different worldviews, and of how interaction in the setting challenges monolingual, monocultural and monomodal approaches to education.

The chapter is structured as follows. We begin by outlining the main theoretical notions that guide the analysis in relation to the conceptual framework presented by Hawkins in the opening of this volume. We then frame our participation in the *Global StoryBridges* network as one of several collaborative educational initiatives in the municipality where our site is located. The research methodology is then presented, together with two extracts of video data, which are analysed and discussed in order to later draw conclusions in the final section of the chapter.

### **‘Trans’ practices across modes, languages and participants**

In introducing the transmodalities framework, Hawkins (2018: 55) refers to the ‘trans-’ turn in studies of language and communication – partly thrust forward by scholarship on translanguaging (e.g., García & Li 2014; Vallejo & Dooly 2020) – to refer to ‘the current era of globalization in which communication occurs with ever-increasing rapidity among ever-expanding audiences, through rapidly changing semiotic means and modes’. Hawkins claims that this ‘trans-’ turn also highlights ‘the significant increase of attention to the ways in which language is enmeshed with other semiotic resources in constructing meanings in communication’ (2018: 55) in fluid and unpredictable ways. In her work on transmodalities, similar to the scholarship on translanguaging, Hawkins builds on the notion of repertoire

originally proposed by Gumperz (1964) and later developed by scholars such as Blommaert and Bakus (2013) and Rymes (2014). Transmodalities also extends work on multimodality rooted in social semiotics (e.g., Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2011; Jewitt, 2017). While the emphasis in translanguaging work tends to be face-to-face encounters, in the case of transmodalities the emphasis is on the complexities of multimodal and transnational communication exchanges in which languages and other semiotic resources necessarily co-exist and are co-dependent, each having the potential to contribute equally to the construction of meaning.

Until now, transmodalities work has proved a powerful theoretical and analytical framework for analysing the processes of production and reception of the digital stories created and shared as part of *Global StoryBridges*. For example, in a recent article (Vallejo, Moore, Llompart & Hawkins, 2020) we draw on the transmodalities approach to untangle an ethical challenge that emerged in the production of one particular video at the site in Catalonia. In the analysis presented in this chapter, however, our focus will not be on a video production for transnational exchange, but rather on interactional data involving participants from our site only. Our in-depth account of what takes place ‘behind the scenes’ during a project session contributes to the multilayered ethnographic analyses which Hawkins (2018) refers to as a necessary development for transmodalities research.

A key characteristic of the data we present in the analytical section of this chapter is the participation of the Google Translate tool on the laptop computer that the youth have at their disposal and which they used, in this data, to mediate communication between themselves and a Chinese project facilitator/PhD student. The data also reveal how the young people are informed by the global circulation of and access to Asian popular culture (music, fashion, etc.), through digital technologies and global social networks of communication and information. Thus, in our work we also draw on the notion of transidiomatic practices as put forward by Jacquemet (2005) and defined by him as ‘the multilingual communicative practices found at the intersection between deterritorialized people and digital interfaces’ (Jacquemet, 2016: 8). This notion complements those of transmodalities and translanguaging and helps us to consider more closely the ‘comingling of localized, multilingual interactions and technologically mediated, digitalized communication’ (Jacquemet, 2016: 8). Jacquemet frames the notion of transidiomatic practices within work on sociolinguistic superdiversity and migration and has developed it in his work on asylum processes in particular. While the context of our work is quite different, Jacquemet’s attention to the ways interactions involve both human and non-human (digital) actors, and to the role of communication technologies in transforming interactions (e.g., Skype or Facebook) and access to knowledge (e.g., Google) in these processes is informative. His work describes, for example, how digital translation tools such as Google Translate or internet search engines become significant participants in asylum processes, not without their challenges and imprecisions.

## **The interactional construction of places and people**

While the notions introduced above help describe how languages, modes, and human and non-human actors come into play in complex interactions, Hawkins (2014) also proposes the concept of critical cosmopolitanism, developing the work of Appiah (2005), Delanty (2006) and Hansen (2010, 2014) among others, to consider how diverse individuals encounter one another in contexts of mobility of people, materials and resources, messages, etc., guided by ethical principles of care, respect and openness to otherness (Hawkins 2018). This critical disposition is particularly important when reflecting on how youth in different global locations and with different cultural and moral frames of reference face each other in the process of producing and receiving digital stories as part of the *Global StoryBridges* project. It is also relevant in our site to consider how young people and facilitators with dissimilar geographical, cultural and linguistic backgrounds engage in day-to-day interactions within sessions and come to know themselves and each other. In particular, we are interested in how they discursively construct indexical understandings of where they come from and who they are in relation to place.

