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# NEGOTIATING ETHNIC DESCRIPTIONS IN ENGLISH AS A *LINGUA FRANCA*

AGNIESZKA NOWICKA  
“Adam Mickiewicz” University, Poznań

**Abstract:** *The main aim of the paper is to show: first, how the descriptions of the ethnic other are realized in interactions in English as a lingua franca and next, how they influence the course of an interaction and the mutual relationship of interaction participants. Conversation analysis framework is used to observe social categorization process in data fragments illustrating the problem.*

**Keywords:** *English as a lingua franca, ethnic categorization, ethnomethodology, interaction, intercultural interaction, membership categorization analysis.*

## 1. Introduction

The main aim of my paper is first, to discuss how the descriptions of the ethnic other are realized in interactions in English as a *lingua franca*, especially in connection with prejudice and bias, and second, how specific modes of producing those ethnic categorizations, namely an ambiguous description reference, can be said to determine intercultural communication. Ethnomethodological conversation analysis framework is used to observe social categorization process and thus, the focus, itself phenomenological, is on how interaction participants themselves understand the meaning of ethnic descriptions as they are co-created in interactions.

The paper will discuss which of the ethnic descriptions are understood as positive and which as negative assessments, and hence treated as problematic by interaction participants; attention will be paid to how the latter are repaired or mitigated in intercultural communication, in order not to produce prejudice or a stereotype, but to create a description perceived as valid.

In the light of this analysis, I aim to argue that the category of the ethnic others that interaction participants belong to can determine communication to be evaluated as intercultural; this tends to be an especially ambiguous and touchy issue for several reasons. Interaction participants usually try to avoid being perceived as “doing prejudice” or producing

stereotypes, especially when there appears a problem of ambiguous reference. This happens because, no matter whether ethnic descriptions are positive or negative, the interaction participants present during the interaction may identify with some description as referring to themselves to varying degrees. Thus, it is a matter of meaning negotiation in interaction to realize how references to ethnic descriptions are to be understood and, thus, how problematic those categorizations turn out to be.

On top of that, interaction participants are aware that there might appear a *lingua franca* problem that could lead to ambiguous or varied cultural interpretations of categories, category attributes and category-bound activities, as social categories are “cultural inference rich” and may be interpreted as more or less positive or negative in different cultures.

## 2. Theory of social categorization

Conversation analysis views the social categorization as a process locally situated in interactions. Interaction participants display their understanding of the relevance and character of a given social category in a given communicative event. An important point made by ethnomethodologists is an issue of indexicality, namely even though there might exist a multitude of possible categorizations that might be logically correct for a given person or, as Coulter puts it, “correctly predicable,” (somebody can be a female, a driver, a student, Jewish, a hobo or Polish), only those categories and categorizations count as meaningful in a given interaction which get visibly co-selected by interaction participants (Coulter, 2001: 41).

Sacks introduced the term membership categorization device (MCD) for the practices of doing social description and defined it as consisting of “resources and practices of their deployment” or as composed of collections of categories and rules of application (Sacks, 1992: 40-48). Collections are not just random aggregates of categories; they constitute sets of categories that would fit together, such as, for instance, an age collection (a child/ a teenager/ an adult) or a gender collection (male/female) (Schegloff, 2007: 466). Each category has also category-bound activities, some of which are category-constitutive ones. The idea of ‘category bound’ activities means that some activities are normatively connected to certain categories of persons: e.g., “crying” is what “babies do” (Lee, 2001: 159).

Many a time, instead of explicitly referring to a category, it is enough to mention a person performing certain category-bound activity to make a given

category relevant in interpreting what is going on in the interaction (Schegloff, 2007: 470). This means that categories are topicalized, or they become a topic of a conversation and influence the interactional topic flow. This also means that their relevance in an interaction might be visible in a turn taking and repair system; for instance, in institutional interaction, a category-bound activity for an interviewee is to answer questions rather than ask them. So certain social categories are understood by interaction participants to have the right to control the topic flow to a greater extent than others, and thus to initiate new topics, change them or drop them more willingly than other categories.

