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Figurative language and ‘doing interculturality’ in a lingua franca

A case study from a study-abroad context

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Abstract: Research has shown how, in a narrative event, people give meanings to and conceptualise their experience in figurative language. The aim of this case study was to explore the figurative language which emerged in the flow of mobile students’ narrative accounts of interculturality. Pragmatic features of talk, including those specific to the lingua franca, were analysed in the participants’ use of figurative language. The data of the exploratory study derived from mobility project interviews conducted with South Korean student teachers at the beginning and end of their short-term stays in Finland. The results revealed, among other things, that metaphors of movement and force were used for ‘doing interculturality’, when the interviewees constructed themselves, others and events in figurative language in the context of the mobility project interview. Using oppositional metaphor (e.g., free-strict) as well as metonymy and hyperbole, the participants presented their views on school education, society and people in the two contexts. By exploring the narrators’ strategies for telling and their discursive construction of roles and positions, it was possible to analyse in more detail the interplay of figurative language and the narrative construction of interculturality.

Keywords: interculturality, narrative, figurative language, lingua franca

Tiivistelmä: Tutkimus on osoittanut, kuinka kerronnan tapahtumassa käytämme kielikuvia merkityksellistämään ja käsitteistämään kokemuksiamme. Tämän tapaustutkimuksen kohteena ovat vaihto-opiskelijoiden kulttuurienvälisen kokemuksen kerronnassa esiin nousevat metaforat, metonyymit ja hyberbolat sekä niiden lingua franca -englannille ominaiset pragmatiikan piirteet. Aihepiirin on paneuduttu vain harvoissa soveltavan kielitieteen ja kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän tutkimuksissa. Tutkimusaineisto koostui aineenopettajiksi valmistuvien eteläkorealaisten vaihto-opiskelijoiden haastatteluista, jotka tehtiin heidän lyhytkestoisen vaihtojaksonsa alkaessa ja päättyessä Suomessa. Englanti oli näissä haastateltaville ja haas-

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tattelijalle yhteinen lingua franca. Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että tutkittavat käyttivät muun muassa liikkeen ja voiman metaforia kokemuksensa merkityksellistämiseen ja käsitteistämiseen, kun he haastattelutilanteessa konstruivat itseään, muita ihmisiä ja tapahtumia kielikuvien avulla. Tutkittavat käyttivät vastakkaisia metaforia kuten free-strict ja metonyymejä sekä jossain määrin myös hyperbolaa kertoessaan vaihto- ja kotimaansa koulujen opetuksesta, yhteiskunnasta ja ihmisistä. Tutkimalla haastateltavien kerrontastrategioita sekä roolien ja positoiden diskursiivista rakentumista voitiin analysoida lähemmin kielikuvien osuutta kulttuurienvälisyyden kerronnassa. Analyysi osoitti, että vaihto- ja kotimaan vertailussa käytetyt kielikuvat rakentuivat vaihtomaan kannalta myönteisesti ja suotuisasti.

Abstrakt: Forsknigen har visat hur vi använder figurativt språk i berättandets stund för att tolka och konceptualisera våra upplevelser. Syftet med denna fallstudie var att utforska metaforer, metonymer och hyperboler som växte fram i flödet av utbytesstuderandes skildringar av interkulturella upplevelser. Pragmatiska drag i talet, inklusive de som är specifika för lingua franca, analyserades i deltagarnas användning av figurativt språk. Forskningsmaterialet bestod av intervjuer med sydkoreanska utbytesstuderanden som studerade till ämneslärare. Dessa intervjuer gjordes i början och slutet av deras kortvariga utbytesperiod i Finland. I intervjuerna var engelskan det gemensamma lingua franca för de intervjuade och intervjuaren. Resultatet av studien visar att de intervjuade bland annat använde rörelse och kraft för att tolka och konceptualisera sin upplevelse, då de i intervjusituationen konstruerade sig själva, andra människor och händelser med hjälp av figurativt språk. Deltagarna använde motsatta metaforer som free-strict och metonymer samt i viss mån hyperbol då de berättade om undervisningen i skolorna, samhället och människorna i utbytes- och hemlandet. Genom att studera deltagarnas berättarstrategier och den diskursiva konstruktionen av roller och positioner var det möjligt att mera i detalj analysera rollen av figurativt språk i berättandet av interkulturella upplevelser. Analysen visade att figurativt språk som användes i jämförelse mellan utbyteslandet och hemlandet var positivt och gynnsamt till utbyteslandets fördel.

1 Introduction

This study explores the figurative language that emerges in mobile students' narrative accounts of their intercultural experience. The research approach draws on sociolinguistics, sociocognitive linguistics and anthropological linguistics (e.g., De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012; Duranti 1997; Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 2007; Johnson 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; van Dijk 2016) to explore narrative accounts

of intercultural experience. The study aims to contribute to research in the field of intercultural communication, in which mobile students' discourse on intercultural experience is under-explored. The research attempts to produce insights that will be useful for future research and practice of intercultural communication and education in globalised contexts. The present study is part of a research project that investigates figurative language in mobile student interviews (Johnson 2021) and written portfolio data (Johnson and Hynynen 2018).

The data of the case study derive from a larger data pool of interviews with exchange students who stayed for five months in the host context. The interviews were conducted in a higher education mobility project with English serving as the *lingua franca* for the interviewees and interviewer. The study examines how transnational South Korean mobile students, who also have previous experience of staying or travelling abroad, go about 'doing interculturality'— in this case, how they construct themselves, others and events in figurative language (metaphor, metonymy and hyperbole), when they are trying to make sense of their intercultural experience in the context of the mobility project interview.

