Linguistic Constructions of Sociocultural Difference: the initial perceptions of Japanese and German students at a New Zealand university

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1. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to investigate the ways in which language is used in the discursive construction of national identities. Specifically, the object of analysis is interview data in which six international students from Germany and Japan enact their early study abroad experiences to a young (mid-twenties) New Zealand researcher. It has been found that the students often construct their experience in terms of perceived sociocultural differences between their "home country", Japan or Germany, and chosen place of exchange, New Zealand. The way in which participants of this study position themselves as a member of a social, cultural, and/or linguistic 'Other', or perceived outsider (cf. Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586) is discursively underscored by the use of "extreme" language. In conversation analysis this language is referred to as Extreme Case Formulations or ECF's, expressions such as '*no one', 'never', 'absolutely',* which are used to justify or defend a position (see Pomerantz, 1986; Edwards, 2000). Although there exists a wide range of scholarship on linguistic constructions of national identity (e.g. Miller 2000; Yamaguchi 2004), it is the author's contention that few (if any) studies have specifically addressed the current research context, viz. comparing the perceptions of Japanese and German students who are studying in New Zealand, while employing a combination of conversation analysis and other discourse analytic techniques in the analysis of data.

Placing this study in a wider context, in terms of potential social application, a secondary aim of this paper is to utilise data in such a way that it might be "empowering" or otherwise useful to international students studying in New Zealand, with regard to cultural differences and intercultural communication (Cameron et al., 1997). This will be done, for example, by making recommendations to the Student International Services at Otago with regard to the section 'Kiwi culture and culturally appropriate behaviour in New Zealand' in the *Guide for International Students* (2007).

2. Notes on Data Selection, Methods of Analysis and Research Questions

2.1 Data Selection

The data in this paper are selected from a preliminary study investigating the (long-term) experiences of Japanese and German students at a New Zealand University. These initial interviews, conducted approximately 2-3 months after the students' arrival, investigate their motivations for coming to New Zealand, their previous experience as a foreign language learner and overseas traveller (where applicable), and first impressions of New Zealand life and culture, compared to that of "home". Although six students have been interviewed, the restricted scope of this paper only allows for a detailed analysis of four participants in the body of the text. The interview excerpts selected for inclusion in the paper have been chosen on the following grounds: (i) the example contains explicit (and potentially implicit) demonstrations of how the participant feels that New Zealand is socioculturally different to her/his own home country, (ii) the example is felt to be indicative of the student's wider experience and common themes of her/his discursive representation throughout the interview (as explicated in the initial paragraph for each student in the data analysis section which gives a general account of the student's experience in New Zealand thus far), and (iii) the example is of (sociolinguistic) analytical interest in that is perceived as "emotionally loaded", i.e. the student constructs and reinforces her/his point using "extreme language" such as Extreme Case Formulations .

2.2 Methods of Analysis: ECF'S, Pronouns, Lists and Repetition

Whereas methods of conversation analysis traditionally fulfil a descriptive function, I argue that analysing talk-in-interaction (in combination with other discourse analytic techniques), can provide a rich detailed perspective from which to interpret the ethnographic interview data in this study (cf. Bucholtz and Hall, 2008, p.408). In particular, the "extreme language" employed by participants in processes of national identity construction, represents their experiences both at the descriptive level (the language used to describe their experiences) and at the interactional level (how meanings are framed in particular ways in an interaction with a New Zealand researcher).

As previously outlined, in order to highlight processes of national identity construction and perceived cultural differences in the chosen interview sequences, I focus primarily on Extreme Case Formulations or 'ECFs' (see Pomerantz, 1986; Edwards, 2000). Pomerantz identified ECF's as expressions such as *all, none, most, every, least, absolutely, completely,*

whose uses are "to defend or justify a position, especially in the case of a challenge" (Edwards, 2000, p. 347).

While research in the area of sociolinguistics has shown that, both historically and currently, homogenous and essentialised and polarised notions of identity, language and culture have salience in people's lives (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 376), narratives constructing the attributes or "tendencies" of people from a certain culture are open to challenge. These constructions therefore require "justification" or "legitimization" to be heard in a certain way or accepted as "normal" (Pomerantz, 1986, pp. 226-227), such as in the following example from a Japanese participant: "in Japan *everyone* is *so* busy" (cf. Tatsuya).