In my paper, I deal with ethnic categorizations such as Polish, Spanish, Americans, etc., which, as Jayyusi observes, are organized as collectives of an open texture as opposed to the type collectives, such as Hell's Angels, Roman catholic church etc., which are of a more closed texture and self-organized groups for some purpose, similar to institutions. If somebody ascribes certain category-constitutive features rather than category-bound features to such ethnic collectivities by describing them, for instance, as: a "good German" or a "self-hating Jew", this might be perceived as "doing prejudice" or fanaticism (Jayyusi, 1984: 50-51). In case of type categorizations, in order to avoid "doing" prejudice or in order to make their descriptions comprehensible and valid, interaction participants usually provide warrants for descriptions, by arranging category-bound activities in certain logically progressing lists and by providing personal stories or accounts of activities. In general they tend to validate their descriptions by revealing ascriptive procedures, and showing on what basis they pass certain judgments (Jayyusi, 1984: 90-91).

As Jayyusi (1984: 25-26) observes, apart from the existence of culturally available category concepts such as *doctor*, *poet*, *murderer* or *saint*, there exist more specific, "type like" "umbrella categorizations" consisting of an adjective and a category such as: *a nice man*, *a nervous person*, *a pretty girl*, *an intelligent woman*, etc. I aim to show that such umbrella categorizations play a vital role in negotiating negative ethnic categorizations, since they can be used to specify generalizing ethnic descriptions into more defined and thus more credible ones that refer to certain types within an ethnic collectivity.

Studies show that interaction participants often use "meta-talk" or *frames* that come before questions and answers or after them in the beginning of turns. Such framing often works as a way of mitigating an utterance. Questions, for example, can be prefaced with "could you answer if" or "I

wonder if,” as described by Clayman and Heritage (2002: 749-775). They can also function as repair initiators (or are themselves repairs) to negotiate categorizations or, in other words, to repair troubles with categorization. An interesting problem, to be discussed on the basis of the data presented in this paper, is why speakers frame or mitigate categorization requests and follow-up categorizations. I would like to argue that such frames appear to negotiate categorizations that might be perceived as prejudice in ambiguous reference context of intercultural communication.

Since ethnomethodological interpretation of *biased and prejudiced categorizations* avoids any references to socio-psychological theories of prejudice, it is strongly based on the indexical and interactive context and it seems far from presenting an exhaustive list of features of such categorizations. Ethnic prejudice is understood to be done when:

- a. a negative/positive ethnic categorization appears and the description concerns the whole ethnic group;
- b. an ethnic categorization is understood as illogical or irrational in participants’ understanding, since it is unwarranted by any logical argument, such as a logically progressing list of activities or accounts;
- c. it is performed by attributing negative/positive category-constitutive activities and attributes to an ethnic group rather than category-bound ones (Jayyusi, 1984: 50-51, 90-91).

So the biased or prejudiced category-constitutive feature for an ethnic category would, for instance, show in the use of expressions such as “a good German” (in Nazi Germany), a “self-hating Jew” (Jayyusi, 1984: 51). It should be observed, however, that whether a given activity is understood as a category-constitutive or a bound one can also be a matter of situated interpretation or visible negotiation of members in a given communicative event. Additionally, it seems that although attributing category-constitutive features seems to be Jayyusi’s most vivid example of prejudice or bias, so can attributing category-bound activities to a given ethnic category be understood as potentially “doing prejudice.” I aim to argue that ethnic prejudice or bias is most clearly observable in the conditions of an ambiguous reference that makes communication intercultural, and that category-bound activities that describe an ethnic category can especially be understood as prejudice when no umbrella terms have been specified.

### 3. Data analysis

Data comprises excerpts from interviews conducted by advanced students of English as a foreign language with foreigners. The first one is conducted with an American interviewee and the second with a Spanish exchange student in Poland.