This kind of narrative account of interculturality in the context of the interview is much more than a rendering of personal experience. The narrative practice approach, which has become an umbrella term for exploration of situated, interactional aspects of story-telling (e.g., De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 114–123), is ideally suited for analysing the interview data in this study. Analysis of the figurative language embedded in the narrative accounts offers a perspective from which to understand how the participants not only construct themselves and others but also seek to maintain or resist dominant cultural storylines (e.g., Bamberg 2011).

The paper first introduces the theoretical framework of the research, including the construct of interculturality and the three types of figurative language investigated in the study. Next, the paper describes the methodological approach and the procedure for conducting analysis of figurative language on the data. The rest of the paper focuses on the findings, conclusions, limitations and implications of the study.

2 Theoretical framework: figurative language and intercultural interactions

Today, more and more people move around the world taking their language resources with them. Researchers in applied linguistics and intercultural communication who have explored linguistic flows and transnational mobility have accumulated knowledge on how language functions in people's communication and their

sense-making of the world (e.g., Blommaert 2005: 71–79; Bäckman 2017; Linell 2009; Martin et al. 2014; Piller 2012; Risager and Dervin 2015). In the framework of 'doing interculturality', language is an important element for performing and shaping identities in situ, as for example Beaven and Borghetti (2016) noted in their review of research on study abroad. Doing interculturality (i.e., the meaning-making of intercultural experience) is here seen as the construction of real or imagined encounters of people who represent various backgrounds and subscribe to different views and identities (e.g., Dervin 2016; Holliday 2017; Hua 2015; Sarangi 1994). Hua (2015: 12–13) notes that in the constructivist view, interculturality is grounded in the meaning-making of diversity and difference. Interculturality informs us about what people actually do with cultural difference in their encounters and how they recount them (Sarangi 1994). The present research is an exploratory study of this phenomenon. It uses a discourse analytic framework that incorporates analysis of figurative language (metaphor, metonymy and hyperbole) and narrative in interactional data, as explained below.

The conception of language that is adopted in this case study is dynamic and dialogic (Cameron 2007; Linell 2009). The study focuses on what happens locally and in the moment of talk when participants employ figurative language in their narrative account. A dialogic view of interaction sees a speaker as "not just putting his or her ideas into words, but taking the Other into account when doing so" (Cameron 2007). Linguistic communication is thus more than the sum of the elements and features of language, such as lexemes, prosody or grammar, to convey meaning. In its essence, figurative language use in interactions is seen as being layered, dynamic and dialogic, because it is constructed and culturally situated (e.g., Johnson 2021).

Pragmatics and socio-cognitive research have shown how people resort to figurative language, including metaphor, metonymy, simile, hyperbole, and irony to create common ground in their spoken and written interactions. Researchers including Fuoli et al. (2021) and Semino (2008: 30–32) have established that figurative language serves various communicative and discursive functions to produce voice, stance, or footing as well as to construct discursive-cognitive frames and scenarios (for scenarios, see e.g., Littlemore 2019: 25–36). Research within the field of pragmatics has also shown that certain types of figurative language may have distinctive functions for mediating emotions and carrying evaluative meaning, typically either a negative or positive connotation (e.g., Gibbs and Colston 2012). Significantly for real and imagined encounters in the context of transitory transnational mobility, figurative language offers the potential for open-ended, creative communication to interactants using the same lingua franca (Kecskes 2007). This potential enables a fluidity of self and identity and thus makes it possible for mobile students to better voice and represent themselves.

Recent metaphor research in linguistics circulates around (socio)cognitive assumptions of language, thought, and communication. Hence Semino (2008) defined metaphor as “the phenomenon whereby we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else” (Semino 2008: 1). Figurative language is commonly used in spoken discourse on intercultural experience and interculturality (e.g., Jackson 2013; Schröder 2015). As an example of this, an exchange student interviewed in Johnson (2021) described her insights about people she met in two countries prior to her ongoing stay abroad. She said the people she had encountered during her stay *were open to people* and, continuing in the same vein, she said that as a result of her own increased maturity and her frequent stays abroad, she had *started to be open to people*. We might conclude that in this metaphor, the interviewee mapped the two domains of *people* and *containment* to reason about human encounters.

According to metaphor theory, a metaphor like PEOPLE ARE OPEN¹ is structured by our experience as we reason about something in terms of something else. Source domains of metaphors (e.g. OPEN) originate from our bodily, sensory-motor experience, thus creating the basis for abstract conceptualisation and reasoning (e.g. PEOPLE). Johnson (1987) defined an image schema as “a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience” (Johnson 1987: xiv).

Related to metaphor, metonymy is also fundamentally about talking and, potentially, thinking about something in terms of something else. However, in metonymy the two concepts which are understood to be linked together derive from the same conceptual domain, not from different conceptual domains as in metaphor (e.g., Kövecses 2010; Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 35–40). For instance, following the *pars pro toto* cognitive model, speakers may conceptualise CULTURE AS PEOPLE (Johnson 2021; Johnson and Hynynen 2018). Metaphors and metonyms may also appear in specialised complex metaphors/metonyms, and in blends of metaphor and metonym (e.g., Kövecses 2010: 171–193). An example of such specialised complex metaphors is INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER AS SEEING IN A NEW WAY, FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE (Johnson and Hynynen 2018).