The notion of scale was introduced into sociolinguistics by Blommaert (e.g., 2007) as a way of handling the complexities of 'context'. In a more recent development of the notion, Blommaert et al. (2015: 123) define scales as the 'spatiotemporal scope of understandability; we are thus looking at the degrees to which particular signs can be expected to be understandable'. Scales, according to these authors, are a particular form of 'indexical order', or normative frames of expectation with regard to meaning (Blommaert 2005). In their discussion piece, Blommaert et al. (2015) refer to Westinen's (2014) doctoral research exploring the construction of scalar frames of reference and of an 'ideological topography' of Finland in Finnish Hip Hop. This topography includes references to geographical, social and cultural margins and centres and stereotypes of people and places, among other aspects. Such an ideological topography also emerges in the data we present in this chapter, in which the participants build scalar frames of understandability in their discourse and use these scalar references to evoke normative frames of expectation about their interlocutors. These expectations in turn become questioned in the unfolding talk as they are faced with contrasting evidence.

### **Introducing the site in Catalonia**

The secondary school level *Global StoryBridges* site in Catalonia is based in a municipality in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area where approximately 13,000 inhabitants live in an area of less than one square kilometre. Visually the town is characterised by rows of public housing tower blocks built in the 1970s (towards the end of the Franco dictatorship) to provide accommodation mainly for workers migrating from other parts of Spain. There is also a significant population of Catalan and Spanish gypsies and of more recent migrants from other parts of the globe. From an aerial view, the town represents the map of the Iberian Peninsula and the Balearic Islands, and the street names refer to different Spanish toponyms and geographic features. The municipality is bounded by two major highways. In terms of educational facilities, there are four primary schools, two secondary schools, a school for vocational training, a school for adults, two day-care centres,

a library and a civic centre. Disposable household income is below the Catalan average, while unemployment in general, and youth unemployment in particular, are quite a lot higher. The town is located less than a kilometre – walking distance – from a large public university and within kilometres of innovative business and technological hubs with international projection.

*Global StoryBridges* in our context is one of several initiatives implemented as part of a larger consortium-led project that began in 2016. The steering group of the larger project is led by a university outreach office and is made up of head teachers and English teachers from the town's two secondary schools, members of the local council, the Catalan Education Department and university-based researchers – the latter group including the authors of this chapter. The project is aimed at boosting educational and professional outcomes generally, and English language competences in particular, of youth in the municipality (see Masats & Guerrero, 2018). Young people's educational outcomes in the town are among the poorest in Catalonia. Indeed, the results of the Basic Competences tests taken by all 4th year ESO (compulsory secondary education) students in Catalonia reveal enormous differences in educational results between youth in more and less affluent places. Students are assessed in Science and Technology, Mathematics, Catalan, Spanish and English, and socioeconomic differences are most accentuated in students' results for English. According to the data, approximately half of the students at the two secondary schools in the municipality do not achieve minimum competence in English. The consortium-led project sets out from a first premise that investigating and taking action to improve the competences in English of the youth in this municipality is a meaningful contribution towards more socially-just educational outcomes for them.

The consortium-led project also proceeds on the supposition that impacting on the English language competences of the youth targeted will contribute to more equitable professional outlooks for them. It is no secret that the concentration in recent history of military and socioeconomic power in English-speaking nations and English-dominated multinational corporations has made English central to globalised international relations, higher education, media and business, among other fields. The European Commission (e.g., 2013), among other official bodies, has repeatedly issued recommendations linking competences in foreign languages to domestic and international employability of youth, while Spain continues to lag behind European targets in this regard.

Finally, we are guided by a third conviction that young people learn not only in schools, but also in the myriad of interactions across space and time that they encounter beyond the classroom. Research has demonstrated that educational opportunities and practices beyond school hours are decisive in youth's educational trajectories, at the same time as access to out-of-school learning opportunities, including out-of-school English activities, is often obstructed by socioeconomic factors. Non-formal education has the potential to either counter or enhance socioeconomic and educational inequalities, depending on who can or cannot afford access.

