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"It's like really like hardcore student food": Identity work through food talk in a virtual exchange project

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Abstract

Virtual exchange programmes such as collaborative online international learning (COIL) are increasingly promoted in higher education as equitable and interculturally oriented initiatives aimed at countering democratic decline and rising polarisation. Yet much practitioner literature still relies on essentialist notions of culture and identity, whereas recent research highlights them as fluid and interactionally accomplished. From this perspective, intercultural communication competence involves examining viewpoints, questioning ideologies, and navigating multiple identities. We investigate how students negotiate identity in COIL and consider the implications for theorising and teaching intercultural competence. Our analysis draws on interaction from a 2019 COIL project between intercultural communication students in Finland and the Netherlands. Using membership categorisation analysis, we examine three online meetings of a five-member group whose task involved discussing food. We analyse three cases of action-oriented category work where participants construct identities through both simple and complex orientations to food and locality: (1) simultaneous construction of different and shared student identities to explain an incomplete task; (2) enactment of local identity to justify choices in the assignment; and (3) culinary othering to craft a non-local student identity. We argue that we need pedagogical approaches that move beyond stereotype reduction and instead engage learners with the tensions and consequences of identity negotiation—and that the concept of simplexity can provide a foundation for such an approach.

KEYWORDS: food talk, identity work, interaction, intercultural communication competence, membership categorisation analysis, virtual student exchange

Introduction

Reflecting on how students "do" interculturality online can enhance intercultural communication pedagogy by providing empirically grounded perspectives for designing educational programmes that foster learners' and teachers' reflexive engagement with intercultural competence as a situated social accomplishment. In this paper, we examine how students based in different physical locations collaboratively engage in identity work—shaping, sustaining, or revising understandings of self and other that generate a sense of coherence (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003)—while participating in a virtual exchange, specifically a collaborative online international learning (COIL; Rubin, 2017) initiative. We utilise material collected in a COIL project that brought together students in two university master's level critical intercultural communication courses simultaneously run in Finland and the Netherlands in spring 2019. The student work, and therefore the subject of much of the student interaction, focused on the pre-assigned topic of food that is a rich resource for identity work (e.g., Arvela, 2013).

Although the social, economic, political and technological realities of today are quite different from those in 2019, the momentous global events and transitions, with the COVID-19 pandemic at the forefront, have stimulated an exponential growth in virtual exchanges (Rubin, 2023). However, our contribution is timely not simply because COIL is on the rise. The increasing presence of COIL in higher education (HE) is powered by the noble arguments of supporting educational equity and promoting communication competence for mutual understanding through online interaction (e.g., Charles, 2023). According to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide (European Commission, n.d., para. 1), virtual exchange projects foster intercultural dialogue and help develop soft skills, offering high-quality "international and cross-cultural" learning without physical mobility. These points about dialogue, participation, and access help COIL proponents frame it as a key strategy for countering democratic decline and rising polarisation (e.g., O'Dowd, 2018).

While enabling meaningful intercultural contact is consistently cited as the primary aim of COIL, understandings of what constitutes such interaction vary widely. The fields of intercultural communication and education have undergone a paradigmatic shift toward viewing culture and identity as fluid, open-ended constructs produced, contested, and manipulated through interaction (e.g., Piller, 2017; Tange, 2020). However, discussions centering on COIL practice appear curiously out of step with this shift. Approaches grounded in essentialist conceptions of culture and identity, underpinned by a modernist epistemology (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008), remain prevalent in practitioner-oriented COIL literature (e.g., Deardorff, 2023). This aligns closely with practitioner-focused institutional discourse on student exchange and HE internationalisation in general (for critique, see Collins, 2018; Dervin & Layne, 2013; Helm, 2018). Such notions also appear in wider popular discourses, including those on food and culinary practices (Gonçalves, 2013; Wilczek-Watson, 2018) that became relevant in our COIL project. Together, these viewpoints portray culture as an entity existing outside interaction, and expressed through fixed (food) practices and preferences. Consequently, learning about "others' cultures"—including "their traditional dishes" and "typical foods"—emerges as the primary path to intercultural competence, assumed to be easily applied in interaction.

Meanwhile, non-essentialist conceptualisations of culture and identity have been gaining traction in research—also around virtual exchange (for a literature review, see Avgousti, 2018). From this perspective, intercultural communication competence involves jointly examining diverse viewpoints, questioning ideologies, navigating both differences and commonalities, and negotiating multiple identities (e.g., Helm, 2018; Holliday & Amadasi, 2020). Building on this view, we stress the need to examine what happens in students' online interactions and how they "do" interculturality through identity work as they negotiate meanings of culture and identity—meanings potentially informed by both mainstream essentialist discourses and critical, non-essentialist perspectives promoted in our courses.

To examine this identity work, we analyse recorded online meetings of a five-member student group with membership categorisation analysis (MCA; e.g., Sacks, 1986), a radically emic ethnomethodological framework for exploring everyday micro-level categorisation practices. MCA focuses on how individuals categorise people, places and objects as particular types of members of society, locations, or, in this case, food. Our analysis centers on negotiations of "who I am," "who you are," and "who we are" in relation to "what food we (don't) eat". Understanding interculturality as dynamically accomplished through students' mutual categorisation offers practical insights for updating intercultural communication competence and refining virtual exchange pedagogies. Thus, the aim of this paper is to enhance COIL pedagogy for supporting intercultural communication competence by reflecting on how students negotiate identity through food talk in an online collaboration project.