Hyperbole is characterised, in varying degrees, by exaggeration, overstatement, extremity and excess. Three elements of hyperbole are significant: hyperbole is notably scalar; it involves a specific shift between the propositional and the intended meaning; and it includes a specific referent (Burgers et al. 2016). The comparison of two evaluative statements (inspired by Burgers et al. 2016) might suffice to demon-

1 In research on metaphor, small capitals are used for indicating metaphors and image schemas (see e.g., Deignan et al. 2013; Semino 2008).

strate both the scalar quality and feature of extremity in hyperbole (note that in this paper, figurative expressions are given in italics):

- (1) That was *an incredible concert!*
- (2) That was *the best concert in the entire history of music!*

Both examples of hyperbole incorporate an element of exaggeration; they intend to imply much more than their literal meaning. Example (2) would stand out as more extreme than (1) on the dimension of time. However, determining if the two statements are hyperbolic or not would require real-world knowledge about music and concerts (cf. Burgers et al. 2016).

The focus of this study is on the use of figurative language (metaphor, metonymy and hyperbole) in narrative accounts. The emergence and the patterns of figurative language across authentic data will be important in this analysis. However, in English as a lingua franca (ELF) data, the use of figurative language might appear differently (see e.g., Kecskes 2007; MacArthur and Littlemore 2011). How this aspect of ELF might relate to the present study will be discussed in the following section.

The use of figurative language in the context of transient mobility was investigated by Johnson (2021). South Korean exchange students were interviewed about their intercultural experience at the beginning and at the end of their short-term mobility period. The results showed how mobile students' narrative accounts about their own intercultural encounters were constructed in metaphorical and metonymic expressions. Tapping these sociocognitive resources, students were able to foreground and elaborate on particular aspects of time, place, people, and identities that were salient for doing interculturality. When resorting to figurative expressions, the participants made use of their sociocultural pragmatic knowledge to construct socially appropriate interpretations that matched their mobile student identities. For example, the identities of people representing the host context were described in more favourable and positive terms than people at home: the former were construed as *active* and *open*, and the latter as *passive* and *closed*. Thus, the participants were attempting to support rather than critique host values, practices and cultural models in an effort to achieve common ground (Johnson 2021).

Linguistic complexity and multiplicity of meanings are highlighted in ELF research. Scholars including Alhasnawi (2021), Kecskes (2007), MacArthur and Littlemore (2011) and Pitzl (2012) claim that non-native speakers' use of a common language in social encounters reveals the interplay of normative, emergent and creative components in language. These ELF researchers have shown that there is both conventionality and creativity in the use of figurative language. Non-native speakers not only adopt target language norms to communicate in the second language but also creatively utilise their knowledge of first and second/target language forms and functions to communicate with both native and non-native speakers of English.

MacArthur and Littlemore (2011), who studied ELF interactions in conversational and interview data, wrote that contextualised and recontextualised uses of figurative language should be seen as achievements in talk rather than as “deviations from some standard form of language use.” When enacted successfully, metaphors created connections between speakers, linking the “words and thought of the participants in conversations [thus] creating common ground” (MacArthur and Littlemore 2011).

As stated above, interculturality is grounded in the meaning-making of diversity and difference, informing us about what people actually do with cultural difference as they recount them. Doing interculturality, the meaning-making of intercultural experience, is thus defined as constructing real or imagined encounters of people who represent various backgrounds and subscribe to different views and identities. But how do transnational mobile student construct themselves, others and events in the context of the complex social situations encountered in study abroad? This topic has received little attention in applied linguistics and intercultural communication research. Thus, in this study, the objective is to analyse the data described below to explore how figurative language emerges as interactional achievement in the participants’ accounts of interculturality. The research questions are as follows: (1) When narrating their intercultural experience, what figurative language do the mobile students use? (2) How do the mobile students employ figurative language in English as a lingua franca for their construal of interculturality?

3 Methodology

The participants in this study were mobile South Korean students who spent an academic term, five months, in Finland, taking part in a transnational mobility project.² The aim of the project was to foster global education competence in subject teacher and class teacher education. The students therefore took part in courses in global education and foreign languages organised by the host university as well as teaching practice at local K-12 schools. In addition, they participated in extracurricular activities that included visits to local families. English was the medium of instruction in all their courses. In the programme from 2011 to 2014, three rounds of exchange periods, each about five months, were implemented during the first academic semester.

² Korean-European Leaders for Global Education (KELeGE), 2011–2014.

The research data selected for this exploratory study consist of six semi-structured interviews with three participants who were all third-year South Korean student teachers (see Table 1). The interviews were conducted for the purpose of project monitoring and evaluation, not as research interviews. Even though the data were not originally generated for research purposes, they offer fruitful opportunities to explore discursive aspects of interculturality in a case study. The selection of interviews presented here was based on how interculturality was foregrounded and developed discursively through figurative language in the data and the excerpts chosen. In terms of relevant and representative samples, an initial analysis of Genny's, Jerry's and Mary's data demonstrated most interestingly, for the objectives of this study, the rich emergent and situated construction of figurative language on interculturality. This can be described as purposeful sampling (e.g., Miyahara 2020; Patton 2002).

Table 1: Participants and research data of the case study

Participant	Major study	Exchange period	Duration of the September and December interviews
Mary	Korean language education	September to December 2013	47 min., 66 min.
Jerry	English education	September to December 2012	83 min., 76 min.
Genny	Computer education, English education	September to December 2012	53 min., 52 min.