#### 3.1. Ethnic prejudice negotiation

##### Fragm\* . 1a (0:00:1:1) (TS, PG and A)

- 1 A: .hh there's a lot of Poles in there it's like (.) this <stereotype> about p- eh (.)  
 2 Polish people (.) that they're (..) it- it's not really (.) pleasant  
 3 T: ehmmm hhh=  
 4 A: =it's the negative  
 5 (1.5)  
 6 T: but actually the (.) sad phenomenon: (.) about the:: Poles who (...) eh::  
 7 emigrate to::: United States is that they tend to: eh (0.5) you know like mh::  
 8 burn the bridges (...) behind them  
 9 A: mhm  
 10 T: so (.) so that (..) they: they don't want to have anymore: connections  
 11 P: .hh yeah=  
 12 T: =with the Poles who::: who who you know who (..) who were left here=  
 13 P: =right because they feel m::uch m- cause they feel (.) better about  
 14 themselves actually=  
 15 A: =but  
 16 P: that the- they::: eh:: went to the US and now they're like you know:: (0.5) oh  
 17 yeah I live in the US and stuff ((using funny croaky voice)) .hh  
 18 A: yeah but actually when they go to in- eh::: US (.) they stay in these little  
 19 groups in these little communities of Poles and they're not really (.) getting out  
 20 of there .hhh thye're not really assi[milating]  
 21 T: [mhm]  
 22 A: with Americans (.) so (..) well- maybe a lit- some of them but .hhh uhm (..)   
 23 well the Poles that are coming to America they're kind of .hhh the the the ones  
 24 that (..) are unemployed and there's eh i- you know they seek w- (..) whatever  
 25 job  
 26 (..)

\* See the end of the paper for Transcription Symbols

In fragm.1a, before A's turn, T and P introduce the subject of the biggest Polish community in the US. In response, in lines 1-2, A says: ".hh there's a lot of Poles in there it's like (.) this <stereotype> about p- eh (.) Polish people (.) that they're (..) it- it it's not really (.) pleasant." Her answer is mitigated and hesitations appear. Then, in line 5, A makes a pause and quits producing the description, allowing T and P to request a categorization or drop the subject as being too delicate. Instead, she uses a frame to explain why she decides to discontinue the subject when she says: "there's is a stereotype," "it's not really pleasant". A creates a *frame* with an adverbial emphasis "really" to avoid being perceived as producing a negative stereotype in general and one that could be interpreted as her personal "stereotypical" opinion.

Another reason for A to create a frame is her orientation to a *problem of ambiguous reference*. Usually, third party descriptions are realized in a more direct manner, with few explanations and warrants only, as it will be observed in the second interview. Since in this interview interviewers are Polish and the described category is Polish, they might choose to identify with the categorization. As a result, such ethnic categorizations are realized in a rather delicate manner and they are mitigated by frames, as if testing interviewers' identification with the description or checking to what degree the description can be problematic for them.

In response, T and P cooperatively produce an ethnic categorization themselves. They enumerate category-bound activities and attributes of the category in lines 6-8: T: "but actually the (.) sad phenomenon: (.) about the:: Poles who (...) eh:: emigrate to::: United States is that they tend to: eh (0.5) you know like mh:: burn the bridges (...) behind them". In lines 12, 13, T and P co-produce a negative description of Poles as isolationists and as "feeling better" and snubbing Poles who remained in the country. Then, in lines 15-16, P produces a category-bound activity by construing a parodic and mocking voicing of Poles living in the US: "that the- they::: eh:: went to the US and now they're like you know::(0.5) oh yeah I live in the US and stuff ((using funny croaky voice))."

This ethnic categorization is realized in a direct manner by both interviewers and interviewees and the reason for this is, as I would like to claim, that an *umbrella categorization* is used. The characterization does not concern all Poles but "us," Poles living in Poland and "them," "Poles who emigrated to the US". In this way a clearer co-selection of categorization refer-

ence is achieved. Since T and G are excluded from the characterized type, descriptions can be more direct as they are aimed at a third absent party. A orients to the type categorization and also produces, in lines 17-19, quite a direct and negative category bound-activity to describe the Polish emigrant type: “yeah but actually when they go to in- eh::: US (.) they stay in these little groups in these little communities of Poles and they’re not really (.) getting out of there .hhh they’re not really assimilating.”

She says that “they” are not assimilating with Americans and she realizes it as an argumentative characterization introduced by the conjunctive “but,” so the immigrant type is characterized as somebody who either assimilates and abandons or keeps contact with his or her country or as somebody who does not assimilate and keeps or abandons contact with the native land and culture. The issue remains unresolved and A adds the category-bound activities of “the Poles that are coming to America” as a group of a low status, unemployed ones, “who will take any job”. So in a way she probably understands T and P’s categorization of Polish immigrants as ascribing a higher status to them, and she chooses to contest it in lines 21-23: “with Americans (.) so (..) ma- maybe a lit- some of them but .hhh uhm (..) well the Poles that are coming to America they’re kind of .hhh the the the ones that )..= are unemployed and there’s eh i- you know they seek w- (..) whatever job”.