In an extension of Pomerantz' thesis, Edwards (2000) looked at how ECFs can be qualified or softened in order to "display investment in, or stance toward, some state of affairs" (p. 347). Therefore, when the participants of this study produce certain positions, these positions are sometimes "qualified" or "softened" so as to reduce the intensity of their claim, and/or build solidarity in their relationship with the (New Zealand) researcher, such as in the following example from a German student: "*sometimes* Kiwis are *a bit more* practical *in a way*" (cf. Paul). In addition to ECFs, I employ other discourse analytic techniques such as examining how participants use pronouns. Pronominal usage is an additional tool to investigate how "the phenomenon of "othering" is linguistically realised", a "typical" example being "we" (Japanese) vis-à-vis "they" New Zealanders (Yamaguchi, 2004, p. 240, cf. Yuji). The creation of lists[i] and the use of repetition will also be included in examining the ways in which the interviewees construct and reinforce particular positions (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 187).

2.3 Research Questions

The following two research questions relate to the primary aim of this paper, i.e. investigating the ways in which language is socially constructive in the discursive representation of national identities (as limited to the current research context), and to the selected methods of conversation and discourse analysis outlined in section 2.2:

(i)   *In an interview with a New Zealand researcher, how do the participants in this study discursively represent their experience in New Zealand with regard to sociocultural differences between their own and others' national identity?*

(ii)   *What patterns, if any, are to be found within and across the two national groups?*

The third question addresses the secondary aim of this paper, i.e. to place the findings in a wider social context, by suggesting ways in which to utilise this kind of data to develop materials for international students studying in New Zealand:

(iii)   *How can we promote the awareness of cultural differences in intercultural interaction without over-generalising or stereotyping?*

3. Methodology

As a young New Zealander who has lived for extended periods in both Germany and Japan as an international student and English teacher, I feel well positioned as a researcher vis-à-vis the selected participants (Miller, 2000, p. 76). The participant recruitment process was as follows: After obtaining ethical approval for the project from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee, potential candidates were sent an email via International Student Services asking them to participate in a study on their experiences in New Zealand. Some participants replied to this email and others were located by, 'word of mouth', or the initial participants asking other acquaintances to participate. One student contacted the researcher after seeing a poster asking for participants for this study at the university library. All participants, once recruited, had an informal chat with the interviewer before the interview, in which they introduced each other. The interviewees were invited to ask any preliminary questions about the research project at this time.

All interviewees were given the opportunity to speak in their first language, (i.e. German or Japanese), however, the interviews were conducted almost exclusively in English.[ii] The interviews, which took place in a small airy University classroom (with the door closed and only the interviewer and interviewee present), were digitally recorded. The informal open-ended questioning technique involved general questions such as: "Why did you decide to come to New Zealand?", "How has your experience in New Zealand been so far", "Tell me about your experience with language in New Zealand so far", and "What would you like to achieve or experience during your time in New Zealand?". The interviews lasted between approximately 20 minutes and one hour. They were transcribed verbatim with transcriptions consisting of between 8 and 21 pages.

4. The Participants and Data Analysis

4.1 The Participants

Table 1: Summary of Student Profiles

Name	*Nami*	*Yuji*	*Tatsuya*	*Paul*	*Christina*	*Petra*
Gender	F	M	M	M	F	F
Nationality	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	German	German	German

There are six international students in this study, three from Japan and three from Germany; three females and three males. The participants are aged between 20 and 25 years of age and study across a broad range of disciplines. All students have studied English previously. They have all been overseas before, notably Paul and Christina having lived in English speaking countries for extended periods. To protect the students' anonymity all names are pseudonyms and the mention of other specific details which could identify students has been avoided. In the following section I focus on data from four of the participants, namely, Yuji, Tatsuya, Christina and Petra.[iii] However, the discussion section takes the data analysis from all students into account.

4.2 Data Analysis

Japanese Students

YUJI

Yuji relays that the main purpose of his time abroad is not study, but to participate in extracurricular activities and learn more about himself and other cultures. At the beginning of his stay Yuji says he felt "culturally shocked" which is highlighted by his construction of the great differences between New Zealand and Japanese culture:

Yuji: *ah everything!*

1	Yuji:	→	yeah and in Tokyo (.) yeah ah the student are really competitive
2	Anita:		yes
3	Yuji:		and and yeah we have to compete with our friends yeah but in this country they
4		→	they don't care like yeah and (.) ah only if ah (.) mm the people around me is happy
5			ah that will be good [like]
6	Anita:		[mhm]
7	Yuji:		so I think yeah they have such a consciousness yeah and
8	Anita:		yeah

9	Yuji:		and I feel happy
10	Anita:		yeah oh good ((L))
11	Yuji:		((L))
12	Anita:		so um what were some of the things that seem or what are some of the
13			things that seem different to you so far? ((L))
14	Yuji:		ah
15	Anita:		((L))
16	Yuji:	→	everything! ((L))
17	Anita:	→	everything! yeah