The themes of the mobility interviews during the first week of the students' mobility period were their past intercultural experience, along with their expectations for their present study-abroad experience. At the end of their stay, another interview was conducted that dealt with the students' study-abroad experience, personal change, and the insights they themselves had gained into the host Finnish culture and educational system. Examples of interview themes and questions are given in Appendix 2. English was used as a lingua franca by the interviewer and the research participants alike (Johnson et al. 2015). Students gave informed consent for the use of their mobility interview data in this study. After the mobility period ended, the students returned to their home country to continue their studies.

Methodological procedure and data analysis

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, the researcher contacted each participant again and asked them to take part in checking the transcript against the recording. Once the transcripts had been validated, the researcher examined figurative language related to interculturality was examined in the narrative accounts, specifically in terms of how it was constructed and sequentially unfolded.

Recent metaphor studies based on spoken/interactive data have mostly used the metaphor identification procedure (MIP), a tool for “the identification of metaphorically used words in context” (Pragglejaz 2007). By following the MIP, the analyst decides if a lexical unit has a metaphorical meaning in a particular context compared to its more basic meaning in other contexts “than the given one”. Thus, determining the metaphoricity of a lexical unit is based on verifying the contrast of metaphorical vs. non-metaphorical meaning (Pragglejaz 2007).

The MIP has been found to have limitations when used for the analysis of spoken data (see Cameron 2012; MacArthur and Littlemore 2011), and these limitations had to be considered in this study analysing ELF speaker data. Because the MIP is best suited for the analysis of metaphor and metonymy in written data, it has a specific focus on the lexical unit, not the utterance. The MIP fails to account for co-creative pragmatic features such as tuning devices and metalingual talk (Cameron and Deignan 2003; Norrick 2001), and it excludes gradience in metaphoricity/metonymy (e.g., Müller 2008). Nor does it cover hyperbole. The MIP therefore could not be adopted in its original form in this research, which involved the analysis of spoken ELF interactional data, not written language. In modifying the method views presented by the above-mentioned and other researchers were observed as potentially contributing to the contextual meaning of an utterance, in interactive spoken data. Thus, pragmatic features including tuning devices, repetitions, echoing and requests were determined to be salient for the identification of metaphor and metonym. To explore hyperbole in the interview data, the hyperbole identification procedure proposed by Burgers et al. (2016) was drawn on and modified for this study. In brief, if a lexical unit contrasted with its basic meaning but was not metaphorical or metonymic, nor intended to be ironic, it was deemed as hyperbolic.

Acting as the analyst of figurative language in this study, the researcher began to systematically identify all the figurative language in the interview transcripts. This was done by identifying the lexical units in the data and deciding if each lexical unit had a figurative meaning (i.e., in the metaphorical, metonymic or hyperbolic sense) in its particular context compared to its more basic, often concrete, meaning in other contexts. Next, expressions deemed to be metaphorical, metonymic or hyperbolic were examined more closely to identify those related to interculturality. To get an overview, the researcher highlighted transcript passages containing candi-

dates for figurative language use on interculturality. The highlighted passages were also put in tabular format when establishing cases of figurative language both in the same interview transcript and across the interview data of this study.

Based on all linguistic metaphors that were related to the topic of interculturality, metaphors and metonyms (Cameron et al. 2010) were initially constructed and projections of the image schemas (Johnson 1987) were outlined. The image schemas and metaphors were re-examined more closely for the data extracts presented in this report.

Following this, a more fine-grained analysis was carried out in those episodes that included clusters of figurative language (e.g., Cameron 2012) demonstrating creation, uptake and modification of metaphor, metonym and hyperbole by the two interactants. When analysing both emergent and recurring figurative language, it is important to look at metalingual talk (Norrick 2001) in the form of repetitions, echoing and requests. Related to metalingual talk are tuning devices, which help speakers activate figurative meaning-making in interaction. Tuning devices (e.g., Cameron and Deignan 2003) such as 'how can I say' and 'you know' may direct listeners to possible interpretations, thus preventing inappropriate literal interpretation. Tuning devices may also tone down or mitigate the interpretation of figurative language (Cameron and Deignan 2003).

Pragmatic features specific to a spoken lingua franca (Kecskes 2007; MacArthur and Littlemore 2011) were also examined in the participants' use of figurative language. These included the discursive means of repetition and rephrasing as well as the use of expressions whose meaning can be inferred from their constituent parts, in the segments of talk where figurative expressions emerged and were negotiated by the interviewee and the interviewer.

Significantly for the present study, analysis of narrative practice reveals how figurative language is employed in discourse, where the storied accounts about intercultural experience unfold in the interaction of the interview. Explorations of narrative practice (e.g., Bamberg 2011) focus on how participants perform, both in habitual and creative ways, their own and others' positions, roles and relations by resorting to story-telling modes and narrative devices. These modes and devices include constructed dialogue, pausing, repetition, and laughter/humour (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012; Tannen 2009). Variability in narrative styles can be examined using Tannen's (2009) analytical concepts of conversational involvement and evaluation. Thus, in the final stage of analysis, the above analytical concepts of the narrative practice approach were adopted to examine the data to explore in detail the interplay of figurative language and the narrative construction of interculturality.

4 Findings

The mobile student interviews that comprise the research data of this study are not understood as single-voiced talk but rather as the co-constructed and culturally situated interaction of two people: the participant/student and the teacher-as-researcher. Both belonged to the specific cultural, social and historical context of the mobility project, yet each had their own role, identity, and agency. Thus, the Finnish teacher-as-researcher's background obviously influenced the interview process; how this is reflected in the discourse analysed in this study will be explored in the sections that follow.

