



THE USE OF INDEXICALS ON THE
COMMUNICATION CONTINUUM:
UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT-DEPENDENCY
FROM A SOCIO-COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

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1. OBJECTIVE:

- To describe how indexicals are used by interlocutors on the intra-and-inter-cultural continuum during the process of interpreting contextual cues, deictic deduction, and constructing common ground
- To explore indexicals' functions for common ground construction in the relatively homogeneity and heterogeneity of socio-cultural backgrounds




➤ Problem Statement

➤ How does **context-dependency** work in intercultural communication where there is more reliance on language created on the spot by individuals, rather than on mutually shared prefabricated language and pre-existing frames?

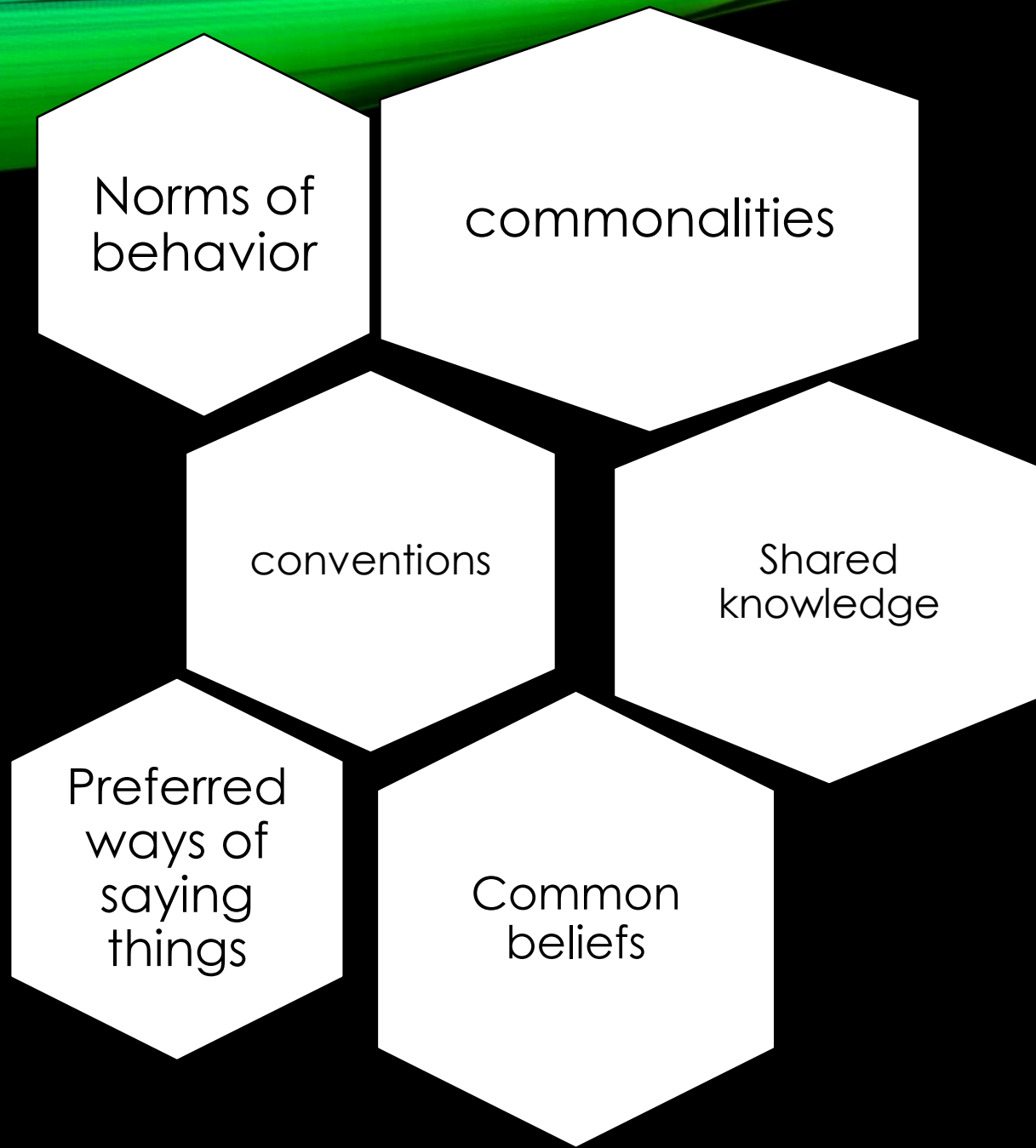
➤ **Limited common ground** and limited familiarity with the target culture among intercultural interlocutors affects **their contextual interpretation** and **their ways of using language** to articulate intended meaning