The ten youth participants in our *Global StoryBridges* site were approximately 14 years old at the time the data presented in this chapter was collected (2018-2019 academic year) and had a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The site was facilitated by four researchers – all of whom author this chapter – and one student volunteer. Both the student volunteer and one of the researchers (a PhD student) were from China and had been in Catalonia/Spain for a short time, while the other three researchers were originally from other parts of the world (Chile, Menorca and Australia) and had lived for many years in the region. Sessions were held in the municipality's Youth Centre once a week for two hours.

### **Interaction 'behind the scenes' at our site**

In this section of the chapter we analyse two extracts of interaction from the same weekly project session at our site. In the day-to-day flow of the sessions, different overlapping and complementary activities take place. Some of these activities are more directly related to the project's vertebral tasks of producing digital stories for sharing and engaging in commentary on the digital stories with the youth at sites in other parts of the globe. Other activities, which are a necessary foundation for the former, are more closely related to establishing and upholding constructive relationships among the participants and negotiating roles and responsibilities.

The sequences of interaction represented in the transcripts below emerge as part of the main activity being carried out during the session, while also deviating from it. The adults facilitating the session – Claudia, Emilee and Miaomiao – are guiding the youth to generate and type up a list of the places in their town where they would like to do some filming for future digital stories (the fourth project researcher/facilitator was not present). The young people struggle to agree on interesting places in the town and propose going to Barcelona or to the nearby university instead. Some of the young participants have an avid interest in 'all things Asia', including K-pop, Chinese cinema and Japanese manga, as well as novels, food, fashion and languages. Miaomiao's participation as facilitator/PhD researcher in the sessions (as well as the participation of another Chinese student volunteer who was not present in this session) regularly prompts curiosity about and enquiries from the young people about her tastes, her languages, her schooling and life experiences and her familiarity with different Asian cultural products with which the youth are acquainted. The youth are much less interested in the backgrounds and interests of the other (older) adult facilitators, who, as mentioned earlier, also hail from other parts of the world.

The participants named<sup>1</sup> in the transcriptions and who are visible in the screenshot from the video recording (Figure 1) are: NAN: Nanyamka (youth participant, previously schooled in Ghana); NAI: Naiara (youth participant); SAR: Sara (youth participant); JUL: Julian (youth participant) and MIA: Miaomiao (facilitator/PhD student from China). EMI: Emilee (facilitator/researcher) and CLA: Claudia (facilitator/researcher) also participate in the two extracts but are not in the view of the camera. Another significant participant in the interaction is

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<sup>1</sup> The names of people used in this chapter are pseudonyms in order to protect participants' anonymity, with the exception of the adult facilitators/authors who agree to their real names being used.

a laptop computer (COM) handled by Nanyamka and Naiara in order to use the Google Translate tool and which is oriented to by all of the participants taking part in the interaction at different times. The transcription conventions are included in the Appendix to the chapter.



Figure 1: Distribution of participants in camera view

We now present a first short extract that is representative of the interactional dynamics, and the transidiomatic practices involving the computer in particular, as they initially emerge and then endure for the remainder of the project session. During the activity of brainstorming places to film in the municipality, the students re-signify the role of the laptop computer from a simple note-taking tool to conversational participant and linguistic mediator. In line 1 of the transcription Nanyamka types a statement into the Google Translate tool on the laptop computer to be translated into Chinese for Miaomiao and read aloud by the same application. It is not clear from the video recording, nor were the authors able to see as participants in the interaction, which language she uses to type into the computer. We can assume, however, based on her later comment in line 64 of the second extract – “estamos en español” (we are in Spanish) – and on other comments made in the recording, that the computer was set to translate from Spanish to Chinese. In any case, the use of the translation tool to mediate communication between Miaomiao and the young people – and in particular between Miaomiao and Nanyamka in this case – is significant. Miaomiao knows little Spanish but is quite fluent in English, as is Nanyamka, having been previously educated at an English-medium school in Ghana. Communication between them usually flows with little obstruction. While it is not the main focus of this chapter, Nanyamka often takes on the role of linguistic mediator in the project sessions between Spanish and English herself. Furthermore, while the other young people’s English language proficiency is below that of Nanyamka, at other times in the project sessions they draw on Nanyamka, the other adult facilitators or their collective competence in English to achieve communication. Thus, we can only explain the participation of the computer in this session as linguistic mediator in

terms of the youths' critical cosmopolitanism – their curiosity for listening to the Chinese language and their desire to use a digital tool at their disposal for connecting with Miaomiao through this language. The choice to include Chinese through the computer could also be interpreted as a way to generate complicity with Miaomiao.