This section first examines the emergence of hyperbole as part of interactive talk on interculturality derived from Genny's interview. Compared to the use of metaphor and metonymy, hyperbole is not very common in the data selected for this paper. Next, findings are presented and discussed for the most part as based on Jerry's and Mary's data. As stated above, focussing on these three interviews is motivated by how interculturality is foregrounded and developed discursively through figurative language in their data, thus displaying the emergent and situated use of figurative language on interculturality.

The following excerpt demonstrates the co-constructed, contextualised use of hyperbole in a narrative account of travelling abroad. It shows how figurative language emerges as interactional achievement in the mobile student's account of interculturality. The data is from Genny's first interview, conducted near the beginning of her stay. Genny tells the interviewer about the frequent international trips that she used to make with her Korean mother. The interviewer asks Genny about the purpose of their travelling. In all the examples that follow, italics are used to indicate figurative expressions and underlining to indicate emphasis. For transcription conventions, see Appendix 1.

Example 1

- 1 GENNY: actually yeah yeah main purpose is for just travelling
 2 my mother is into travelling she loves it and she said
 3 I *feel nothing* when I'm travelling @
 4 I think she loves this feeling, *feeling nothing* you know [because
 5 INT: [*feeling nothing*?
 6 GENNY: maybe maybe she was too stressed about like house working
 7 works from my father @ (-) something (-) like that

In Genny's response, the hyperbolic 'feel nothing' (3) and 'feeling nothing' (4) construct an evaluative and emotional stance that is dramatized in reported speech (3). The repeated 'feeling nothing' followed by 'you know' invites the interviewer to

seek clarification ('feeling nothing?' in 5). In her reply, Genny speculates about her mother feeling stressed and needing to get some relief from her daily work as a housewife (6–7).

4.1 Jerry: performing a newly arrived and a returning mobile student

This subsection examines how Jerry tells about his intercultural experience on two occasions: when interviewed at the beginning of his mobility period and again a week before he returns Korea. Analysis of the two extracts from Jerry's data reveals a complex and situated character of figurative language use on interculturality.

In the following episode, Jerry is talking about the tour he made of Europe before flying to the host town. When moving around in the first of the several cities he visited he had been accompanied by a European friend of his, who had taken good care of him – like a brother. This friend had told Jerry that local people had a 'prejudice against Asian tourists' who, among other things, were known 'to take a lot of pictures.' Preceding Example 2, the interviewer asked Jerry if, because of the prejudice he had heard about, he felt the need to hold back and refrain from taking pictures.

Example 2

- 1 JERRY: I didn't know about I didn't feel like anything (- -)
 2 about because I was in Switzerland (- -) and I was
 3 with my friend so I couldn't feel any bad (- -) stuff but
 4 when I went to Czech Republic and some eastern Europe (- -)
 5 I was by myself most of the time, (- -) so when I get into MacDonald,
 6 some people.. told me taking pictures just tourist taking pictures and
 7 they laugh laugh (- -) those were kind of about eight people (- -).
 8 at first I didn't understand what taking (- -) picture means (- -)
 9 but after I got to understand they made (- -) fun of me (- -)
 10 because taking picture and then
 11 INT: that's not very nice, they're not very nice
 12 JERRY: and even in shops (- -) not everyone was friendly
 13 to me comparing (- -) to other.. white
 14 INT: yeah, so you felt maybe did you *feel as a stranger* and not
 15 JERRY: yeah, yeah
 16 INT: not fully welcomed by by the locals?
 17 JERRY: but.. I travelled about three weeks so at the end of the travel
 18 I got used to this
 19 INT: alright you got used to that
 20 JERRY: but what I want say is that even I met American people,

- 21 this is the one that I never experienced before so (- -)
 22 if I didn't have chance to travel around Europe
 23 I may not know about this
 (eight lines of transcript omitted)
 24 INT: so how do you feel about yourself after the experience
 25 JERRY: erm.. I can say *I got to know about (- -) the invisible (- -) rules*
 26 INT: yeah yeah so you know more about the invisible..
 27 *kind of barriers* and
 28 JERRY: yes and I think it is.. hard to get on get along (- -) with
 29 different ethnic I think
 30 INT: yeah ethnic groups yeah

In this excerpt, Jerry's narrative evolves and culminates in a conventionalised metaphor: othering that is invisible. First, referring to the prejudice he had heard about, Jerry explains that he 'couldn't feel any bad stuff' (3). However, in the next place on his tour he was treated differently: the locals laughed at him and commented that he was taking pictures (4–10). Jerry got used to such encounters, which he indexes three times anaphorically by 'this' (18; 21; 23). He accepts the interviewer's analogy/metaphor that he felt like 'a stranger' (14–15). When asked how he felt about it, Jerry puts it figuratively that he 'got to know about the invisible rules' (24–25). Jerry agrees with the interviewer that he now knows more about 'the invisible rules' being 'kind of barriers' (26–28) and that the invisible rules can make it hard to get along with different ethnic groups (28–29).

In sum, Jerry initially prefers to use non-figurative (literal) language, i.e., 'stuff' and repeated anaphoric reference when talking about the people he encountered during his European tour. He eventually evaluates his experience in metaphorical language ('invisible rules'), reporting this quite impersonally in terms of getting to know of the existence of these rules that are salient to interculturality. Jerry also goes along with the interviewer's paraphrase that extends his metaphor of 'invisible rules' to be understood as 'kind of barriers'.