Theoretical background

Rethinking intercultural communication competence for meaningful interaction in COIL

Key terms in online collaboration research are often used inconsistently (Avgousti, 2018). Here, we use virtual exchange as an umbrella term for diverse online collaboration practices, and COIL to describe the specific virtual exchange we implemented. We define virtual exchange as a research-supported, educator-facilitated practice that uses sustained, technology-enabled interaction among geographically distant groups (Helm, 2018), placing interaction itself, rather than predefined content, at the centre of learning. COIL is one of several virtual exchange models (e.g., Godwin-Jones, 2019; O'Dowd, 2018). Developed in the early 2000s, it links student groups in different countries through a shared syllabus, enabling 5–8 weeks of synchronous or asynchronous collaboration for joint construction of new knowledge (O'Dowd, 2018; Rubin, 2023). While COIL exchanges were initially seen as marginal, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst that enabled them to grow and reach maturity (Rubin, 2023). COIL is now considered a major player as an international education practice offering the benefits of fostering sustainability, inclusiveness, equity and global citizenship to a degree much higher than traditional physical international mobility (Charles, 2023; Rubin, 2023).

The ideals behind COIL are admirable, but parts of the COIL literature risk oversimplifying and essentialising student interaction. Rubin (2017, pp. 33–34), for instance, presents COIL as a transformative pedagogical paradigm where "teachers from two cultures work together to

develop a shared syllabus, emphasising experiential and collaborative student learning [...] providing students new venues in which to develop their cross-cultural awareness." This account presupposes that "cross-cultural" contact is key to the arrangement, with teachers embedded in their separate, container-like cultures creating a shared space where students, likewise defined by their fixed singular culture, can reconsider their ideas from the other cultural perspective. A fairly recently published practitioner-oriented COIL guide edited by Rubin and Guth (2023), which we regard as an authoritative volume on the status quo in the field, features a chapter on the intercultural (Deardorff, 2023). In this chapter, the author discusses people as "culturally conditioned" (p. 277) and shares insights on dimensions of cultural differences that students should learn about to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts "before conflicts occur" (p. 278).

Here, we turn to Helm's (2018, p. 4) unpacking of the notion of "equipping learners to participate together in a global world" presented as the aim of virtual exchange. Helm (2018) draws on Andreotti and de Souza's (2008) distinction between a modernist paradigm and a complex systems paradigm. In the modernist view, an ideal global society is one unified by a universal truth and a single correct course of action; participation in such a world demands acquiring and reproducing the "right" information while suppressing or managing conflicting ideas (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008; Helm, 2018). There is resonance between the modernist epistemology and the traditional view of intercultural competence discussed above, with intercultural interaction construed as an unusual type of interaction ridden with dangers that one needs to prepare oneself for through learning about some objectively describable "cultural differences." We are concerned that this modernist perspective may hinder meaningful interaction and are reminded of Collins's (2018) concept of interculturality from above—based on his ethnographic study of a British university—that captures how top-down modernist internationalisation discourses in HE hinder authentic interpersonal relationships. These narratives foreground superficial national differences and frame intercultural communication competence as marketable, while obscuring both structural injustice and deeper human connection (Collins, 2018).

The competing viewpoint imagines the global society as a complex dynamic system emerging from interconnections among diverse parts; participating in this world requires an ability to reflect on and synthesise different ways of knowing, accept uncertainty, navigate complexity, rethink one's assumptions and take up alternative positions (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008). Helm (2018) adopts this stance in her view of virtual exchange, stressing identity as fluid and co-constructed, and positioning identity work as central to learning. This approach helps students move beyond monolithic cultural views and develop deeper connections to the social world within and beyond the classroom (Helm, 2018). This epistemology informed our COIL project, and it underpins our analysis. We define interculturality as a process where individuals engaged in interaction constantly produce, adjust and (re)negotiate similar and different identities (e.g., Dervin, 2016). Placing such identity work (see Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) at the centre of interculturality, we view intercultural communication competence in online student collaboration as coordinated reflexive navigation: jointly interrogating different perspectives, engaging with difference and similarity, and exploring and negotiating different identities (see Holliday et al., 2021). Importantly, rather than relying on participants'

perceptions of competence, we focus on actual communicative practices—intercultural competence in action.

With these theoretical choices, we contribute to the growing body of research that takes a nuanced dynamic view on online student collaboration. Avgousti (2018), in a review of empirical studies on collaborative projects using Web 2.0 tools, observed a shift toward critical, interaction-focused views of culture as dynamically negotiated through multimodal interaction, with intercultural learning emerging through doing. Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2019) argues that virtual exchange projects be approached as sites of small culture construction (see Holliday, 1999), where participants co-construct their identities and relationships as they orient to their environment and tasks. Empirical research conducted from this perspective (e.g., Peng & Dervin, 2022) suggests that students in online collaboration might indeed be dynamically and creatively negotiating different roles to preserve harmony and move the discussion forward—roles associated with small rather than big cultures. In our paper, we are interested in identity work as occurring through talk about food.

Food talk as a resource for identity construction

The COIL initiative examined here centred on the theme of food and food practices to prompt students' critical reflection on culture and identity. Food is fundamental to humans not only as a physiological necessity, but also as a deeply meaningful aspect of the economy of social life (Crouch & Sanderson, 2013). The trope of food is a rich and malleable resource for meaning-making related to identity and categorisation of people, especially along the axis of similarity and difference (Arvela, 2013; Wilczek-Watson, 2018).