➔ It is important to treat the differences between intracultural communication and intercultural communication as a continuum rather than a dichotomy (Kecskes, 2018).

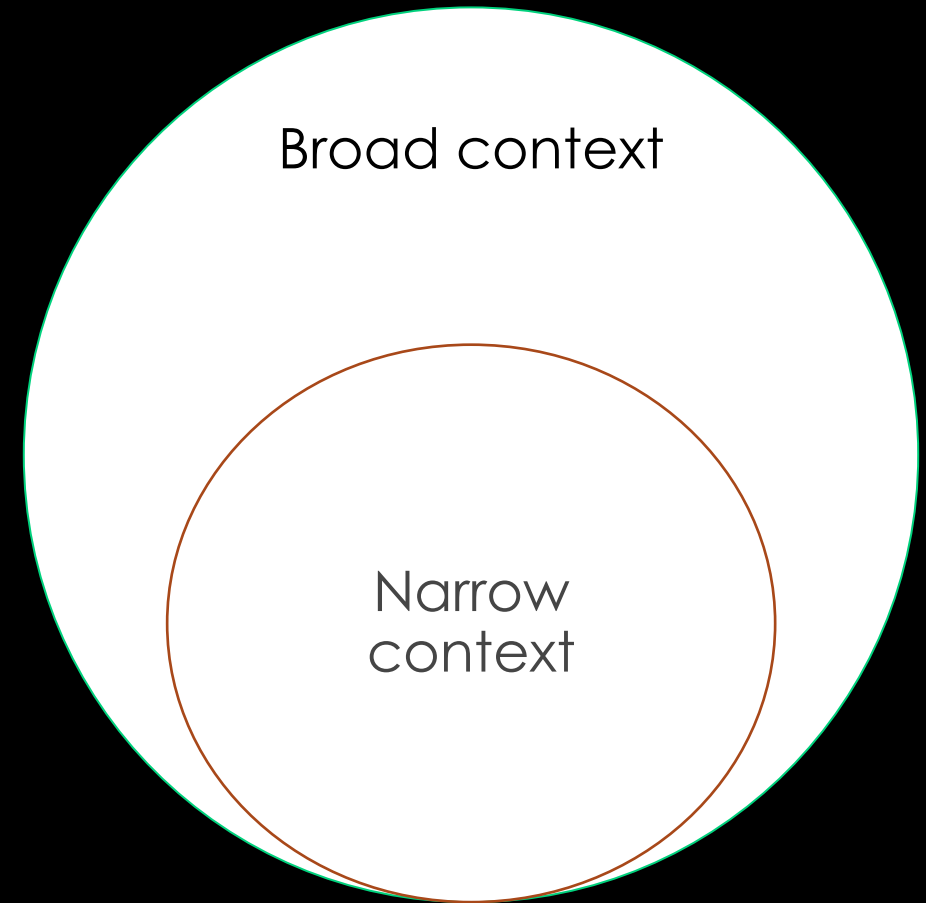
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- **Why to investigate deixis use? The relationship between context-dependency and deixis**
 - Among current strands of studies on context-dependencies to understand context apprehension and speakers' meaning, scholars have investigated the act of pointing (deixes) by looking into different types of deictic markers or indexicals (cf. Hanks, 1992).
 - The reflection on indexicals could offer insights into understanding the language user's belief, self-knowledge, personal perspectives, consciousness, and other cognitive matters (Kaplan, 1989).
 - This study considers indexicals linguistic markers that help us describe how context is interpreted for deictic deduction, and how common ground is constructed among the interlocutors, on the intra-and-inter-cultural continuum.