When interviewed about his study-abroad experience and personal development five months later, a week before returning to Korea, Jerry is not in a good mood. He regrets that he has not done his best during his stay in Kokkola. He reveals that he declined to take part in activities made available especially for the small group of Korean exchange students. Nothing big really happened to Jerry; 'it was just common, normal life'. But getting together with other students to say goodbye before leaving will soon be 'something big comparing to the past, previously life was so monotonous' (the above quotes are from a segment that precedes Example 3). Indicating that he understands the metaphorical expression of life being monotonous, the interviewer then goes on to ask Jerry to say what he has learned about both locals and other people during his stay. Jerry replies that local life 'is just totally different' from his life in Korea.

Example 3

- 1 JERRY: I was raised in big cities and.. I was quite hectic do you know the word *hectic*?
- 2 INT: hectic, yes yeah yeah hectic right sorry
- 3 JERRY: working well @
- 4 INT: (checking the recorder) yeah it's it's all right
- 5 JERRY: so.. I felt like *something.. chasing me*.
- 6 INT: *chasing?*
- 7 JERRY: yeah @ and people look seems like that like many people work a lot and..
- 8 but the life in here the Finnish people was.. kind of I felt they are..
- 9 that's the life @ because I.. already visit Finnish family
- 10 not the family for the class I'm taking (- -)
- 11 but the.. teachers I already know (- -) from the primary school,
- 12 they showed me how they live hm usually.. yeah so.. what I most..
- 13 what was the impressive is that is the life @ (- -)
- 14 it is the life (- -) for the people @
- 15 because Korean looks like..hm live for something @ for example
- 16 to make money, they live for, to raise their family, (- -) they live (- -)
- 17 to get a job, they live (- -) to sustain some goal, they live.
- (five lines of transcript removed)
- 18 but.. I couldn't find Finns are chased by something @ (- -) yeah.

To highlight how totally different life in the host context is from his life in Korea, Jerry puts it figuratively that he was quite 'hectic' in Korea and then checks if the interviewer knows the word (1–2). Next, he explains that in Korea he 'felt something chasing' him (5). The interviewer asks for clarification of what he means by 'chasing' (6). Prompted by this request, Jerry constructs 'Finnish people' in the small town who are not 'chased by something' (7–14; 18) and juxtaposes this with a scenario of Koreans who are chased to accomplish things in their lives (15–17).

Here, the strong emphasis on idiomatic expressions such as 'that's the life' (9), 'live for something' (15), 'to make money', and 'to raise their family' (16), several of which are produced in parallel, indicates that Jerry is serious when he contrasts the cultural models of host country versus home country. The metaphorical expressions 'I was hectic', 'I felt something chasing me' and 'I couldn't find Finns are chased by something' may be interpreted as projections of the image schema of FORCE (Johnson 1987).

If we compare Jerry's predominantly non-figurative language use in the first interview (see Example 2) and the excerpt from the second interview (Example 3), we can conclude that he now seems to be more confident in construing self and cultural difference through figurative language. He can foreground salient aspects of his complex intercultural experience through figurative language while also managing the risks of simplifying reality that are inherent in its use (Semino 2008: 86). Also, his contrast of the cultural models of host versus home in metaphor

helps to perform a returning exchange student who, in spite of a dreary, monotonous stay, shows the expected and proper appreciation for both the local people and the mobility project and is quite happy to return to his home country.

4.2 Critiquing the cultural model at home and finding a place with multiple voices

Going back to Korea and resuming their teacher education studies in their home university was something the three participants in this study all looked forward to. When interviewed at the end of their mobility period, they reflected on their evolving sense of self and professional competence as student teachers. Overall, the prospect of going back gave rise to many concerns. The students knew that embarking on a teaching career in the Korean education system after graduation would be stressful and extremely competitive for all of them; only a minority of teacher education graduates, they said, would be able to have a career in Korean public schools.

Mary's study abroad had made her think a lot about her future. Before the stay, she wanted only to become a Korean language teacher, but by the end of her stay she was considering other options, namely graduate study at her university and pursuing a career as a specialist in intercultural education. Even in the September interview, she had argued figuratively that Korean education was 'not going the right way' because of the excessive competition in schools, which she thought was accepted by everyone and was deliberately built into the ranking system of higher education:

Older people [in Korea] think differently because they are the baby boomers, the *strict generation*. They think the good university means the happy life, good work, good life, but young people of my age we think that students of my age have to study really hard, and they feel it's really hard to get a job now, even though they studied in the high school so hard (...) The parents want their children to go to [the top-ranking universities] and they say to the students if you go there, you can get a good job, and you can meet the good people and date with other girls and boys, and so, you have to study in the high schools, *it's a rule or road to them*. (Mary's first interview)

Mary's metaphorical expression 'it's a rule or road to them' concludes her notion about the dominating 'strict generation'. It seems to be a projection of the two image schemas MOVEMENT and FORCE (Johnson 1987). The scenario of a single road encapsulates her critique of the cultural model of Korean education and society at large, a model that is driven by the older generation and more or less willingly accepted by Mary and her peers. They do not know how or where to 'find their own way' because, as she explains 'that kind of philosophies (...) in their thinking is in-

jected to their children'. We can see here that Mary's interculturality at the level of the narrated event is related to the Korean context. The interculturality that she points to here does not primarily juxtapose the 'big cultures' of home versus host but foregrounds an intergenerational tension at home. Mary's narrative about cultural difference and diversity requires a closer look.