In her comparative exploration on the meaning of "ethnic food" in Australia and the Italian city of Lucca, Arvela (2013) demonstrates how "ethnic dishes" only come to be recognised as such through crossing boundaries, encounter with difference and a relationship to some "national culture," itself a fluid and fragile construct: while "ethnic foods" emerge as a celebrated cornerstone of the local affluent urban Australianness, the right-wing Italian town council sees "ethnic restaurants" as an outside threat to the traditional local identity. "Ethnic foods" can act as stand-ins for the people associated with them, carrying over stereotypes and attitudes toward those groups (Zaneri, 2013).

Food talk may thus serve as a resource for social exclusion, constructing a solidified image of both self and the Other, and eliciting sentiments of aversion that draw boundaries between groups. Conversely, it can also convey belonging and affective attachment (Arvela, 2013), as poignantly shown in research on transnational couples. Gonçalves (2013) conducted interviews with Swiss-based couples where the other partner had moved from the US, and found that talk about specific eating habits served as markers of "Swissness," with the immigrant partner's alignment framed as evidence of becoming "local." Wilczek-Watson (2018) studied UK-based Polish British families around festive meals and found her participants to be vigorously engaging in culinary othering or the interactive process of construing one's partner as the culturally distant Other by presenting their apparent culinary legacy as exotic, deviant, and inferior. As the author argues, humoristic, exaggerated and mutual culinary othering may, paradoxically, serve as a way of accomplishing sharedness and intimacy–the couple jointly producing a trans-

national couple identity. In sum, studies examining food as a resource for performing identity show how its significance intensifies, fostering both closeness and distance in encounters with others within an increasingly globalised world.

Exploring identity work in action with membership categorisation analysis

To explore identity work through food talk in student online collaboration, we adopt membership categorisation analysis (MCA) as our theoretical and analytical framework. Rooted in Sacks' (1986) foundational work and grounded in ethnomethodology, MCA is considered a strand beside/within conversation analysis (CA) (Schegloff, 2007). With MCA, the focus shifts from the conventional "using categories to study people to studying how people use categories" (Stokoe et al., 2025, p. 534). MCA examines how ordinary people engage in everyday category work, displaying their practical sense-making and theorising about social structures (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015). Identity work is thus seen as a publicly observable dynamic negotiation of categories.

While MCA begins with the premise that people are understood through membership categories (Sacks, 1986), its scope extends beyond persons, enabling exploration of how spaces and objects are also categorised (Smith, 2017). Categories are inference-rich as they carry implicit assumptions—such as category-bound activities associated with a category—as well as category-tied predicates or characteristics, entitlements, duties, values, relationships and specialised knowledge (Sacks, 1986). As the interaction unfolds, participants may produce particular membership categories for themselves, others, spaces or entities, either through explicitly naming the category, or implicitly through actions or references that suggest the predicates associated with that category (see Stokoe et al., 2025). While a person or an entity can be categorised with several different labels, membership categories deployed in social life are organised into collections tied together through identifiable qualities or practices (Schegloff, 2007), such as "fries," "pizza," and "pasta" forming the collection "convenience foods." Collections may be organised hierarchically, enabling us to criticise a university student for behaving like a "school kid," and they may be duplicated or arranged as a team with categories having specific obligations to one another (Stokoe, 2012), such as a group of students collaborating on a course project. Category collections may also appear as standardised relational pairs—complementary pairings linked by mutual rights and responsibilities (Sacks, 1986), such as the pairing of "host" and "guest."

Category work is not merely descriptive; the fact that activities and predicates are connected to specific categories—and that these categories can be arranged hierarchically, duplicated, or paired—can serve as a powerful resource for action (Stokoe, 2012). Being recognisably categorised in a particular way provides participants with a shared framework for explaining and interpreting what is happening, and these activities are also intrinsically moral in nature (Jayyusi, 1991). For instance, constructing a "national dish" as abnormal by deeming it revolting, or complaining about "absent activities," such as when a student did not do their course task, allows one to make moral evaluations and legitimise certain actions (Stokoe, 2012, p. 281).

Categories are central to social organising and examining their situated use offers insights into diverse social practices (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015), such as the construction of intergroup relations in online settings. For instance, Hous-

ley et al. (2017) analysed celebrity troll account tweets to show how antagonistic membership categorisations target and morally judge specific groups. A study of neighbors' discussions about racism on an e-democracy platform (Shrikant, 2022) shows how efforts to appear "reasonable" and non-racist generate competing ideologies of racism as systemic or as exceptional acts. Existing research has largely focused on negative phenomena in asynchronous interaction—a limitation our study may help address. Our paper aims to enhance COIL pedagogy for intercultural communication competence by analysing how students negotiate identity through food talk in online collaboration. Our analysis is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the participants mobilise membership categories in their online interactions when discussing food?

RQ2: What membership categories do the participants mobilise, and what social actions do they accomplish through their category work?

Data and method

Data

The study draws on recordings of online interactions among students in critical intercultural communication courses at two European universities (Finland and the Netherlands) collaborating in a COIL project in spring 2019. Each course enrolled about 60 students, was co-taught by two instructors, and ran for ten weeks, with the COIL component spanning five weeks. Both courses were grounded in social constructionist views of culture and identity (Holliday & Amadasi, 2020) and a complex systems paradigm of knowing (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008). We designed the COIL syllabus to complement and deepen students' course assignments. Finland-based students worked in small groups to organise, prepare, and share a dinner, then develop a presentation where they analyse their dinner interaction. Netherlands-based students conducted ethnographic projects observing and interviewing grocery store customers in different city areas. For the COIL component, students from both courses were grouped (four to five students per group). As a pre-task, each student photographed their meals for one week and uploaded the images to a shared platform. Groups then held several online meetings to get acquainted, reflect on the pre-task, and support one another's course assignments.