Types of deixis

Person Deixis	<p><i>First person: I've never had a baby.</i></p> <p><i>Second person: So, what do you usually do at your baby shower?</i></p> <p><i>Third person: Brazilian male: I just had a niece, so we buy her like a bunch of clothes.</i></p>
Spatial Deixis	<p><i>American female: ...we came here, we paid for your gifts.</i></p>
Temporal Deixis	<p><i>Korean female speaker: It is very traditional, these days rare...</i></p>
Discourse Deixis	<p><i>Chinese female speaker: That usually happens when <i>it's</i>...like...a year old?</i></p> <p><i>Korean female speaker: It's like the same, yeah.</i></p>



Traditional views



(Bach, 1997)

Socio-cognitive Theoretical Framework

(Kecskes, 2008, 2010, 2013; Kecskes & Zhang, 2009, 2013)

- *societal-cultural* side and the *individual* side of the speaker/hearer
- *Emergent situational context*: everything out there in the world that is available as cues for the interlocutors to make use of during cognitive processing of information for meaning co-construction
- *Prior context*: individuals have experienced in a given speech community is encoded in the lexical concepts and drives salience

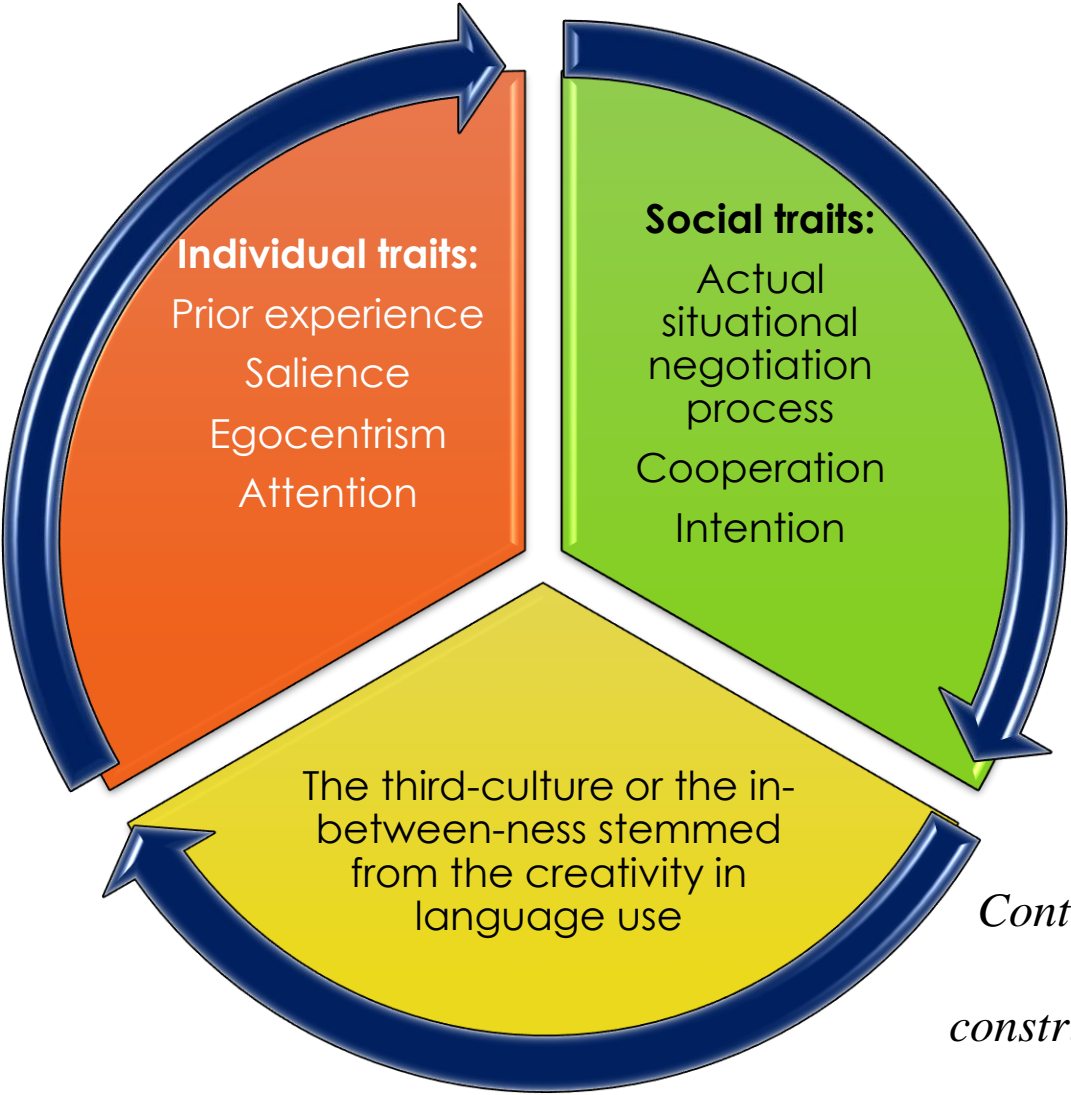
Intracultural Communication

Intercultural Communication



High common ground

Low common ground

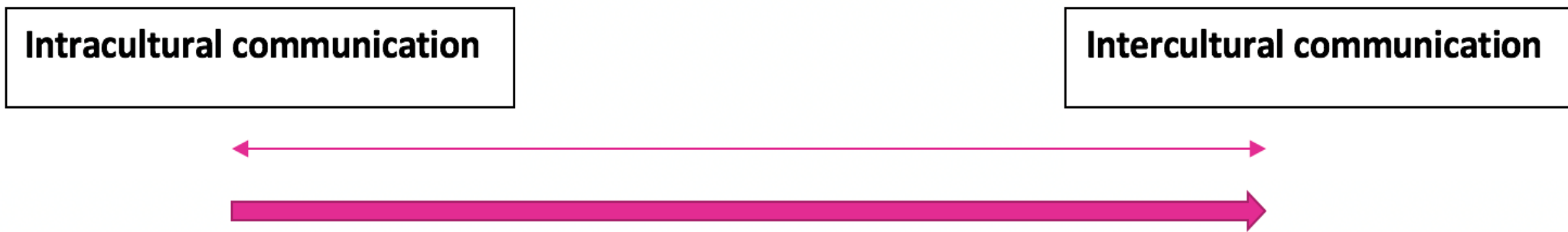


Context comprehension and common ground construction in intra-cultural and inter-cultural communication continuum