An umbrella categorization of an ethnic type is realized cooperatively, the category reference “they,” the Poles who emigrated, is co-selected. All participants commonly realize the negative categorization; however, an argumentative issue of the reasons and the details of the category-bound activities introduced by A remain undiscussed. The topic is dropped. As a result, the categorization, even though quite specific in the sense of using umbrella terms, still remains quite general.

**Fragm. 1b** (0:00:1:5) (TS, PG and A)

- 28 T: mhm=  
 29 A: =they can::: get and- (..) .hhhh they're just  
 30 P: what about these [stereotypes]  
 31 A: [xxxxxxx]  
 32 P cause you started the topic and (.) kind of (.) went around it cause oah:: well  
 33 yh::: you know .hhhh actually >there there's no problem< for us to hear  
 34 something un- unpleasant about eh: our eh:: la- landsmen actually=



- 35 T: = so maybe y- tell us what annoys you (.) in in us hhhhh
- 36 A: eh:::: [well]
- 37 P: [maybe] what annoys the Americans::
- 38 A: =th- the Americans↑ the Americans th- the view:::: of:: eh the American
- 39 view:: of a Po::le:: ((funny voice)) (...) well actually ih- (..) Polish people are
- 40 very hard working .hhhh they work a lot (..) for shitty money (..) actually th-
- 41 they do (.) whatever they ca::n:: (..) they (.) work nightshifts and .hhh they
- 42 work like twenty hours a day .hhh so:: uh: but they do (.) their work uh yhm
- 43 precisely and they do it yh (.) good
- 44 (...)
- 45 A: but actually there're there're uhm (1.5) they have this ability and capability
- 46 (.) to(hh) drink(hhh) a lot(hhhh) then
- 47 [hhhhhhh]
- 48 T: [hhhhhhh]
- 49 A: stay sober (.) Americans you know they (.) drink their (.) Budwei::sers::
- 50 jus::t jus::t (but like) they- you know shitty shitty [shitty beer]
- 51 T: [which is a rather light] beer hhhhhh=
- 52 A: =ye::::s [ye::s] ye::s
- 53 T: [hhhhhhhhh]

In fragm. 1b, in lines 30, 32-34, 35 and 37, T and P produce requests for A to categorize Poles in a general, negative way. A considers this problematic, as the prejudice or bias can appear: “cause you started the topic and (.) kind of (.) went around it cause oah:: well yh::: you know .hhhh actually >there there’s no problem< for us to hear something un- unpleasant about eh: our eh:: la- landsmen actually”. In lines 32-34, P re-introduces the request for the categorization of Poles. He refers to the general ethnic category that they started discussing in the beginning of the interview. In the first frame, when he says: “cause you started the topic and kind of went around it,” he explains why he reintroduces the dropped subject, indicating a trouble with A’s first answer that appeared earlier. He *frames the request* as a characterization of landsmen, “they”, so, not necessarily themselves, the participants in the interaction. He uses the frame that “it is no problem to hear unpleasant things about our landsmen,” to make it easier for A to produce a negative categorization, and at the same time he implies that the interviewers will be somehow excluded from the description. However, the

category “our landsman” is still a general, open texture ethnic category, and it is difficult to be described without prejudice.

Moreover, T, in line 35, reformulates this request to ask for a negative categorization of “us”, which is more problematic for the interviewee, as, first, it is a request for criticism, and, second, the categorization will refer to the present party: “so maybe y- tell us what annoys you (.) in in us hhhhh”. Additionally, P, in line 37, makes it even more difficult for the interviewee, as he asks A to produce an even more *generalizing ethnic categorization* in a relational pair, “Americans vs. Poles”. Here, the status of A’s answer would become quite equivocal, as it might be interpreted as her personal prejudice, for instance, or as a generalizing prejudice Americans might hold. In fact, T and P cooperate in characterizing A as a *representative of an ethnic category*, that of Americans. This becomes even more manifest when P asks in line 37: “what annoys the Americans:::.”

She delays answering the request and precedes it with “well.” She mitigates her assessment a lot, produces hesitation tokens in line 38, “eh::,” “well” and finally resorts to *parodic framing* of her following description, by producing the following frame in an exaggerated intonation, in lines 38-39: “th- the Americans the Americans th- the view::: of:: eh the American view:: of a Po::le::: ((funny voice)).” The whole frame functions as a mitigation of the following description since A’s answer might be treated as possibly problematic in the situational context. Namely, her interviewers expect her to produce a negative description, which she tries to avoid, and in the context of their expectations, her positive evaluation can be considered a dispreferred action that might be sanctioned. The point is, A treats the request for a negative and generalizing ethnic description as problematic and avoids answering it by using a frame that introduces and describes the character of a following talk. In fact, it is also an argumentative action, showing the problem with answering a question that asks for stereotyping. Additionally, A is unsure of the cultural value of her description, whether it will be perceived as positive or negative.