Our data consists of three recorded video meetings of a five-member student group ("Dan," "Kate," and "Pete" in the Netherlands; "Mary" and "Josh" in Finland; see *Figure 1*). The students in the course used the tools of their own choice to run their meetings. The specific group relied on the video call function of Messenger, a Facebook instant messaging app that enables users to chat, share images, audio and video files and make (high-definition video) calls (Meta, 2026). The meetings were initiated and recorded by the students in the Netherlands. In the first session, the students get to know one another and discuss their pre-task. The second session focuses on the Finland-based students' presentation, and the third on the Netherland-based students' interview questions. The sessions lasted 10–20 minutes, totalling about one hour of video. This scope aligns with MCA's reliance on small-scale data for case studies of interactional contexts, examining turn-by-turn constructions of "identities-for-interaction," culture, and category-related phenomena (Stokoe, 2012). Recordings were transcribed using Jefferson's CA conventions (2004; see *Appendix*).

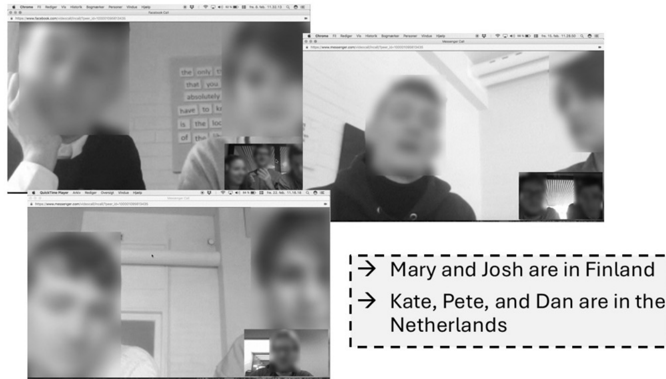

Figure 1. Study participants

Analytical steps

The analysis combines MCA with CA's attention to sequential development to examine how categories are produced turn by turn. Our primary focus is on categorial and topical matters—how people and food are talked about and what commonsense understandings these descriptions display—rather than on the sequential organisation of interaction (see Stokoe, 2012). Our analytical procedure followed the five MCA principles laid out by Stokoe (2012): (1) collecting data, (2) building collections of explicit and category-resonant mentions of categories, (3) locating the sequential position of category instances in the data, (4) analysing the design and action orientation of the turn in which the category appears, (5) seeking evidence of how the other interactants respond to a category, the interactional effects of its use, accompanying features of its formulation, and how speakers construct or challenge categorisations across turns.

We will now present detailed analyses of three data extracts that offer particularly rich examples of identity work and illuminate key dynamics in the COIL interaction relevant to our research questions. As strictly empirical approaches, both MCA and CA require grounding analytical claims in the data by demonstrating that the categories identified are produced by, and relevant to, the participants themselves (Seedhouse, 2005). Therefore, the analysis needs to be fully traceable to the reader to ensure reliability. In terms of generalisability, it is not important to determine how often a certain communicative practice occurs, but rather *that,* and *how,* it occurs (Psathas, 1995). Ultimately, even an interactive practice observed only once is considered socially relevant if participants themselves draw on and orient to it.

Identity construction through membership categorisation of peers, food and localities

The following three analytical sections each focus on category work within specific action-oriented contexts. The first examines the simultaneous construction of both different and shared student identities when accounting for an incomplete handling of a task. The second looks into the enactment of local identity to justify the choices made in the course assignment. The third (analysed in two parts) demonstrates how a non-local student identity is crafted through culinary othering. The participants construct

identities through situated membership categorisations that draw on both simple and complex orientations to locality and local meanings of food. Meanings tied to physical and online environments thus play a crucial role in identity work.

Explaining unpreparedness by mobilising different (yet similar) student identities

Our first case, embedded in the group's discussion of their pre-task, illustrates the nuance with which the participants simultaneously construct two student identities: one grounded in different material realities ("you there vs. we here") and another based on a mutual orientation to similarity ("us being students together"). This works as an efficient resource for explaining differences in how the pre-task of taking and sharing personal meal pictures was completed, while carefully aligning as a group. In the preceding talk, the students compare their photos, and some members praise the pictures posted by Finland-based Mary and Josh.

Now (see Extract 1), Dan engages in a new aspect of completing the assignment by justifying the apparent lack of breakfast pictures from the students in the Netherlands ("you know most of the time we miss breakfast because we wake up late," lines 1–13), treating the absence of those images as possibly problematic. He starts this effort by stating "I'm not gonna lie" (line 3), thereby projecting continuation and announcing an account of something potentially unfavourable (i.e., something one might also prefer to lie about). Continuing with the stance marker "you know," Dan observably appeals to the others' engagement and sympathy. Asmuß (2011) finds that "'you know' is a resource in interaction to deal locally with emerging disagreements, and it is a device which can be used both prospectively and retrospectively to pursue agreement locally" (p. 234). Here, "you know" clearly attends to disparity, as Dan next describes a pattern of him and his peers skip-

```
1    Dan     ja’ I mean [I’m  ]
2    Kate               [we’re] going.
3    Dan     I’m not gonna lie,=
4            =you know most of the time we m:iss breakfast,
5            because we wake up late,
6            so then we only eat [lunch,]
7    Mary                        [haha  ]
8    Dan     [and (      ) also, ]
9    Mary    [hahaha             ]
10   Pete    [yeah yeah yeah heh]
11   Josh    ja.
12   Dan     we do’ we don’t I don’t think we have a lot of
13           breakfast pics,
14           bu=yeah mostly we have like these ahm: food markets?
15           it’s like this the: supermarket called Jumbo
16           and then they make the food,
17           and then we usually eat like (.) pizzas you know=
18           =or like £pasta,£
19   Kate    [hm hh]
20   Josh    [yeah ]
21   Dan     it’s like really like hardcore student food,
22   Pete    >yeah (I think) [it’s also] because
23   Dan                     [but yea- ]
24   Pete    it’s it’s< really cheap as well.
25   Mary    ((nods))
```