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- **RQ1.** How is deixis used differently on the intra-and-inter-cultural communication continuum?
- **RQ2.** What are the different functions of indexicals on the communication continuum to construct common ground in a context?

3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS:



Hight common ground:

Low common ground:

Intra-cultural Group

Inter-cultural Group 1

Inter-cultural Group 2

Demographical Summary

Intracultural Group (Control) - 3 females from New York State
- 1 male from New York State

Intercultural Group 1

- 2 Chinese female speakers
- 1 Korean female speaker
- 1 Vietnamese female speaker

Intercultural Group 2

- 1 Chinese female speaker
- 1 Brazilian male speaker
- 1 Vietnamese female speaker
- 1 American female speaker
- 1 American male speaker

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graph LR; A["• TTR (type-token ratio) (Malvern & Richards 2002;)  
• Standardized sample size using TTR Comparison Tool (Thommas, 2005); & WordSmith (Scott, M., 2013) as the standardized type-token ratio (STTR)"] --> B["Discourse Analysis (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009)"]; B --> C["Stimulated Recall (Mackey & Gass, 2013)"]
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Discourse Analysis
(Kecskes & Zhang, 2009)

Stimulated Recall
(Mackey & Gass, 2013)

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

- **RQ1.** How is deixis used differently on the intra- and-inter-cultural communication continuum?