1. NAN: (typing on computer keyboard)
2. NAI: (reading from computer screen) wǒmen xiǎng jìlù (name of town omitted) [(name of town omitted)]
3. NAN. [dónde está?  
*translation: where is it*
4. NAI: (pointing to computer screen) aquí está.  
*translation: it's here*
5. NAN: sí pero dónde es (.) para que se escuche?  
*translation: yes but where is it to listen to it*
6. (NAN points to the computer screen, NAN presses play, all the young participants look at MIA, NAI points at MIA, see Figure 2))
7. C: wǒmen xiǎng jìlù (name of town omitted) de hǎi'àn  
*translation: we want to record the coast of (name of town omitted)*
8. (NAN presses play again, others still looking at MIA))
9. COM: wǒmen xiǎng jìlù (name of town omitted) de hǎi'àn
10. MIA: ah (..) that it's not correct.
11. NAN: ah! (.) [(pretending to hit the computer) me has fallado!  
*translation: ah you let me down*
12. (laughter from all participants)

Once Nanyamka has typed the statement into the computer, Naiara reads the translation as it appears on the screen (line 2). Nanyamka then seeks Naiara's help to find the button allowing the translation to be read aloud by the computer tool (lines 3-5). Having located the button, Nanyamka presses play and all of the young people orient their gaze and bodies towards Miaomiao (line 6 and Figure 2) as they listen to the computer speak Chinese. The English version of the statement read by the computer is roughly "we want to record the coast of (name of town omitted)". The students are referring to the town where the *Global StoryBridges* site is located, which is approximately 20kms inland from the coast, thus the comment is meant to be ironic. As mentioned already, the students had been struggling to identify places of interest to film in the municipality. Thus, the statement is interesting in terms of transidiomatic practices in the way that its vocalisation crosses languages and is mediated by the computer, as we observe throughout the interaction. It is also interesting because of what it tells us about how the young people ideologically construct their town as an uninteresting place lacking attractions of interest to youth at other sites, such as a beach.

Interestingly, in response to the statement, and similar to elsewhere in the recording, Miaomiao focuses on the accuracy of the Chinese version rather than on the message itself, thus further diverting from the task of deciding where to film (line 10). Miaomiao mistakenly hears “jìnrù” (come into) rather than “jìlù” (record), while the translation “hǎi'àn” to refer to coast is unusual. She seems to interpret the young people’s use of Chinese through the computer in terms of their interest in learning the language and positions herself as language teacher in response. Reacting to Miaomiao’s response, Nanyamka reproaches the translation tool in line 11, as she does elsewhere in the recording, thereby positioning it not only as a tool facilitating transidiomatic communication, but also as an accountable interactional participant.



Figure 2: Screenshot taken at line 6

The second extract takes place a few minutes after the first. Previous to the second extract, as we have seen in the first one, Nanyamka writes a question into the translation tool to be translated and read aloud in Chinese for Miaomiao. We are again unable to say which language Nanyamka employs to type the question, but can make the reasonable guess that the tool continued to be set to translate from Spanish to Chinese. Given that Nanyamka and most of the young people know enough English to formulate the question asked at the beginning of this extract – “what do you like about Spain?” – and to collectively understand the answers given by Miaomiao in the following lines, we again explain their recourse to the computer as linguistic mediator in terms of their interest in hearing Chinese and using it with Miaomiao.

1. MIA:        you want to ask me? (.) what-
2. NAN:        do you like about Spain?
3. MIA:        [what do I like of Spain?