Extract 1

ping breakfast, distinguishing them from their peers in Finland (line 4). He explains this by their sleeping habits (line 5) that further lead them to starting the day with lunch (line 6). Dan's talk is accompanied by shared laughter and acknowledgement. As he further expands the turn to explain the local practicalities of eating lunch, Josh and Mary display receipt by nodding repeatedly and drawing on the response tokens "ja" and "yeah" (Josh, in lines 11 and 20), thereby claiming understanding and affiliation (lines 8–21) (see Gardner, 2001). Dan's turn is thus clearly designed and oriented to by the others as a multiunit construction. He develops a story that provides not only an elaborate and apologetic account for not having posted breakfast pictures but also reference to and explanations of the local grocery landscape and its affordances that enable the students to get lunch characterised as "hardcore student food." In lines 22 and 24, Pete continues the second part of the account (for eating lunch at the supermarket) by appealing to the affordability of the supermarket food.

While the sequential unfolding of the account provides a first reading of the students' activities and displayed understandings, the stretch further reveals profound identity work with which the participants organise and situate the narrative and make relevant for one another their group memberships, treating them as consequential. More precisely, the section is intertwined with references to various identity categories and category-bound activities as well as (local) knowledge claims, but also the establishment of exclusive interactive roles (e.g., doing being storytellers vs. doing being addressees of the story told). By drawing on the collective pronoun "we" throughout the passage, Dan not only positions himself as a representative speaking on behalf of others; he also creates a contextual in-group, an "association" that does not include Josh and Mary (McLay &Renshaw, 2020, pp. 49–50). However, the "we," or more specifically, the distinction between "we here" and (implicitly) "you there" is not achieved by Dan alone, but is an interactive accomplishment: both, Pete and Kate support Dan's turn by not rejecting his account, by outright agreeing (Pete, line 10), and even expanding it (Pete, lines 22 and 24), thereby assisting in the reporting and acting as one unit that claims epistemic primacy (Heritage, 2013). By nodding, laughing, and smiling, Mary and Josh, on the other hand, display mutual listenership and contribute to the construction of the two momentarily separate social entities.

Dan structures his reasoning in such a way that information on what type of a group the "we here" represents (namely, "hardcore students," line 21) is hinted at quite late, towards the end of his turn. Moreover, the explanatory weight of "we miss breakfast," "we wake up late," "we only eat lunch" (lines 4–6) becomes apparent only retrospectively, once he explicitly ties these activities (as category-bound: "we" do this) to the lack of breakfast images from the students in the Netherlands. By employing this format, Dan carefully designs a trajectory where one category-bound activity inevitably leads to another (and ultimately trumps aspects of the assignment). This order can be seen as a powerful identity-inducing resource that sets the tone for the account (or apology) as it prioritises "our" way of doing things while de-emphasising the task at hand.

The account is intertwined with characterisations of places (a close-by supermarket Jumbo offering affordable lunch) and food (pizza and pasta) as concrete, category-relevant elements and affordances of local student life, as well as generalisations, such as "most of the time," "mostly," and "usually." Hence, the par-

ties not only claim specific knowledge on and make sense of their material ecosystem but also re-enforce a situated student category, supporting their reasoning for living without breakfast and, ultimately, not having posted (as in, "not having been able to post") the required photos. Dan, in lines 14–16, introduces Jumbo as an example of the kind of supermarkets "they have there" that also make food, and indexes it as the place where he and his peers buy lunch ("and then we usually eat like pizzas you know or like pasta," lines 17–18). Both descriptions of food and place are further expanded in terms of their meaningful and logical connection to the participants (as students) in the Netherlands and their typical activities, i.e., food and place are constructed as student-relevant matter. This is an important observation of methodological relevance supporting Smith's (2017, p. 121) point that MCA's more recent emphasis on person-descriptions may be too narrow. Here, food is bound to students' culinary preferences by Dan categorising pizza and pasta as "hardcore student food" (line 21). Pizza as well as pasta and students (who take their role seriously) are thus treated by the participants as belonging together (Sacks, 1995). Similarly, in lines 22 and 24, Pete constructs Jumbo as category-relevant space (see Smith, 2017), a place where local students go, by adding that "it's really cheap," implying that they/students do not have much money to spend on food, thus evoking a category predicate of students being poor.

The passage reveals complex and purposeful practices of relational work that attend to the different localities of the participants and the given task. In tracing how "the ways in which who the participants are to one another—and, specifically, how they categorize one another—contributes to their understanding of their local contexts, actions, and activities" (Stokoe et al., 2025, p. 538), our analysis demonstrates that membership (or identity) can be a resource for participants to position themselves and thereby make their realities intelligible to one another. The interactants elaborately develop the category "students here," who do and engage with typical things ("most of the time," "mostly," and "usually") that are embedded in the local material world. Thus, two types of student identities ("you there" vs. "we here") are constructed that help justify apparent differences in the pictures the participants uploaded. However, these identities also appear fragile or fleeting considering that the participants simultaneously exhibit an orientation to similarity, to being "students" together: one element of this is certainly the use of "you know" in line 4 and especially in line 17, appealing to affinity while dealing with the discrepancy of posting vis-a-vis not-posting breakfast images. Josh and Mary, in turn, accompany the story with laughter and receipts, observably aligning with the account as funny and displaying recognition and familiarity, which is further supported by the absence of verbal or embodied change-of-state-tokens that would indicate receipt of new information (Heritage, 1984).