Overview of Deixis Instances Per Group (word per hundred or wph)

<u>Group</u>	<u>Person Deixis</u>	<u>Spatial Deixis</u>	<u>Temporal Deixis</u>	<u>Discourse Deixis</u>
Intracultural Control Group (American)	11.44	1.63	1.1	4.65
Intercultural Group 1 (Chinese, Korean, & Vietnamese)	9.87	1.71	2.57	4.74
Intercultural Group 2 (American, Chinese, Brazilian, & Vietnamese)	8.08	1.77	3.66	5.23

The further towards the interculturality extreme of the continuum:

- the less frequently person indexicals would be employed.
- the more frequently spatial, temporal, and discourse indexicals would be employed in the meaning negotiation in the emergent situational context.



Intracultural Communication

Intercultural Communication

- **RQ2.** What are the different functions of indexicals on the communication continuum to construct common ground in a context?

1 Deixis use in the Intracultural Control Group:

- To elicit information already encoded in the prior context
- To trigger both the referent in the emergent situational context (the chocolate eating game in the baby shower) and the referent in the conceptual representation in the shared prior/private context
- A contextual boundary (e.g.: for the intention of making humor)

- **Extract 1** (American Female 2 states that a year ago, she went to a baby shower where she played a game called “the diaper game”):

(line 17) **American Female 1:** The one I’ve seen, is like they put different types of chocolate on a diaper, so it looks like poop! [all laughing]

(line 18) **American Male:** Simulated doo-doo!

(line 19) **American Female 3:** **That** is *not* what I was thinking...

(line 20) **American Female 1:** And you have to guess what kind of chocolate it is, something like that, something like that...

(line 21) **American Female 2:** Ok, I didn’t play that diaper game...you have to eat **that**?

(line 22) **American Female 1:** You have to try it, yeah yeah yeah yeah. So it’s kinda gross, you like have to try the chocolate off the diaper.

(line 23) **American Female 2:** Do they eat **that**?!



➤ Complete the referential meaning an indexical is aiming at:

Extract 2 (American Female 1 is explaining the gift-giving in a baby shower):

(line 78) **American Female 1:** You just don't want a traditional baby shower, like you open your gifts, and the re-, honestly. The main reason is that everyone else can see what you got. I mean you write down what you got. So that way when you go to that person's event you get them something. In that case, **that** would match.....

(line 79) **American Female 2:** ...what (already) got.

➤ compatible to the economy balance of human cognitive behavior mentioned in Sperber & Wilson (1986), which geared to the maximization of the relevance principle to express intended meaning with the least processing efforts

2. Deixis use in the Intercultural Group 1:

Similar functions were identified:

Chinese Female 1: **That** is actually for being a gift to the...

Korean Female: Yes, right. Yes, yes.

(line 70) Vietnamese Female: But then when the kids, like maybe two years old and **they** grow up, like what do **they** do?

(line 71) Korean Female: The ring is for actual parents.

[all laugh]



Different functions (compared to Intra Group) were identified as well:

- To negotiate and specify the meanings of some deictic entities: indexicals denoting discourse, spatial, and temporal deixis are used **more divergently** to elaborate the speaker's intended deictic meaning
- To help guide **the reconceptualization** and the meaning deduction from the contextual cues: more indexicals to elaborate what is inside their mind to become explicit in the emergent situational context

- **Extract 6:** (the Chinese Female 1 explains that gold is preferred to silver for personalized gifts in Chinese culture)

(line 47) **Chinese Female 1:** [unintelligible] I don't know, like **they're, they're** the *animal of the year*.