She aims to frame her characterization as not a very serious one, and herself only a mock and pretend animator of such an assessment. She actually indirectly rejects interviewers’ request for a negative categorization, and she produces a parodic voicing of somebody’s introduction to “the American view of the Pole.” The frame is followed by A’s series of positive category-bound activities of a type of Poles in the US in lines 40-44.

Later in her utterance, in lines 44-49 she introduces a more ambiguous category-bound activity of Poles drinking a lot: “but actually there’re there’re uhm (1.5) they have this ability and capability (.) to(hh) drink(hhh) a lot(hhhh) then [hhhhhh]stay sober.” Again A produces this description with great hesitation, there are repetitions and pauses, she inserts laughter particles in her utterance, as if orienting to the fact that her categorization might be perceived as a negative stereotype. It is also intended to be treated as a jocular, amusing description, not a serious characterization. She says Polish men can drink a lot and stay sober; she implies here, through the characterization that is quite ambiguous, that Polish men are strong, drinking probably strong alcohol, as opposed to American weaklings drinking “weak,” “shitty beer”. So she produces the categorization based on contrastive features of two gender and ethnic categories.

However, the possibility of the cultural difference in perceiving certain category attributes and category-bound activities exists, as A is quite cautious in producing the characterization. When T overlaps her description with cooperative laughter, then A finishes by characterizing American men in a jocular-negative way as drinking “shitty beer”. However, the categorization is perceived by Polish interviewers as a definitely positive description of Polish men. T orientates himself to such interpretation by confirming it in lines 47, 50, 52, and by laughing and later on by discussing types of beer, and what their favorite ones are. Actually, a jocular, stereotypical ethnic- gender categorization (a sort of a positive bias) is produced; however, it is *parodied* and *framed as a stereotype*, so as not to be treated as a seriously generalizing categorization.

### 3.2 Ethnic bias negotiation

The second interview was conducted by Polish students of English with a Spanish student on Erasmus exchange in Poland. In the beginning of the interview, he describes his family: he has a Spanish father and a Czech mother. This interview has been chosen to show how positive categorizations are co-created and what can be considered as a positive ethnic categorization, as well as to show how negative ethnic categorizations are realized when a described party is absent and when a speaker has the ambiguous status of potentially being within the described category. The ethnic category “Czech” is part of a family category, including D’s mother and grand-

parents. However, since D rather distances himself from this ethnic category, it might be treated as a third, absent party description.

**Fragm. 2 (0:00:41:8) (N, A and D)**

- 1 A: have you been to to Czech Republic  
 2 (.)  
 3 A: to [to Brno]  
 4 D: [I was] I was in in Prague (..) two times=  
 5 A: =in Prague  
 6 N: so were [in Brno]  
 7 D: [I: p-] I prefer eh: (.) in Brno↑  
 8 N: hehehe  
 9 D: in Brno in my [gra- gran]dfather's  
 10 N: [hhhhh]  
 11 D: eh::: (.) and (.) I was::: two times in Cracovia (..) and [I prefer]  
 12 N: [xxxx]  
 13 D: I prefer Poland  
 14 A: OK  
 15 N: hehehh[ehhhhhe]  
 16 A: [don't you] xxxxxxxx  
 17 D: yes (.) because yh you know eh::: (..) Czech Republic (2.0) you know  
 18 Czechs are:: s:- s::: small and ver- very very:: m::: eh::: (1.0) you know the-  
 19 they they:: think only about working and they think eh (.) only about beer  
 20 and::: (..) m (.) that's that's all (.) and here in Poland w- we uh::: I I feel the  
 21 same as I like in (.) Espania  
 22 (.)  
 23 N: yes people are:: so vivid yes↑ full of li::fe (.) energ[etic]  
 24 D: [yes]