Doing local expertise to account for local grocery landscape and types of people

One assignment for the Netherlands group was to interview customers in a local grocery store. Students designed interview questions and discussed their plans with their Finnish peers in their final meeting, from which the next instance is taken. Our analysis shows how students categorise themselves as a local expert and non-experts to justify their assignment choices. The local grocery landscape is constructed as frequented by two distinct client groups. Only one member of the Netherlands group, Pete, was present in this session. On

the Finnish side, both Mary and Josh participated. Prior to the passage below (see Extract 2), Pete introduces their pick (a shop called Le Souk), accounts for the decision to collect data there, and then presents all interview questions one by one with contextualising explanations, prompting ratification and short comments by Mary and Josh. After this, the parties agree on role-playing the interview to determine its feasibility. The beginning of the extract shows a point of transitioning from testing one interview question to engaging with the next, final one (“Do you come here for the healthy products or for other reasons?”).

The passage starts with a sequence attending to potential further input regarding the previous interview question (lines 1–7). In lines 8–11, after the participants complete the sequence (“okay,” lines 6–7), Pete shifts the orientation to the final question, reading it out loud once more. While the design of the query is interesting in itself (categorising Le Souk as a specific supermarket primarily offering healthy groceries), we focus on the account that follows. Not only does it display an orientation to Mary and Josh as outsiders, but it also works to make sense of the organisation of the local social world by describing the infrastructure of Le Souk as one option within a range of competing grocery stores in the area and by evoking a distinct customer category (lines 12–24). The instance unfolds as an expansion latched on to the presented interview question (line 12) and accompanied by nods and smiles from Josh and Mary making their listening and receipt visible. The participants thus mutually put their role-play on hold to manage understanding and progressivity, ensuring that the functionality of the question can be tested: addressing his peers directly (“now you have to consider”), Pete immediately treats the given prompt as possibly

```
1    Pete   yeah. ((nods)) okay.
2           äh: do you have anything to say, (1.0) [Mary.]
3    Mary                                          [h no:]:,
4           [I  ] don’t think so.
5    Pete   [no?]
6    Mary   I’m [just ] thinking.
7    Pete       [okay.]
8    Pete   ähm: do you [c↑ome] (.) fro’ do you come here
9    Mary               [(    )]
10   Pete   for the healthy products.
11          (.) or for other (0.5) reasons.=
12          =and I ↑now you have to consider that there are
13          ↑mu:ltiple shops.
14          in (the) ((NAME OF THE CITY)) there is a lot of shops.
15   Josh   [yeah]
16   Pete   [and ] the Souk is,
17          there’s only ↑one of them.
18          and it’s very traditional.
19          it’s very (.) ↑no:rmal for (.) the Moroccan.=
20          =and basically they GO to Moroccan place.
21   Josh   ((nods)) [yeah.]
22   Pete            [an:  ] (.) what would you,
23          (.) so like you have to consider that.
24          and that there are multiple competitors.
25   Josh   yeah I think it that is uh:=an interesting question.
26   (0.7)
27   Pete   [yeah.]
28   Josh   [uhm  ]
```

Extract 2

insufficient for Josh and Mary and in need of contextualisation before moving on, to which Josh and Mary witnessably align.

By providing more information on the city grocery landscape (lines 12–17), Pete first offers a view of the shop's standing in his current community. Within this landscape, Le Souk is then constructed as different by drawing on expressions such as "there is only one of them" (line 17) and "it's very traditional" (line 18), which is further extended as "very normal for the Moroccan and basically the go-to Moroccan place" (lines 19–20). Pete thus develops an elaborate storyline that situates the store and its goods, allowing him to link them to a specific target group and explain–at least in part–the design of the interview question he cited. Like in Extract 1, space and food are organised here as category-relevant matters, moving beyond mere "person-descriptions" (Smith, 2017, p. 121). Mobilising the customers' group membership as a logical consequence of Le Souk's "traditional" offer (in other words, linking nationality/ethnicity with local shopping habits as category-bound activities), Pete's account, however, remains somewhat ambiguous. The interview question "Do you come here for the healthy products or for other reasons?" can be read as implying two different customer groups, but this is only implicitly developed in the extract into "people who come for healthy products" and "people–Moroccans–who come for traditional food, for whom the shop is a normal go-to place." In line 25, Josh expresses appreciation for the question ("that is uh: an interesting question"), displaying understanding and acknowledging the relevance of collecting information from the people in question on their reasons for shopping at Le Souk, which ultimately leads to the completion of this sequence.

Throughout, then, Pete displays, and is granted, epistemic authority (Heritage, 2013); contrary to Josh and Mary, he is interactively positioned as a knowledgeable member of the local community. This is accomplished through tacit mobilisation of a standardised relational pair: Pete as an expert is now expected to teach the non-experts Josh and Mary, who are expected to listen to the account. Through clarifications on the city's grocery supply and what is "normal" for whom, orientations to "here" and "there," and thus to Josh and Mary not knowing, are interactively made available. Drawing on a complex description of Moroccan customers (treating them as locals, while also classing them into a specific, national group that favors a particular place for shopping) Pete invokes several, seemingly competing identity categories to make the interview question understandable.