4. NAN: [(to COM) traductor nos has fallado varias veces.  
*translation: translator you have failed us several times*
5. NAI: mmh
6. MIA: aaah (.) weather
7. (.)
8. EMI: weather. (laughs)
9. (general laughter)
10. NAN: weather is beautiful.
11. MIA: not today not today. weather food and ah the church.
12. NAN: (stroking her right hand, see Figure 3) la iglesia.  
*translation: the church*
13. NAI: (moving gaze from NAN - see Figure 3 - to MIA - see  
Figure 4) la iglesia?  
*translation: the church*
14. (NAN and SAR make eye contact - NAN seems unenthusiastic and SAR  
smiles confused, see Figure 4)
15. NAN: (to MIA) church right?
16. MIA: yes church.
17. NAN: (to NAI) lo que escuchas. [iglesia.  
*translation: what you hear church*
18. CLA: [ask her Naiara (.) ask her (.) why
19. NAI: why?
20. SAR: (laughs)
21. MIA: why?
22. NAI: why?
23. JUL: te sorprende?  
*translation: does it surprise you*
24. NAI: no.
25. MIA: because is beautiful. the weather's beautiful.
26. NAN: but here or [in Barcelona?
27. MIA: [ee-
28. NAI: [you are (.) Christian? or- (looks to NAN for assistance)
29. MIA: both (.) Christian?
30. NAN: are you Christian? or-

31. MIA: no I'm not Christian but is beautiful is beautiful.

32. NAN: ella creo que es buda.  
*translation: I think she is Buddha*

33. SAR: but in (.) in China? [you have xxx? eh-

34. NAI: [y por qué va a ir a la iglesia?  
*translation: and why is she going to go to church*

35. NAN: [y?  
*translation: and*

36. NAI: [la iglesia es de Dios.  
*translation: the church is of God*

37. SAR: [como se dice iglesia?  
*translation: how do you say church*

38. NAN: [pero iglesia no es para los-  
*translation: but church is not for the*

39. CLA: church.

40. SAR: church?

41. NAN: [la iglesia no es para los budos.  
*translation: church is not for the Buddhas*

42. MIA: [oh no we have no church. we only have temples.

43. NAI: los bud?- ya por eso pero los- pero le gusta-  
*translation: the Budd yeah that's why but the but she likes it*

44. NAN: dice que le gusta porque es bonito y que allí-  
*translation: she says she likes it because it's beautiful and that there*

45. SAR: y que allí no hay iglesia.  
*translation: and that there is no church there*

46. NAN: por eso. que allí no hay-  
*translation: that's it that there they aren't*

47. NAI: hay templos.  
*translation: there are temples*

48. NAN: sí.  
*translation: yes*

49. NAI: espera. (typing on computer keyboard)  
*translation: wait*

50. NAN: [you have temples in your country?

51. JUL: [xxxx llevan a la iglesia.  
*translation: they take them to the church*

52. MIA: a lot of temples.

53. NAN:       when they are young they prepare them to go to the temple  
                  and dress with a yellow:?

54. MIA:       ee:

55. NAI:       (presses key on keyboard)

56. COM:       sìmiào  
                  *translation: temple*

57. NAI:       sìmiào  
                  *translation: temple*

58. NAN:       xx

59. MIA:       yes to learn kung fu yes?

60. NAN:       yes. and they- they- ay- (reaches for keyboard then  
                  changes her mind and places hand to her head)

61. MIA:       they don't have hair.

62. NAN:       yes.

63. MIA:       yes it's a tradition in my province.

64. SAR:       (writes on computer keyboard)

65. MIA:       the city is Kaifeng near my city.  
                  the [kids]

66. NAI:       [no no estamos en español.]  
                  *translation: no no we're in Spanish*

67. MIA:       learn kung fu when they are very young.

68. NAN:       yes. I read a book about it

Miaomiao's question in line 1 – “you want to ask me? what?” – and Nanyamka's scolding of the computer in line 4, similar to what was observed in the previous extract – “translator you have failed us several times” – suggest that Miaomiao does not understand the question as it is posed to her by Nanyamka through the computer. This prompts Nanyamka to ask the question in English through her own voice in line 2 and after line 4 the computer is not brought into the interaction again until line 49. The question – “what do you like about Spain” – establishes the nation-state (as opposed to a city or a region) as the ‘benchmark scale’ in Blommaert, Westinen and Leppänen's (2015: 120) terms, or the scale offering the young people and Miaomiao the greatest scope of understandability. In response to the question, Miaomiao explains that she likes “weather” – generating laughter and commentary as this particular day it was raining and miserable –, “food” and “church” (lines 6-11).