In this passage Yuji spatially constructs a dichotomy between people "in Tokyo" (Japan) as "competitive" and the people "in this country", (New Zealand), as non-competitive and "happy", based upon his experiences of the behaviour and attitudes of people in each respective country. This position is highlighted by the use of ECFs and the "typical" pronominal usage of "they" and "we" (Yamaguchi, 2004, p. 240) to highlight stances toward sociocultural "otherness". Yuji establishes his view in line (1) ("in Tokyo (.) yeah ah the student are *really* competitive") and (2) ("and and yeah we have to compete with our friends"). The use of the ECF *"really"* and repetition of "competitive" and "compete" reinforce the construction of this unqualified statement (Edwards, 2000; Yamaguchi, 2004). This statement is immediately followed by the conjunction (3) "but" introducing an opposition, which is then highlighted by the prepositional phrase (3) "in this country" (as opposed to (1) "in Tokyo") and continues (3) "they don't care". The contrasting views Yuji constructs between Japanese as "competitive" and New Zealanders as non-competitive are highlighted by the prepositions "we" Japanese, a group of which Yuji is a part, and "they" New Zealanders. In this way Yuji concurrently avoids directly addressing the interviewer (who is part of the category "New Zealanders"), i.e. by using the preposition "they" instead of "you", which could potentially affect interviewer-interviewee solidarity or offend the interviewer. Yuji oscillates between putting himself in the position of (i) what he perceives a New Zealander to be like, indicated by the preposition "me" and "legitimized" (Pomerantz, 1986) by the "semantically extreme adjective" (Edwards, 2004, p. 348) "only" in line (4) "*only* if ah (.) mm the people around me is happy" and (5) "ah that will be good", and (ii) his own experience as a (Japanese) student observing and interacting with New Zealanders, shown in lines (7) so yeah *I* think *they* have such a consciousness yeah and" (9)" and *I* feel happy". This binary construction between New Zealanders and Japanese is then further challenged by the interviewer's question in lines (12) and (13), which is emphatically

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countered by Yuji's ECF response "everything!" an overt indication of his position on cultural differences perceived in his experience thus far.

TATSUYA

At the time of this interview Tatsuya is in the Language Centre of the University but plans to attend 'mainstream' classes in the second semester. Tatsuya is motivated to achieve academically but is challenged by communication difficulties and dealing with what he perceives as the vastly different "slow life" of New Zealand in comparison to "busy" Japan. To the question "Have you found New Zealand quite different from Japan?" he replies:

Tatusya: *"lifestyle is so slow and everyone in Japan is so busy"*

1	Tatsuya: →	yeah so I found different
2	Anita:	yeah?
3	Tatsuya:	yeah
4	Anita:	Can you think of any examples?
5	Tatsuya:	oh examples? So the lifestyle ((L))
6	Anita:	yeah
7	Tatsuya:	first is lifestyle
8	Anita:	yeah
9	Tatsuya: →	is so slow and in Japan everyone is so busy ((L))
10	Anita:	((L)) yeah
11	Tatsuya: →	very busy and ah so negative I feel, but I sometimes become negative but I
12	→	sometimes to talk about and my host, but he always say 'you can do it, just' ((L))
13	Anita:	yeah

Similarly to Yuji, Tatsuya perceives life in New Zealand as very different from Japan, a stance which, despite challenges from the interviewer, lines (2) and (4), is maintained throughout the passage, lines (3) and (5). Tatsuya presents his viewpoint in line (1), underscored by the use and foregrounding of the ECF *"so"* in (1) "so I found different", a pattern which he repeats in subsequent turns (c.f. (9) and (11)). When prompted for examples, Tatsuya contrasts the lifestyle between New Zealand, (7) "lifestyle" (9) "is *so* slow" and Japan in the unqualified statement (9) "and in Japan *everyone* is *so* busy". From line (11) Tatsuya then extends and personifies his position in relation to his own experiences interacting (as a Japanese) with his (New Zealand) host father. He begins with repetition of

the previous statement, reinforced with the ECF *"very"* in (11) *"very* busy and ah *so* negative I feel". He then develops this analogy by aligning himself with what he sees as "negative" Japanese (11) "but I sometimes become negative" as opposed to a positive stance toward New Zealanders, as represented by the encouraging words of his host father (11) "he *always* say 'you can do it, just'"

German Students

CHRISTINA

Christina has previously been to New Zealand for a holiday and had high expectations of returning to a "relaxed" culture and doing a specific course at University. However, in a dramatic turnaround she decided that she could "never ever live here". The "precipitating circumstance[s]" (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 228) which lead to this decision include the cancellation of her chosen academic course and a re-evaluation of the "relaxed" attitude of New Zealanders (as opposed to "focused" Germans) which she outlines in the following:

Christina *"and they say 'everything's fine' but actually it's not fine"*

1	Christina:	Like some weeks ago I said like after two months being here that like I decided for
2	→	myself I never ever could live over here.