Culinary othering as a resource for producing outsider identity

In Extracts 1 and 2, the participants' concern clearly is not (their) national group memberships nor some consequential differences based on where they come from, but rather where they are currently located and how this is reflected in their actions or in their expertise on the locality. However, in Extract 3 (divided into two parts; see Extract 3a and Extract 3b) taken from the first meeting, national identities are invoked by the participants as they subtly problematise the national location-identity link and mobilise the categorisation exchange student for some group members as demonstrably relevant.

Prior to this passage, the participants encounter a problem with understanding their next COIL task, now resolved as Pete presents a solution, producing a candidate understanding of the instructions, suggesting that the focus

```
1  Pete   like what you [think (you) would] eat in Finland.
2  Kate                 [oah::: ((nods))  ]
3  Josh   hmh hh ((silent laugh))
4  Pete   like I always thought [like you] guys would eat that
5  Kate                         [uff::.  ]
6  Pete   fucking smelly ↓fish.
7         [((smiles))] [((smiles broadly))                  ]
8  Dan    [ha ha ha  ] [ha ha ((points at Pete palm up)) ]
9  Kate   [heh he    ] [((smiles))                          ]
10 Mary                [he ha ha ((throws head backward))]
11 Josh                [ha ha ha                      no=]
12        that's uh=that's Sweden.
13        he he he
14 Pete   jaja.
15 Kate   £hm [hm hm£]
16 Dan        [ha ha ] ha
17 Pete   surströmming. that's what it's called.
18        it's:
19 Kate   ah
20 Pete   fucking dis[gus]ting.
21 Josh              [ja.]
22        (0.5)
23 Josh   ha ha .h no we (.) we don't get that.
```

Extract 3a

should be on their beliefs regarding different food, which is accompanied by Kate's ratification (lines 1–2). Pete continues by initiating an example ("like I always thought like") of what the group may be expected to talk about, and presents an assumption related to local Finnish cuisine (line 4–6). The design of his remark displays not only essentialist expectations but also categorisation by indexing a category bound activity (eating "fucking smelly fish") in connection with "Finland" (line 1) and Josh and Mary ("you guys," in line 4) that temporarily groups them as actual representatives of the imagined Finnish food culture. In this scenario, Josh and Mary not only know about members' culinary practices but also engage in activities treated here as typical for them. Furthermore, the use of the adjective "smelly" coupled with the strong intensifier "fucking" describing the qualities of the fish demonstrably constitutes the dish as extraordinary, strange and repulsive, even laughable. Indeed, Pete's turn prompts an outburst of joint laughter by the others (lines 8–11). However, the guffaw is accompanied by activities that indicate an orientation to certain norms regarding what might be considered inappropriate talk–such as by Dan, who (while laughing and looking into the camera) slightly shakes his head and points with his right palm at Pete. The mutual response of laughing, then, can be seen as not only (or not even mainly) directed at Pete's point of consuming somewhat "unusual" food but also as a way of bolstering interactive competence (see Petitjean & González-Martínez, 2015).

Next, in lines 11–13, Josh takes the turn and laughingly rejects the established association between "you guys in Finland" (person category) and "fucking smelly fish" (category-bound predicate), replacing the first part of the pair with another category, "Sweden" (nation category). He thereby treats Pete's supposition as inadequate–but only regarding where the fish is eaten, without explicitly taking a stance on the "fucking smelly" nature of the dish and therefore implicitly aligning with the description and contributing to an essentialising understanding of national group membership. This is acknowledged by Pete in line 14 ("jaja"), who moves on

to explain what the fish is called in Swedish ("surströmming" or "sour herring," line 17) and that it is "fucking disgusting" (lines 18 and 20). Thereby, he not only reinforces the explicitly dismissive assessment of the herring and the categorial matter of "them" eating "this," but also implies that he has experienced it, (re)claiming epistemic primacy, while maintaining an observer's or outsider's position. Josh's response in line 23, however, treats the issue as incomplete: he again attends to the earlier assumption that suggested a Finnish category-relevance of the fish ("no we don't get that"), but his turn also works to resist Pete's categorisation of him and Mary being representatives of Finnish food culture. His choice of words references someone who is served (rather than cooks or prepares) local food, which may be seen as a categorial resource for distinguishing themselves from the locals. This is acknowledged by Pete in line 24 (Extract 3b, below), who reformulates the focus and marks it as a question, completing the sequence. So far, then, the instance provides yet another window into how identities can be negotiated, affirmed or contested in interaction. Unlike in Extract 1 and Extract 2, the participants' national identity momentarily becomes relevant and is intertwined with location as Josh and Mary are treated as Finnish representatives.

The participants next engage in a detailed account of the kind of food Josh and Mary encounter in their current location, which is elaborately constructed as typical Finnish cuisine (Extract 3b). The trajectory of this sequence is insightful not only in terms of how local culinary preferences are brought forth and made sense of, but also in view of an observable orientation to aligning with the tone and assembly of "fucking smelly fish" and "fucking disgusting," i.e., the ongoing activity of "doing being outsiders/food critics." Extract 3b starts with Pete's question in lines 24–26 indexing Josh's and Mary's meal pictures (see Extract 1) and connecting them momentarily to the current discussion:

```
24 Pete   >no but like what< what you eat.
25        =(  ) like what you have shown on the pictures.
26        (is) that traditional like (classic:) s Finnish food¿
27 Josh   .h uhm: from=uh from what I get the: it's:
28        (.) the they (  ) like stews¿
29        and=uh (0.2) uh some=uhm
30        (0.5) (there is this uh one) (1.0) thing=
31        where it's a pasta (.) and=uh minced meat,
32        (0.2) and=uh (.) uh cream.
33        and there are no spices.
34        and it's ↑horrible.
35        but it's apparently
36 Mary   hahh
37 Josh   very ↓Finnish. ((laughs))
38 ?      okay.
39 Kate   £hm hm£
40 Josh   uh I've had that ↓once
41        and=uh ((nods)) I'm not having that ever again.
42 Mary   [okay.]
43 Josh   [just ] so so boring. ((laughs))
44 Kate   £mm hmh£ okay?
45 Josh   and then you're supposed to put ketchup on it.
46 Kate   £ah hm hm£
47 Pete   just put ketchup on everything and it tastes nice.
48 Kate   yeah [a ha ha]
49 Pete        [ha ha  ]
```