Miaomiao's reference to the church is met by surprise on behalf of her young interlocutors. In line 12, Nanyamka strokes her right hand (Figure 3) as she translates Miaomiao's response into Spanish, possibly to stress that particular piece of information for her peers, while her gesture and falling into nation also

express her incredulity at the response given by Miaomiao. Nanyamka's gaze is focused on Miaomiao at this point (Figure 3). Naiara looks with disbelief at Nanyamka as she translates the response in line 12 (Figure 3), before turning to look at Miaomiao and seeking confirmation of her answer in Spanish with rising confirmation – “la iglesia?” – in line 13. Interestingly, at this point Nanyamka and Sara, one of the young participants who has so far been quiet, make eye contact; as they do, Nanyamka's expression suggests she is unenthusiastic about Miaomiao's interest in church, while Sara smiles in a way that suggests she is also confused (Figure 4). Indeed, the young people's frames of reference – they are asking someone from China about Spain – evoke stereotypical understandings both of Miaomiao (for example, that she would not attend church) and of Spain (including that all Spanish churches are Christian ones, as emerges in the following lines).



Figure 3: Screenshot taken at line 12



Figure 4: Screenshot taken at line 13

In line 15, Nanyamka again takes on the role of linguistic mediator, translating Naiara's question from line 13 into English for Miaomiao – "church right?". Miaomiao, who seems quite unaware of the young people's surprise, confirms that she likes church in line 16. In line 17, using Spanish – "lo que escuchas, iglesia" (what you hear, church) –, Nanyamka ratifies Naiara's understanding of Miaomiao's response. Claudia, one of the other adult facilitators participating in the session, prompts Naiara to ask Miaomiao to expand her answer in line 18, which Naiara does in line 19 ("why?"), prompting laughter from Sara. Miaomiao also seems slightly surprised by the interrogation in line 21 as she repeats Naiara's question, seeking confirmation of it. Julian, who until now has watched on silently, asks Naiara if she is surprised by Miaomiao's liking for church ("te sorprende?", are you surprised?). Still looking at Miaomiao, Naiara responds with a "no". Miaomiao then justifies herself and simultaneously shows that she has not picked up on the reason for the young people's confusion, explaining that "the weather's beautiful" (line 25). At this point, Nanyamka poses her own clarification question to Miaomiao – "but here or in Barcelona?" – which scales down the frame of reference from the nation-state to either the capital city of the region (Barcelona, where Miaomiao lives) or to the municipality where the project takes place. Indeed, while Barcelona is known as a tourist destination in part due to its churches and other famous buildings, in which case Miaomiao's interest in them might be conceivable, in generating their list of places to film for the project the young people had discarded the church in their own town as a place of relevance or interest to them and to other young participants in the *Global StoryBridges* project.

In overlap with Nanyamka's question, Naiara formulates a different one which prompts further enquiries. She asks in line 28, "you are Christian or?". Both Nanyamka's and Naiara's questions receive responses in line 29. Miaomiao says she likes the churches in both Barcelona and the municipality, and repeats Naiara's mention of Christianity with rising intonation, seeking clarification of the question. Naiara looks to Nanyamka for language assistance in line 28 (Figure 5). Nanyamka repeats Naiara's question for Miaomiao in line 30, implicitly correcting her peer's English grammar as she does so. Miaomiao responds that she is not Christian, but she finds the churches beautiful (line 31).



Figure 5: Screenshot at line 29

The discussion about Miaomiao's religion and about churches is expanded from line 32 in two parallel conversations; her responses continue to contradict the young people's stereotypical understandings of China and being Chinese. Speaking with Naiara, Nanyamka puts forward the hypothesis, based on her knowledge of 'all things Asia', that Miaomiao is Buddhist. This prompts Naiara to ask why Miaomiao would go to the church then if the church is for worshipping the Christian God (lines 34 and 36). Nanyamka agrees in lines 38 and 41 that church is not for Buddhist people. It is interesting that neither of the pair use the correct word for Buddhist (i.e., budista) in Spanish, suggesting that they are not terribly familiar with this religion. Meanwhile, in overlap with Nanyamka's and Naiara's conversation, Sara speaks with Miaomiao, with language assistance from Claudia, asking her whether there are churches in China (lines 33, 37, 40). Miaomiao responds that there are no churches in China, only temples. Of course, there are indeed Christian churches in China, however Miaomiao deploys her own topographical ideologies about China in making this claim. From line 43 to 48, Sara, Nanyamka and Naiara bring their information together, reaching the consensus that despite being Buddhist in their imagination (which has neither been confirmed nor refuted in the interaction), Miaomiao likes churches because they are beautiful and that in China there are no churches, only temples.