In fragm. 2, lines 17-20, D creates category-bound activities to describe the ethnic category of Czechs. The description is negative, since Czechs are presented as “no fun” ethnic category, as “small” and probably with a narrow orientation on work and beer. He uses the token “you know,” appealing to the common knowledge of interaction participants and this is the only mitigation he uses. This happens because there is no ambiguous reference, the description he uses does not concern the present party and is addition-

ally contrasted with the positive categorization of Poles, who by implication must be “fun loving” and not so much work oriented, Poland being more like Spain, in line 13: “I prefer Poland,” and in lines 19 — 20: “and here in Poland w- we uh::: I I feel the same as I like in (.) Espania”. D characterizes Poles by describing the country, although in quite general terms, since D probably supposes that O, being Polish, knows what Poles are like. N extends his characterization by saying in line 22: “yes people are:: so vivid yes full of li::fe (.) energetic”. Doing this, she actually indirectly ascribes positive attributes to the ethnic category of Spaniards and D agrees with her description.

Generally, D refrains from characterizing himself as a stranger or as an ethnic other. His positive ethnic categorizations are realized in a direct way as a positive stereotype or bias. And as it happens in this and in other observed interactions, interaction participants do not always produce warrants for positive assessments, as they suppose that the present party agrees with their descriptions. If explanations appear, they are usually reduced in content and usually function as reformulated enhancement of positive categorizations.

**Fragm. 3** (0:00:41.2) (N, A and D)

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 1  | D: and I know::: eh::: where I will be l- looking and searching for my wife  |
| 2  | (.)  |
| 3  | N: [where]   |
| 4  | D: [here in] Poland hhhh xxx   |
| 5  | N: but why::   |
| 6  | D: hohhohohhoo   |
| 7  | N: yhhhhhh   |
| 8  | D: hhhhhh  |
| 9  | N: in Po]land  |
| 10 | D: hh s- si si   |
| 11 | N: why(hhh) you could (.) could you tell us                                  |
| 12 | (.)  |
| 13 | D: because(hhh) yh:: y::ou know:: (.) Po- Po- Poland maybe (.) i: is in:: yh |
| 14 | Eastern part of Europe but (..) your   |
| 15 | N: [hhhhhhhhhh]  |
| 16 | D: [eh:::] your  |

- 17           (.)
- 18           A: charm=
- 19           D: =your attitude to to (.) to life (.) your lifestyle and yo- your eh:: way of
- 20           thinking and (..) .hhhh yh::: behavior is::: (.) so Spanish in in:: in::
- 21           N: hhhhhh hahha[hahahuhu]
- 22           D:           [the background] so it's:: (.) is so common common for me (..) and
- 23           (..)
- 24           N: hyhm [yes↑]
- 25           D:   [yes] (..) so (..) beautiful girls that's why=
- 26           N: =ehyhyhyh (..) thank you our (.) camera woman also right↑
- 27           D: uh gracias xxxx
- 28           A: heh

In fragm. 3, lines 1 and 4, D emphasizes his positive image of a Polish category by stating that he would like to have a Polish wife. In reaction to this N expresses amazement and asks him for an explanation, in lines 5, 11 and 9.. In return, D produces another positive categorization of Poles in lines 19-20, 22: “=your attitude to to (.) to life (.) your lifestyle and yo- your eh:: way of thinking and (..) .hhhh yh::: behavior is::: (.) so Spanish in in:: in:: the background so it's:: (.) is so common common for me.” The positive categorization is realized directly, D describes the mentality and behavior patterns, emphasizing the commonality, if not outright identity between the ethnic category of Poles and that of Spaniards. Still, D's categorization is devoid of extended explanations, as he probably assumes that hence the described categories are identical, interviewers understand them, and second, since they are positive, they do not require any explanations that usually mitigate critical assessments.

Positive ethnic descriptions are treated as compliments, so the ambiguous reference problem gets resolved in the interaction, participants hearing D's positive descriptions as describing them. Ethnic type categorizations, like the general type “Polish beautiful women”, do not appear to be as specific as in the first interview, since ethnic categorizations are understood by interaction participants as unproblematic for any present party.

#### 4. Conclusion

In intercultural talk there is a great degree of reference ambiguity and the possibility for prejudice and stereotype to appear. This becomes especially apparent in the first interview. The interviewee A displays problems with producing ethnic categorizations, since they are usually negative and open texture, so a stereotype or a prejudice can appear, and prejudiced categorizations seem to be problematic in this interaction because there is an ambiguity of reference problem. To resolve reference ambiguity and not to do prejudice and still be able to discuss cultural experiences:

- a. interaction participants use *category frames* of talk, distancing themselves to ensuing categorizations. They use the following kinds of frames: framing a categorization as a mere generalization or a stereotype and using parodic voicing;
- b. they use *umbrella categorizations* to discuss ethnic types, instead of ethnic categories in general. So if there is a discussion about ethnic categories, it usually concerns contesting interpretations of *type ethnic categories*.