[...]	((several turns later))

3	Christina:	When I came to New Zealand and that's what I liked before as well and that was sort
4		of what I was expecting it's more like people are more relaxed

[...]	((Christina continues her narrative of "relaxed" New Zealanders))

5	Anita:	mhm
6	Christina:	but there are some things like I I just came across people or some things happening
7		when people were saying 'yeah I'm gonna do that' or 'take it easy' and then
8	→	nothing's happened, and that was something I really, I I couldn't that it's just, oh I
9	→	can't stand it's like well they say they are going to do it and they don't do it and they
10	→	say 'everything's fine' but actually it's not fine and so that's kind of th the border,
11	→	it's not superficial I'd say, but it's like sometimes it's too much like ((L)) too much
12		relaxation, it could be something more, you know, like focused on things. And that's
13	→	been something I, well that's why I would say 'well I prefer the German way' just to
14		saying 'well I'm doing things' and

15   Anita: mhm

In the above extract Christina relays her personal experiences in New Zealand using the pronoun 'I' vis-à-vis her encounters with New Zealanders, referred to as "people" or "they". Her position is also reinforced or legitimized by the use of several ECFs. Christina begins with an emphatic decision she made about New Zealand after two months of living here, underscored by the use of the absolute ECF "*never ever*" in (1) "I decided for (2) myself I could *never ever* live here". In lines (3) and (4) she explains that the one of the reasons why she chose to come and study in New Zealand after her short experience there on holiday was because (4) "people are more relaxed" [than in Germany]. In line (6) she then introduces her counter experience, or re-evaluation of New Zealand culture with the conjunction "but". What follows is a portrayal of a relaxed, non-responsive New Zealand attitude highlighted by the directly reported colloquial phrases (7) "yeah I'm gonna do that" and (7) "take it easy". Christina's dismay at this attitude and her expectations not being met is highlighted by the ECF in line (8) "*nothing's* happened" and built upon (8) "and that was something I *really*, I I couldn't that it's *just*, *oh I* (9) *can't stand it's*". The outcome is then summarised by way of repetition in the two syntactically similar phrases (i) (9) "they say they are going to do it and they don't do it", and (ii) (9) "they (10) say 'everything's fine' but actually it's not fine". Christina then justifies her position by comparing it to the way things would be done in Germany "sometimes it's *too much* like ((L)) *too much* relaxation, it could be something more, you know, like focused on things". She finishes with the conclusion (13) "that's why I would say 'well I prefer the German way' just to (14) saying 'well I'm doing things'". Note that overall the interviewer has little to no influence in co-constructing the participant's dichotomy, as indicated by the two instances of her responses "mhm" in lines (5) and (15). While the interviewer is by default, a part of the category whom Christina feels is too relaxed, or non-responsive, she is not directly addressed as being part of this group (Christina uses the pronoun 'they' to refer to New Zealanders). Furthermore, with regard to interviewer-interviewee affiliation, Christina's language is in some parts softened or mitigated for example, (6) "some things", (11) "sometimes", and (12) "it could be".

PETRA

For Petra, studying in New Zealand is the ideal situation. Before she came to New Zealand she felt "like it must be really great" and after a short period living here maintains that it's "even better than I expected". Like Christina, Petra feels that people in New Zealand are more relaxed than in Germany. However, in contrast to Christina she would feels that it is "so perfect here" as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

Petra "*for me it feels like so perfect*"

1	Petra:	→	yeah but overall it's a really great experience because I feel like I feel really
2		→	welcomed, and I feel that the that the most persons here are friendly and open and
3		→	also like the nature and everything is really great. I have a feeling here is not so much
4		→	stress or everything is going to a little bit more relaxed.
5	Anita:		yeah?
6	Petra:		yeah

| [...] | ((Several turns later)) |

7	Petra:	→	I really really like it here
8	Anita:		[yeah]
9	Petra:	→	[it's] just, I'm wondering if it's always like this if you go abroad like you're so um
10			enthusiastic about it=
11	Anita:		yeah
12	Petra:	→	= or if it's really New Zealand?, but for me it feels like so perfect I would
13			like to stay here, or I would like to have it like this at home too, yeah