(line 48) **Korean Female:** Ohhhhh...

(line 49) **Vietnamese Female:** Yeah yeah, something like **that**.

(line 50) **Chinese Female 2:** It is a kind of, uh, hope for them to grow healthy, and uh happy in the future?

(line 51) **Chinese Female 1:** No no, I'm talking about **those other things** like the animals is the year of the pig, they will have a little pig like the shape of a pig...

(line 52) **Vietnamese Female:** On the necklace, bracelet, or ring?

(line 53) **Chinese Female 2:** Anything. Anything can be made with gold (still confused)

3. Deixis use in the Intercultural Group 2:

➤ co-constructing and reaffirming the intended meaning in the *emergent* context

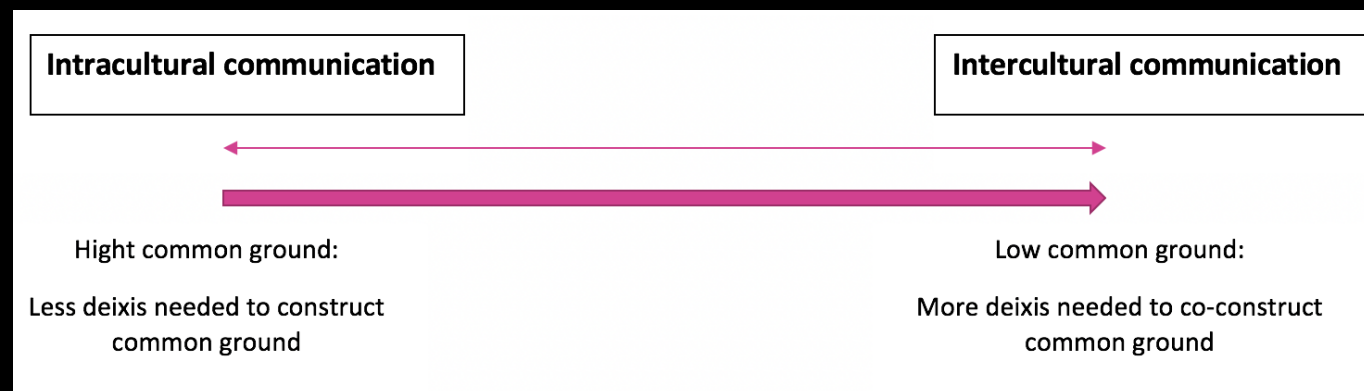
Extract 8 (The Brazilian repeatedly used the word monthly “celebration” to talk about the traditions of counting months while the newborn baby approaches being one year old):

- (line 63) **Brazilian Male:** I mean the first year, so the baby's a month old, the baby's two months old, the baby's like three months old, until it turns one year. And then that doesn't count anymore.
- (line 64) **Vietnamese Female:** Oh, wow, so like you have like twelve times like **that anniversaries?**
- (line 65) **Brazilian Male:** Yep.
- (line 66) **Vietnamese Female:** I see.
- (line 67) **Brazilian Male:** But like people don't give gifts at all times at **all those celebrations....** but it's like a [] celebration, like telling your family like “oh my god, the baby's like two months old now.”
- (line 68) **Vietnamese Female:** Ah, two months, ok.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- The use of indexicals resonates with the SCA that there is an interplay between the *emergent situational context* and the *prior context* in context comprehension and construction.
- Specifically, indexicals:
 1. can function as linguistic marker to indicate deixis within the emergent situational context and prior context
 2. substitute for expressions and words which participants are not fully articulated

- The use of indexicals proves that context-dependency in intercultural communication is **inherently different** from intracultural communication.
- The findings support that as in a continuum, the further towards the interculturality extreme, the more interlocutors must rely more on the co-constructed common ground in the emergent situational context.
- Thus, investigating context-dependencies in intercultural communication, one must take into consideration the dynamism in context comprehension and common ground co-construction.



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