In the case of ethnic categorizations that might potentially refer to the present party, it is interactionally important for speakers to resolve the problem concerning the degree to which interaction participants identify with descriptions as possible representatives of a category.

In the second interview, positive descriptions of an ethnic category are realized as a positive stereotype or bias. They are frequently unwarranted, as usually no problems for communication partners are anticipated to be connected with construing such categorizations. The interviewees potentially belonging to the positively described category ratify, confirm it, and often treat descriptions as compliments referring to themselves. So ambiguity of reference is resolved in favour of positive ethnic categorizations. The possible warrant or explanation of a positive ethnic categorization claims the similarity of two ethnic categories and implies the speaker's identification with a given ethnic category. Negative third and absent party ethnic categorizations and positive present party ones are performed more directly and they get less mitigated, as there is usually no ambiguity of reference problem. In case of negative third party descriptions, only few, quite limited explanations for category-bound activities and attributes are offered. Such third party descriptions can be paired with the present party positive descriptions to enhance a positive categorization.

Most of the types of ethnic categorizations can appear as well in various types of interactions, both in a native or a foreign language or in a *lingua franca*. However, within an ethnomethodological CA framework, what seems to make an interaction intercultural is the interaction participants' orientation to it as to an intercultural event, that is one in which various aspects of different ethnic cultures interplay with one another and possible differences in communicative competences can play a role in understanding what is going on in the interaction and in acting accordingly. So far there seem to exist several intercultural exchange determinants which can, but do not have to appear together. The first is the interaction participants' orientation to the fact that communication happens in a *lingua franca* (an aspect that remains undiscussed here), then their orientation to the topic of cultural differences, and finally, the main, and, I believe, the most remarkable determinant, an orientation to the problem of ambiguous ethnic category reference.

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**\* Transcription symbols:**

(.) micropause

(1.0) pause in seconds

[ the beginning of an overlap

] the end of an overlap

: prolonged sound

h outbreath or laughter

.hhh inbreath

a emphasis

CAPITALS utterance louder than the surrounding talk

(xxxx) unintelligible talk

°silent° utterance

↑raising intonation

↓falling intonation

>quicker< utterance and <slower> utterance

- interrupted or discontinued utterance or a sharp cut-off of the prior sound

= latching between utterances.

# THE META-MODEL: THE NLP MAP OF LANGUAGE

CRISTINA-MIHAELA ZAMFIR  
University of Constanța

**Abstract:** *NLP has a very useful map of how language operates, namely the Meta-Model. It aims at identifying those linguistic patterns which are likely to generate vagueness and at recreating them by using questions to clarify meaning. Neuro-Linguistic Programming names these questions meta-model questions, as they shed some light on the meta meaning of words. The Meta-Model is needed when applying NLP to business English as a means of improving language patterns in communication.*

**Keywords:** *artfully vague language, business communication, Meta-Model, NLP.*

## 1. Introduction: The Meta-Model — The NLP Map of Language

From the very beginning, the Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) was closely linked with language models. Every language model is used to analyze people's filtering processes and to recover information that has been left out during the filtering processes. NLP was initiated by the linguistic modelers Bandler and Grinder in the early 1970s. As Dilts and DeLozier (2000: 733) point out, they developed the Meta-Model as "a means of identifying and responding to problematic patterns in the speech of people". In dealing with the Meta-Model, three essential aspects need to be highlighted: 1) the Meta-Model consists of a series of categories identifying ambiguities of verbal communication which may bring about limitations, confusions or miscommunication; 2) the Meta-Model offers a set of questions for each category with the purpose of clarifying verbal ambiguities and of challenging or transforming potential limitations; 3) the function of the Meta-Model is to identify and recover problematic generalizations, deletions and distortions by analyzing the surface structure and providing an inquiry system in order to get at a better representation of the deep structure. The three basic troublesome areas (deletion, generalization and distortion) were very useful for the *maps of language* applied by Bandler and Grinder (1975) to identify common pat-