In line 49, Naiara asks to halt the conversation – “espera” (wait) – as she takes the laptop computer and types into the translation tool, presumably “templo” (temple) in Spanish, engaging in the same type of transidiomatic practice as Nanyamka elsewhere in the extracts. The computer translates the word into Chinese and says it out loud when cued to do so by Naiara (lines 55 and 56). Naiara repeats the word, however she does not succeed in getting the group's full attention, with her peers' and Miaomiao's attention divided between this activity and a parallel conversation between Nanyamka and Miaomiao. Nanyamka is asking Miaomiao about the temples in China, drawing again on her knowledge of Asian cultures from global popular culture in probing into whether children

attend the temples dressed in yellow (line 53) with shaved heads (lines 60-62). It is actually Miaomiao who helps Nanyamka to verbalise this enquiry, which Nanyamka first expresses with gestures (putting her hand to her head). It is interesting here that Nanyamka does not resort to the use of the translator tool, thus showing the many modalities at play. Miaomiao confirms this feature of the temples in China, including in her own province of origin. The extract closes in line 68 with Nanyamka explaining that she knows this information as she read a book about it.

We now turn to the implications of this analysis.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

In the previous section we have offered a glance into youth-led interactional practices at one particular *Global StoryBridges* site. In doing so, we aimed to shed light on how scalar frames of understandability are built and the multimodal ways in which the youth engage in meaningful exchanges. As pointed out in the introduction to this volume, one of main aims of the project is to develop critical cosmopolitanism among participants in very different sites through transnational and transmodal asynchronous encounters. The frame of reference in these asynchronous communication exchanges, as shown in other chapters in this volume, necessarily includes not only the worldview of the digital story youth producers but also of the addressees. In synchronous face-to-face encounters such as those analysed in this chapter we observe how similar understandings of people and places are built, confirmed or questioned in real-time. Thus, as clear as it is that our globalised lives require that youth experience transnational and transmodal encounters framed by criticality and collaboration to prompt openness and empathy with global others, the ethnographic observation of the inner dynamics at our site show that encounters that promote critical cosmopolitanism can also become relevant in local interactions.

In the extracts, we have seen young site participants from diverse backgrounds engaging with a Chinese facilitator/PhD researcher, drawing on and enriching their keen interest in Asian cultures. What strikes us as interesting is that while the *Global StoryBridges* project has a more or less established protocol to trigger engagement with global 'others' on a transnational scale through producing and exchanging audiovisual narratives and questions-answers with peers at other sites, this particular face-to-face interaction can be seen to accomplish similar objectives, while being initiated by the site youth as a deviation from the planned activity. This is doubly significant as at our site we have experienced irregular success in engaging young participants in meaningful encounters with their peers from other global sites. Against this backdrop, a somehow unexpected factor (the Chinese origin of an adult participant) opened a space for transcultural and translinguistic communication 'within' the site, where youth actively deploy their full linguistic repertoires, knowledge, curiosity and skills, while displaying and negotiating different roles in interaction. A clear example of this negotiated agency in the extracts is displayed by Nanyamka, a girl with a migrant background who had learned English as the medium of instruction at school in Ghana and who offers a lot of insight on Asian cultural and religious traditions, regularly self-

adopting or being assigned the roles of language and/or cultural mediator between her peers and Miaomiao.