In this excerpt Christina uses a number of statements perspectivised by the pronoun 'I', ("I feel" "I'm wondering" "I would like") to construct her personal narrative about the differences between Germany and New Zealand. Her positive stance toward New Zealand is highlighted by the use of several EFCs throughout the short passage and the repetition of the preposition 'here' (New Zealand). Petra begins by outlining her general position in line (1) underscored by the ECF *"really"* in (1) "overall it's *really* great". This claim is then justified by and explicated ((1) "because") by a list of positive personal experiences and feelings about New Zealand (i) (1) I feel like I feel *really* (2)welcomed, (ii) (2) and I feel that the that the *most* persons here are friendly and open (iii) (2) "and (3) also like the nature", which culminates in her overall impression (3)"*everything* is *really* great". At this point Christina's positive stance towards New Zealanders as "welcom[ing]", "friendly" and "open"

is juxtaposed against her (negative) perceptions of how New Zealand ("here") is different to Germany (3) "here is *not so much* stress" and (4) "*everything* is going to *a little bit more* relaxed", however this is relayed with the use of softened ECFs. The interviewer then challenges the participant's aforementioned views in line (5). The participant maintains her position in line (6) and reinforces it with the repetition of the ECF *"really"* in line (7) (I *really really* like it here). Christina then goes on in line (9), (10) and (12) to question whether her enthusiasm is due to the exchange experience itself or actually a result of being in New Zealand specifically. However, to summarise her position she refers back to her personal experience (12) "but for me", to reinforce her positive stance toward New Zealand by indicating that she would either like to stay here or transpose the sociocultural attributes of New Zealand (13) "like this" to Germany, (13) "home".

5. Discussion

In order to discuss the analysis of the data I refer back to the two relevant research questions:

(ii)   *In an interview with a New Zealand researcher, how do the participants in this study discursively represent their experience in New Zealand with regard to sociocultural differences between their own and others' national identity?*

(ii)   *What patterns, if any, are to be found within and across the two national groups?*

Japanese Students

In general the Japanese students found that New Zealand was very different to Japan, as demonstrated by their use of "emotionally loaded" language; participants employed a number of ECFs and other devices to construct and underscore this position, especially in the case of Yuji who used the "maximum" ECF "everything!" to express this viewpoint (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 221). All three students created a binary construction to represent how they felt New Zealand was different from Japan, although in varying ways; Nami with reference to nature, Yuji by contrasting the students in Tokyo as competitive with New Zealanders as non-competitive and only caring if others are happy, and Tatsuya by juxtaposing the slow lifestyle of New Zealand with the busy and negative life of Japanese society. Despite their individual challenges (homesickness, coping with culture shock and communication difficulties respectively), in general the Japanese students in this study presented a positive stance toward New Zealand.

In light of the interactional context in which the interviews took place, this positive view could also be interpreted as partially a way of building solidarity with the New Zealand researcher, by complimenting her country. Furthermore, the nationality of the researcher was never directly addressed, as could have been achieved pronominally through the use of "you".

German Students

In contrast to the generally positive views of New Zealand outlined by the Japanese students, the experiences of the participants from Germany showed great individual variation in terms of stance toward the host country; from Christina who felt she could "never ever" live here, to Petra who felt it was "so perfect" here. However, there were patterns in the way that the students discursively created binary constructions between New Zealand and Germany and the "extreme language" they employed; all three German students used ECFs and lists to legitimise or justify their position. Both female participants felt that New Zealanders are more relaxed than Germans and similarly Paul felt that New Zealanders are more practical or going for the easiest solution. Paul felt that the German way of doing things was more precise and exact, Christina perceived Germany as more stressful, however Petra found Germans comparatively more focused.

While, in general, the German students (2 from 3) were more critical of New Zealand, only Paul directly addressed the category of the New Zealand researcher with the pronoun 'you' and the students sometimes used softeners or qualifiers to mitigate their positions. This could also been seen as an appeal to interviewer-interviewee solidarity.

General Comment

Adopting a post-structural viewpoint that recognises identity as "a discursive construct that emerges in interaction" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 587), the researcher contends that the methodology used in this study points toward insightful ways in which to re-examine previous scholarship on Japanese and German interactional style. The qualitative methods of analysis have permitted a more nuanced description of emerging discursive representations in context, helping to avoid "freezing" or essentialising the participant's identity. At the same time, this methodology has allowed for the wider comparison of data, or identifying patterns among particular (national) groups. To illustrate this point further, I now make a brief

description of how the data from this paper is (in)consistent with popular conceptions of Japanese and German communicative behaviour.

In prior studies, Japanese speakers have been widely perceived of as "conflict avoiding and harmonious" (Maynard, 1986, pp. 1103-1104). At the interactional level, this appears consistent with the tendency of the Japanese participants in this study to discursively construct a relationship of solidarity with the New Zealand researcher (cf. Yuji 3-4; Tatsuya 12-13; Nami 3). However, concurrently, there is a generally negative portrayal of Japanese culture in comparison to New Zealand, underscored by the use of "extreme language" (cf. Yuji 1,3; Tatsuya 9,11; Nami 3). This necessarily contravenes the aforementioned generalisation, i.e. could be interpreted as "non-harmonious" or potentially controversial. In a similar vein, the data analysis in this study can be used to test the validity of widespread perceptions of Germans as "direct" and "abrasive" (Heinz, 2003, p.1114). While the German speakers were more forthcoming with critical comments on New Zealand than the Japanese speakers (cf. Christina 6-14, Paul 3,5 7-10), the New Zealand researcher was not (apart from one instance) directly addressed as the recipient of such criticism. In addition, the extreme language used by the speakers used often mitigated (rather than made abrasive) such negative (or in the case of Petra, overtly positive) perceptions (cf. Christina 6,11,12; Petra 2,3,4; Paul 2,3) .