In Example 4, which is from her second interview, Mary shares her plans for the future. She again performs the identity of a third-year exchange student who has plans and a personal agenda worth pursuing. Mary talks about the local and transnational students and teachers with whom she has interacted during her stay. Trips she has made in Finland and Scandinavia have given her opportunities to make friends and compare Korea and other countries with regard to education and beyond. Prior to the excerpt that follows, the interviewer asked Mary what she has learned while she was away from her home country.

Example 4

- 1 MARY: erm.. okay, erm.. I think there's a quite general answer, but (- -)
 2 it's true that I'll I've I've got erm really.. multiple.. perspectives,
 3 I think it's quite general, but it is true, because
 4 when I just stay in the Korea, I didn't realise erm my own thinking
 5 like erm.. actually, when I came.. before I came here,
 6 I just thought that the western peoples are same or similar,
 7 like Americans and Europeans will be similar like that.
 8 but it was totally.. different
 (18 lines of transcript removed; talk about a children's game in Korea)
 9 but erm in Korea it's what's English words erm it's just *the way*
 10 (- -) *how.. we are doing* (- -) but.. for the.. other countries' people
 11 it's not.. it's *not the way they're doing*.
 12 So I can I can compare, and I can judge what.. not to judge
 13 I can think about it once again (- -) about what.. I what I thought
 14 it was.. the way how it was like, so.. *I just really experienced*
 15 *the multiple perspectives* while.. meeting the other.. people
 16 from different countries (- -) so maybe.. that's that's the best parts
 17 when I learned (- -) in here, [yeah
 18 INT: [in addition to games (- -) what *other things are* (- -) *to be found*
 19 *in those different kinds of perspectives?*
 20 MARY: erm *the perspectives*... like erm while we are tal- talking,
 21 it's the most di- different thing, for example, erm
 22 when I talk with friends' friends, you know *they are really*..
 23 how can I say, erm freely think right but you know
 24 *Asian cultures are more strict* than that but but
 25 while:: I'm talking with them, just you know, we are friends
 26 and we just *hanging around*, and just staying with together,
 27 but.. the thinking is quite different, so.. it was quite.. at the first

- 28 time it was quite *weird* or awkward for me (- -) but after..
 29 talk more about the topics, that specific topics,
 30 and just understanding *how* they just grow up in their own countries

Using the frame of ‘multiple perspectives’, Mary describes what she has learned during her stay in Finland. She talks about the new insights she gained when she compared her own understanding of Korean values and the cultural value systems of ‘the western peoples’ she met during her stay in Finland (3–11). She rephrases and uses paraphrase to frame the comparison in figurative language: ‘[the way] how we are doing’ vs. ‘the way they’re doing’ (8–11). As an example, she relates how she had talked to her European friends about a Korean children’s game and how these friends had reacted and called it quite violent (this subtopic between lines 8 and 9 is not seen in the transcript). The interviewer then asks Mary to tell him what else is to be found ‘in those (...) multiple perspectives’ (18–19). She explains what she learned from and about her friends while in the host environment. Her European and other Western friends are ‘freely think[ing]’ whereas ‘Asian cultures’, with which Mary seems to align, are ‘more strict than that.’ Hanging around with her new friends and talking to them about various topics was first ‘quite weird or awkward’ for Mary (25–28), but with time, and in dialogue with her peers, she was able to think about and understand how cultural views and values were sited (28–30).

In Example 4, figurative language appears in a clustered and layered way. Mary first employs ‘multiple perspectives’ (1–2) as a literal idiom that frames a long, uninterrupted narration (1–17), with the interviewer occasionally back-channelling her. The metaphorical expression ‘the way we /they are doing’ (9–11) seems to be motivated by the image schema of MOVEMENT. After the interviewer’s question (18–19), the literal idiom ‘multiple perspectives’ soon evolves into a metaphoric source, SPACE OF LEARNING, to conceptualise how she gained intercultural insights, viz. LEARNING TAKES PLACE IN A SPACE. In this metonymic frame of comparing cultures (CULTURE AS PEOPLE), she again resorts to the oppositional metaphor FREE-STRICT to make sense of the cultural difference (20–24). Finally, she resorts to the hyperbole ‘weird’ – in this case, not a very extreme exaggeration – to sum up her account of intercultural learning (27–28).

5 Discussion: Metaphor, metonymy, and hyperbole in doing interculturality

By exploring the narrators’ strategies for telling and their discursive construction of roles and positions, it was possible to analyse in more detail the interplay of figura-

tive language and the narrative construction of interculturality. Narrative analysis in and around clusters of figurative expression revealed how the narrative accounts on interculturality were influenced by the natural, social, and linguistic environment of interaction. The first research question was: When narrating their intercultural experience, what figurative language do the mobile students use? In answering it, two major conclusions can be drawn: Firstly, metaphors of movement and force were used for 'doing interculturality', when the interviewees constructed themselves, others and events in figurative language in the context of the mobility project interview. Secondly, using metonymy and oppositional metaphor (such as free-strict) as well as hyperbole, the participants presented their views on school education, society and people in the two contexts.

The second research question was: How do the mobile students employ figurative language in English as a lingua franca for their construal of interculturality? The use of figurative language is a situated practice which obviously has its advantages and disadvantages. It serves the mobile student well to reason, explain and communicate one thing in terms of another (metaphor, metonymy) and to express something through extremity and exaggeration (hyperbole), when making sense of self, others, otherness and diversity in their lifeworld. However, the use of figurative language also requires pragmatic skill and negotiation by the interactants to avoid misunderstanding and potentially unfriendly or too critical comments about the host educational context and its representatives.