We clearly see sociolinguistic scales or frames of understanding intersecting in these encounters: the youths' interest and knowledge about 'all things Asia', which somehow shape their local interactions with Miaomiao, are informed by the global circulation of and access to Asian popular culture (music, fashion, etc.) through digital technologies and global social networks of communication and information. Miaomiao is positioned by the youth as a Chinese person in Spain, which indexes different stereotypical assumptions including that she is not a Christian. Miaomiao's assertion that she likes church in response to their enquiry about her favourite things about Spain challenges the young people's 'pop-culture' informed imaginations and expectations about Chinese people, complexifying their frames of reference. Her unexpected response prompts a great number of interactional turns during which an ideological topography emerges and is confronted with unanticipated evidence which needs reconciling in the youths' worldviews. A translocal scalar frame of 'what it is to be Chinese' encounters a local scalar frame of 'who goes to the church'. At the same time, Miaomiao also tries to make sense of the youths' reaction to her answer. Meanwhile, Miaomiao's mention of Spanish weather and food as likeable aspects of the country fit well within the young people's normative frame of reference for a Chinese person in Spain and are accepted without further discussion.

The extracts also show how the young participants' curiosity and eagerness to know more about Miaomiao and Chinese language and culture relate to their strategic assemblage of multiple, digital and embodied modes, including artefacts such as the computer's translator tool and other people. (Note that we use the singular for language and culture here as we do not see hegemonic understandings of China and being Chinese questioned in the interaction suggesting that some opportunities remain for the development of critical cosmopolitanism.) By deploying expanded communicative repertoires and resources, the youth try to make sense of the scalar frames of understandability they use in their discourse. This resonates with Jacquemet's (2005, 2016) notion of transidiomatic practices. We would like to discuss the transidiomatic practices involving the role of the laptop computer a little further. Laptops are a regular feature of *Global StoryBridges* sites globally and usually serve a key function in the project's aim of editing the digital stories and facilitating transnational exchanges. However, as we have seen in the extracts, the relevance of the computer – and of the Google Translate tool in particular – in the site interaction studied here differs, as the youth attribute to it the status of non-human participant and linguistic mediator, whom they incorporate, set aside and even scold according to the needs of the communicative situation.

In line with this, Jacquemet suggests that transidiomatic practices conceive digital communication technologies as much more than facilitators of interaction and mobility, understanding them as:

altering the very nature of this interactivity, confronting people with expanded rules and resources for the construction of social identity and

transforming people's sense of place, cultural belonging, and social relations. The integration of communication technologies into late modern communicative practices has resulted in the emergence of a telemediated cultural field, occupying a space in everyday experience that is distinct from yet integrated with face-to-face interactions of physical proximity. This field is transforming human experience in all its dimensions (2016:4).

Indeed, as the transcripts presented in this chapter show, the role of digital technologies in this interaction cannot be defined solely in terms of being a tool for communication or disconnected from the social relations at play. As we explained in introducing the first extract, both the youth and Miaomiao were able to communicate through multilingual and multimodal resources without the Google Translate tool. The choice of recurring default to the computer as linguistic mediator has more to do with their willingness to hear and use Chinese with Miaomiao than with overcoming communicative obstacles. This language choice could also be interpreted as a way to create complicity by attempting to involve Miaomiao, for example, with their humorous proposal to record their town's non-existent coast.

The fact that the youth participants can creatively choose tools and strategies for communicating without strict adherence to specific languages or modes enhances the non-formal educational settings' potential to promote co-learning dynamics (Li, 2014) where students can engage in creative and meaningful ways and actively display skills that do not usually find a place in mainstream educational settings. Along with promoting flexible expert-learner role arrangements, and fluid language, cultural and multimodal uses, such settings can challenge still pervasive monolingual, monocultural and monomodal approaches to teaching and learning. Considering that one of the main rationales of *Global StoryBridges* is to boost participants' foreign language competence in English, it is indeed relevant to document how local practices such as the ones presented in this chapter promote opportunities for learning English and learning about others, along with other languages and digital resources, in contexts of meaningful, critical cosmopolitan exchanges.

In this sense, and as a final reflection, we would like to reiterate the contribution of an ethnographic approach to the understanding not only of processes of transmodal and transnational meaning making and language learning across sites, but also of the many other local and translocal practices where multilingualism, critical cosmopolitan curiosity and openness can be boosted by the program.

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## **Appendix**

### **Transcription conventions**

1. Intonation:
  - a. Falling: .
  - b. Rising ?
2. Pauses: (.)
3. Overlapping: [text
4. Interruption: text-
5. Lengthening of a sound: text:
6. Transcriber's comments: (text)
7. Incomprehensible fragment: xxxx
8. Translation on non-English text: *translation: italics below original*