To summarise, the data analysis and discussion sections have shown: (i) the unique and complex way each individual participant used (extreme) language in the discursive representation of their own and other's national identity, (ii) discursive patterns within and across the two national groups, and (iii) how the data from the study is both consistent with and transgresses prior widespread perceptions of German and Japanese interactional style.

6. Conclusion and Application of Research Results

6.1 Conclusion

In making concluding remarks about the data of this paper it is important, firstly, to recognise the limitations of this study and, secondly, to suggest ways in which future research could extend the scope of scholarship and knowledge in this area. To begin with, I reiterate that this is first part of an on-going project; the object of analysis in this study was taken from a preliminary set of interviews with general questions on initial impressions of exchange life in New Zealand. In order to expand on this original enquiry, a second round of interviews will

be conducted with the same participants approximately six months after the initial set. Methodologically speaking, this is found to be effective in revealing the ideologies of the participants by referring to the initial sets on interview data and asking them to reflect upon them (Yamaguchi, 2004, p. 247). In addition, this longitudinal approach has the advantage that it will expand upon the limited knowledge gained from the first set of interviews by answering residual questions. What will happen, for example, where two people of the same nationality, such as Christina and Petra of Germany, initially appear to have quite opposite experiences and stances toward New Zealand, yet represent sociocultural aspects of their host country in the same way, i.e. New Zealanders as "relaxed"?

The analysis of data using conversation and discourse analytic techniques such as ECFs, pronouns, listing and repetition has been highly effective in revealing how the students in this study use language to legitimise and justify their positions. However, I would suggest that further longitudinal research using this methodology needs to be conducted with international students of different nationalities, both to further test its analytical effectiveness and to gain a wider perspective in this area. From the viewpoint of the interactional context in which the interviews were conducted, i.e. with a New Zealand researcher who shared the participants' experience of living overseas within a new culture and language, it would be insightful to research a change in the situational contingencies. This could serve to answer questions such as: "Would the students respond differently to a non-New Zealand (vis-à-vis older, male) interviewer asking them about their experiences in New Zealand?", or "How would their language use reflect this change in orientation?"

Thus, while recognising the limitations of the scope of this paper, it is the author's contention that the qualitative ethnographic methodology used therein is highly expedient in recognising the importance of interaction in context, and thereby providing a detailed description of lived experience. The following section attempts to place the findings of this study in a wider context, in terms of its potential social application.

6.2 Application of Results

Cameron et al. (1997) propound that conducting research on language should be "empowering" not only to the researcher, but also the participants and the wider community (1997). An important part of their "Empowerment Framework" includes "the sharing of expert knowledge" gained from research (Cameron et al., 1997, p. 154). With this in mind, a

relevant practical application of the interview data from this study should serve to mitigate the sense of 'otherness' represented by the students. Accordingly, I suggest using the interview data to develop materials on promoting the awareness of cultural differences and methods of intercultural communication for international students studying in New Zealand. A recent report conducted by the New Zealand Ministry of Education on a survey of the "Experiences of International Students in New Zealand" also emphasises the need for the development of a communication and cultural handbook, "outlining the various cultural differences to expect [in New Zealand]" (2008, p. 8).[iv]

While the benefits of creating such a document are axiomatic, it is a highly complex task to create a handbook which successfully promotes the awareness of cultural differences without over-generalising or stereotyping the object of its description. Therefore I propose that a key question to be investigated is:

(iii) How can we promote the awareness of cultural differences in intercultural interaction without over-generalising or stereotyping?

Based on my own research, in particular the discussion section of this paper, I would suggest that this goal could be worked towards by: (1) recognising the uniqueness and complexity of individual experiences, as well as (2) being aware of widely circulating discourses, (common ways of talking about people from a certain culture), and what they can tell us about our own and other's sociocultural identities and positioning, while at the same time recognising their fluidity and rejecting them as universal.

To explicate I now refer to an example from a small section of the University of Otago's *2007 Guide For International Students,* entitled "Kiwi culture and culturally appropriate behaviour in New Zealand":[v]

> Kiwis think they are pretty funny and will laugh at their own jokes (2007, p. 65).