The analysis carried out in this study foregrounded commonalities within figurative language use, such as the metaphoric source of 'strict' vs. 'free' to conceptualise diverse cultures of education (e.g., Mary in Example 4; see also Johnson 2021). Conversely, examples of the more creative use of figurative language included Jerry's 'monotonous' and 'hectic' metaphorical construals of self and his lifeworld when he was talking variously about his life in Korea and Finland.

Unlike in Example 1, hyperbolic expressions turned out to be embedded in clusters of other figurative language use. Analysis also revealed that compared to the emergence of metaphor and metonym, hyperbole, which was also accompanied by tuning devices, was quite rarely employed, and when it was used, it presented far from extreme scenarios.

For the joint effort of meaning-making on interculturality, the participants used metalanguage and tuning devices, and they repeated expressions as well as echoed the interviewer's expressions. This helped to distinguish figurative from literal/non-figurative language use, a distinction that is often blurred in spoken discourse (Cameron 2012).

Confusion or miscommunication might occur in the production and interpretation of figurative language (Gibbs and Colston 2012; MacArthur and Littlemore 2011; Pitzl 2012). Analysis of the six interviews points to a pattern in which a participant

initially preferred to employ non-figurative language when making sense of their experience. On the other hand, when later dealing with various topics of interculturality in more detail, they seemed to be more confident with the production of both conventionalised and creative figurative language to explain, compare, and argue. We may assume that by the end of their stay, the participants' sociocultural knowledge, which was required specifically for the figurative language use in the mobility context, had evolved considerably. Example 2 above showed how Jerry began as neutral and unbiased rather than emotional and evaluative, both in his interaction with the interviewer and in his construction of a narrative account about the locals during his travels in Europe. From the perspective of intercultural pragmatics, Jerry achieved common ground (Kecskes 2007) by explaining his views in non-figurative language. In the second interview, however, (see Example 3), we meet him as a mobile student who is much more confident and creative in his use of figurative language.

6 Conclusion

This research explored the figurative language, including metaphor, metonymy and hyperbole, that emerged in the flow of mobile students' narrative accounts of interculturality. The data of the study derived from mobility project interviews conducted with South Korean student teachers at the beginning and at the end of their short-term stays in Finland.

The current exploratory research has limitations. Identifying metaphor and other figurative language in a valid and reliable way would ideally require a procedure involving more than one analyst and a large corpus of data (see Praggeljaz Group 2007; also Low 1999), which were not available for the implementation of this study. The research findings, however, offer perspectives that could be further investigated by teams of researchers and based on larger datasets/corpora.

In this study, it has been argued that in spoken narrative discourse, figurative language should be understood as a dynamic, dialogic and innovative potential for communication, reasoning, and understanding. Figurative language was neither a static cognitive structure nor a deviation in meaning (Gibbs and Cameron 2008; Kienpointner 2011). Exploring pragmatic features specific to lingua franca interactions, such as repetition and rephrasing enriched the analysis of figurative language in the data.

Analysing the use of figurative language made it possible to understand key processes and events of interculturality, as narrated by the transnational Korean mobile students. Their narrative accounts not only highlighted tellings of past and ongoing events but also revealed "future or hypothetical events (...) allusions to (pre-

vious) tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 116). Negotiation, co-construction and appropriation of figurative language (as theorised for example in Cameron 2008), both in the event of narration and for the event narrated, constituted the core finding of the present study. The participants reflected on their experience of the social/cultural environment, and in doing so, they resorted to figurative language in different ways, depending on the topic at hand and the context of situation. The narrative practice analysis of the data demonstrated that in the narrative discourse of the mobility interviews, figurative language had a significant role in the speakers' representation of themselves and in their making sense of others, otherness and cultural diversity. This is also shown in Johnson (2021), where the use of figurative language (metaphor and metonym) in doing interculturality was frequent but varied considerably between the participants and between the two interviews in which they participated.

In this study, interculturality was not investigated in terms of some kind of capacity, awareness or stance but was posited as the construal of self, others, otherness and cultural diversity in narrative and figurative language. Hence, interculturality provided an analytical and methodological perspective to investigate these hypermobile students' ways of constructing themselves, others and events in the context of the complex social situations encountered in study abroad. Its in-depth examination of this kind of discursive construction is the major contribution of the present study, particularly because it is a subject that has been given little attention in the field of applied linguistics and intercultural communication research.

The analytic approach developed in the present study should also be useful in future research on intercultural communication and education in a globalised world, as well as in its practice. New lines of research to explore how processes and events of interculturality are constructed in figurative language might include investigations based on larger data sets and other types of data, such as educational discourse from classroom interactions related to interculturality or focus group interviews with mobile students prior to, during and after their study or internship abroad.

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Appendix 1

Transcription conventions

italics figurative expression

comma (,) continuing intonation contour; a slight rise

[] overlapping talk

"@" laughter

“.” truncated word

“?” rising intonation contour; an appeal i.e. the speaker seeks validation from the listener

pauses: “.” a micro pause

“(- -)” back-channelling omitted

underlining: emphasis

Appendix 2

Examples of themes addressed and questions asked in the mobility interviews

What emotions and images do you have about things, people and yourself, now that you are starting the exchange? (first interview)

In what way do you think (you will) interact and communicate with the locals, international students and your own people/countrymen? (first interview)

What do you want to study in the host country? (first interview)

Who did you interact and communicate with in your study and during your free time? (second interview)

How do you describe your own beliefs about culture, the host context and different academic cultures? (second interview)

How have your views about education changed? (second interview)