 I recommend changes to this statement for three reasons (1) the use of the absolute "Kiwis" is an over-generalisation and implies that all New Zealanders behave in this manner, (2) based on the interviews I have conducted the above point has never been suggested (even in a minor way) and I would hypothesise that it is not a widely circulating discourse on the perceptions of Kiwi culture, and (3) the fact that it is in the *Guide for International Students* could lead to its uncritical acceptance and consequent misunderstandings between

international and domestic students.   In light of these criticisms I suggest the following replacement which is based on the interview data in section 4.2:

> Some international students feel that the people in New Zealand are more relaxed and that the pace of life is slower than in their home country.

This example addresses each of the aforementioned criticisms respectively, in the following way: (1) the use of the word 'some' indicates that not all students share this perspective, (2) the statement is taken from (recent) in-depth interviews and is found to be a pattern across the groups interviewed, and (3) it re-perspectivises the statement from that of an anonymous 'neutral' observer to the position of the international student herself.

In conclusion, further research in this area can contribute not only to the broadening of academic knowledge in sociolinguistics and education, but perhaps even more importantly, to the success of everyday intercultural encounters between international students and New Zealanders.

Paul: It's, sometimes you feel a bit torn, you know, but um that's also part of this exchange experience.

Notes

[i] Schiffrin (1996) defines a list as "a discourse structure in which similar items are clustered together" (p. 187).
[ii] It should be noted here that I followed Miller's (2000) methodological stance in terms of analysing data; that is my aim was not to measure the competence of the students' English, but to regard their discourse as "a meaningful, communicative variety of English in itself" (pg. 76).
[iii] Please refer to appendix for data analysis sections on Nami and Paul.
[iv] While the recommendations from the Ministry of Education outlined here are highly relevant, it should also be noted that the 2007 survey was conducted on epistemologically different methods and assumptions from this paper.
[v] It must be reiterated here that this is a small example, (from one page of the 70-page *Guide For International Students)*, which has been specifically chosen to reinforce the discussion of this paper. In general the information outlined in the *Guide* is a particularly useful resource to international students and was specifically mentioned as such in a recent "Code of Practice" audit. The 2007 *Guide For International Students* is being upgraded by the current International Student Advisers. A new version, which aims to update sections such as the one outlined in this paper, will be provided to students coming to the University in 2009.

Transcription Conventions
The following transcription conventions are based on Jefferson's Transcript Notation as outlined in Atkinson and Heritage (1999:158).

[ ]	simultaneous/overlapping utterance
=	contiguous utterance
(.)	brief pause
(..)	longer pause
((L))	laugh
((?))	unclear utterance
→	Extreme Case Formulation

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Appendix: Data Analysis for Nami (Japan) and Paul (Germany).

NAMI

For Nami, coming to New Zealand is her first experience living independently of the family household. Around the time of this interview she is beginning to feel homesick, however, in general, her narrative is framed by a sense of liberation and excitement at the newness of her experience in New Zealand and how it differs to Japan.[iv] Preceding the following extract I ask her "How has your experience in New Zealand been so far?" to which she provides the following:

Nami: *I like New Zealand very much*

1	Nami:	→	It's very nice.
2	Anita:		[yeah?]
3	Nami:	→	[I] like New Zealand very much
4	Anita:		yeah
5	Nami:		mm because so far I went ah Queenstown and Stewart Island
6	Anita:		mhm
7	Nami:	→	Catlin and Fiordland and I was so moved its nature
8	Anita:		yeah
9	Nami:	→	and I've never seen such a big-scale view
10	Anita:		oh right
11	Nami:	→	it's very different from Japanese nature
12	Anita:		[mhm]
13	Nami:	→	[so] I liked there very much
14	Anita:		yeah

In this sequence Nami employs a number of ECFs in constructing a dichotomy between her experience in New Zealand (1) ("it's *very* nice") and her experience in Japan (11) ("it's *very* different"). Nami begins this sequence with the ECF in (1) "it's *very* nice" which functions in two concurrent ways. First, it sets up and intensifies her general narrative of enjoying her

experience in and positive stance toward New Zealand. At the same time this statement is "affiliative" (Edwards, 2000, p. 360) or works to build solidarity between the (Japanese) participant and the (New Zealand) researcher, by the former complimenting the latter's country. This position is further intensified in line (3) ("I like New Zealand *very much*") which can also be regarded as a counter to the interviewer's challenge (2) ("yeah?") (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 226). Nami continues her story where she describes her trips to various scenic spots in the South Island of New Zealand (5), (7). This begins with the conjunction "because" (5) illustrating a justification for the previous claim (3) ("I like New Zealand *very much*"), and leads into the crescendoing triplet (7) ("and I was *so* moved its nature"), (9) ("and I've *never* seen *such a big-scale* view"), and (11) ("it's *very different* from Japanese nature"), (linked together by the conjunction "and"). This 'list' is used as an "evaluative device" (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 187) complementing the initial position established in lines (1) and (3) and further developing affiliation between the student and interviewer. The ECF's (7) "*so*" and (9) "*never*" emphasise the link between newness of Nami's experience and the positive emotional stance she attributes to New Zealand. The stark juxtaposition between line (7) (I was very moved its [New Zealand's] nature) and line (11) ("it's very different from Japanese nature") highlight and are representative of the binary construction Nami creates between her experience in Japan and New Zealand. She feels that Japan is different from New Zealand and identifies strongly with this difference, as indicated by lines (11) "it's very different from Japanese nature", and (13) "so I liked there very much". Aside from the researcher's initial challenge in line (2), it should also be noted that the researcher helps to co-construct this position (Yamaguchi, 2004, p. 242).

PAUL

Paul's narrative of his experience in New Zealand is framed in a philosophical-analytical way which he attributes to his personal and academic focus on Social Sciences. In general he constructs a dichotomy between New Zealanders as "practical" and Germans as "exact", "precise" etc, primarily based on comparisons of 'everyday' topics, such as the following in which he outlines cultural differences with regard to disparate refuse collection systems:

Paul "it's not like you gotta have the complete, exact, precise system"

1	Paul:	But it's more than, just translating the words, it's a different way of thinking about
2		the world you know. I guess sometimes Kiwis are a bit more practical in a way.

3			They're not that metaphysical.
4	Anita:		yeah
5	Paul:	→	You're you're just going for the easiest solution,
6	Anita:		[yeah]
7	Paul:	→	[it's] not like you gotta have the complete, exact, precise system. The just think
8		→	about garbage, I mean, you just go into the supermarket, buy a bag, put it at the street
9		→	and that's it! In Germany you need a contract, you have to pay monthly fees, you
10		→	have a certain amount per week and stuff and oh!
11	Anita:		mhm
12	Paul:		it's a it's a different approach you know,

[...] ((Paul continues his explanation of the differences between refuse collection in New Zealand and Germany))

13	Paul:	→	Well it wouldn't be possible in Germany! OK, they have special clothing, of course
14			they do!
15	Anita:		mhm
16	Paul:		And here they are looking like they have some some some comfortable
17		→	shoes on and maybe shorts and just collect it and drive on
18	Anita		((L))
19	Paul:	→	((L)) yeah it's really different.

Just before this excerpt Paul has been talking about the difficulties expressing himself in English. Here he begins by explaining that the differences he feels between New Zealand and Germany are not just in the language, (1) "but it's more than, just translating the words", but cognitive and behavioural (1) "it's a different way of thinking about the world you know". This passage is structured around the repetition of this overriding perspective, i.e. (12) "it's a different approach you know" and culminating in (19) "yeah it's *really* different." To begin with Paul uses qualified and softened versions of ECFs (Edwards, 2000, p. 352), to introduce his ideas about 'Kiwis' to the New Zealand researcher (2) I *guess sometimes* Kiwis are *a bit more* practical *in a way"* and (3) "They're *not that* metaphysical". However, the introduction of Kiwi's as a sociocultural 'Other', which the (German) participant positions himself to be different from, is reinforced by the pronoun (3) 'they', followed by the more direct pronominal switch to 'you' in lines (5), (7), (8), which incorporates the (New Zealand) interviewer. It is at this point that Paul illustrates his juxtaposition between New Zealanders as "going for the easiest solution" and Germans as having the "exact, complete, precise

system" by way of the 'everyday' example (7) "just think" (8) "about garbage". Interestingly in line (9) the interviewee then puts himself in the position of the more 'neutral' observer (neither New Zealander nor German), by also pronominally referring to Germans as "you" as in (9) "in Germany you need a contract". To further highlight the cultural differences Paul perceives between the two countries he creates two contrastive lists, in which the language he uses matches his perceptions. His description of the rubbish collection system for New Zealanders who are "going for the easiest solution" uses the ECFs *"just"* and *"that's it!"* to portray a simple, practical process: (8)"you *just* go into the supermarket, buy a bag, put it at the street and *that's it!"*. The method for refuse collection is Germany, in contrast, is presented as far more 'precise' and complex, which is highlighted by the use of the obligatory verbs "need" and "have to" and the (painful!) ECF *"oh!"* (9) "In Germany you need a contract, you have to pay monthly fees, you" (10) "have a certain amount per week and stuff and oh!" In the second part of the excerpt Paul extends and intensifies his binary construction highlighted by ECF's, the adjective "comfortable" and the adverb "maybe", i.e. The German situation: (13) *"it wouldn't be possible*!", (13) *"of course* (14) they do" and the contrasting New Zealand context, *"comfortable* shoes [...] and *maybe* shorts *"just* collect it" This viewpoint is concluded with the statement (19) "yeah it's really different".