Extract 3b

The passage represents a classic question-answer format with the participants clearly displaying a mutual orientation to the production of a multi-unit turn in response to Pete's inquiry: the design of Josh's answer projects the development of a story, and it is accompanied by continuers throughout, e.g., in lines 38 and 39. Despite it being a closed question, the group treats it as an invitation to delve into and evaluate "traditional Finnish food practices." Indeed, although Josh's answer neither returns to the pictures–implying they do not represent true Finnish cuisine–nor provides an explicit affirmation or negation, it is nonetheless accepted as sufficient.

The nature of what the participants are doing can be traced as an interactive accomplishment, extending to the categorial work of establishing different group memberships in conjunction with category-relevant practices and predicates, such as consuming certain dishes and taste. The lengthy response attends to and expands on Pete's "traditional like (classic) Finnish food" in line 26. The participants thus produce a shared understanding of distinguishable national food cultures, displaying assumptions of categorial incumbencies by evoking local traditional classic food. Josh, however, frames his account as a personal perception ("from what I get," line 27), before moving on to describe "stew" and "this one thing" consisting of pasta, minced meat, and cream (lines 28–32) as some specific typical dishes. To this, in lines 33 and 34, he adds that "there are no spices" and emphatically characterises the "thing" as "horrible." Portraying the food in this way, Josh observably returns to the earlier concern of taste, echoing and aligning with Pete's "fucking disgusting" and reinforcing their outsider-status as exchange students vis-à-vis a local identity. This is further highlighted by his activities in lines 35 and 37, explicitly connecting the predicate of "horrible" to authentic Finnishness ("but it's apparently very Finnish") while maintaining some distance as a non-local by further downgrading epistemic primacy ("apparently"). As he continues, Josh, however, justifies his descriptions by accounting for them as something he experienced first-hand, allowing him to further disengage from the food and credibly underline its essence as "just so so boring" at the same time (lines 40–43). Interestingly, in lines 45 and 47, Josh and Pete construct the taste as a given that even the locals cannot overcome other than by adding ketchup. This creates a strong category-bound dimension of cultural inescapability contributing to a sense of group membership dictating what people eat. In retrospect, some of the passive formats in Extract 3a and b, such as "we don't get that," "there are no spices," or, indeed, "you are supposed to put ketchup on it," seem to support such a reading.

In sum, also Extracts 3a and 3b reveal the participants' fine-grained practices of positioning one another as being exchange students, but exchange students in different places, and thus knowing (about local culinary practices) and not-knowing. Particularly in relation to the question-answer pair in Extract 3b, this type of categorial work becomes salient, which is in line with Dai and Davey (2024, p. 576) pointing out that

> (...) it is not the case that, on the completion of some first pair part, participants are merely accountable for producing a fitted response in a timely manner at an appropriate sequential juncture. Rather, they are simultaneously accountable for producing this response in such a way that it is visibly aligned with their locally relevant category incumbency (-ies).

Yet alongside treating their peers as local food experts, the participants also construct Mary

and Josh's whereabouts and their inhabitants as somehow exotic. By mobilising category-bound predicates–such as "fucking smelly fish" (first linked to Finland, then Sweden) and references to "them" and "their" simple, "so so boring," unspiced food–the group engages in culinary othering (Wilczek-Watson, 2018). Thereby, they not only interactively accomplish agreement on what counts as good "normal" food but also perform identity work in the sense of "we are what we (don't) eat."

Discussion and conclusion

The intricate practices of identity work through food talk in which the students engage during the COIL project reveal how they navigate the turbulence generated by intensified online interaction and widening social diversity. These moments of negotiation offer intercultural communication educators a valuable vantage point: they illuminate how our core concepts might be more robustly theorised and more deliberately operationalised in teaching. In doing so, they invite us to design pedagogical practices that counteract—rather than inadvertently contribute to—emerging patterns of social polarisation.

Mainstream practitioner-oriented COIL literature sees students as defined by the imagined cultures of their different national locations and emphasises the role of national cultural differences in student interaction and learning (e.g., Deardorff, 2023; Rubin, 2017). However, a higher-order observation we can make is that a variety of membership categories are dynamically talked into and out of being in our data, pointing to difference as fluid, momentary and fine-grained. Food has been recognised as a powerful symbolic resource for constructing solid national or ethnic identities (Zaneri, 2013), and we can identify the trope of food utilised this way in our data, to which we will return later. However, the participants' nationality does not appear to be their primary concern. The identity categories that we have identified are quite elaborate, and entail students in general, students in the two physical locations, exchange students, national representatives, or customers of a specific grocery shop who are local yet different from the mainstream. These categories are mobilised through references to food—as local, traditional, cheap, healthy, disgusting; food as keeping people apart but also bringing them together. Furthermore, membership categories are constructed through connecting food to physical locations. This is accomplished through assuming, displaying and granting epistemic authority on the culinary landscapes in the localities in which the participants are embedded (see Heritage, 2013). The student group's identity work and emerging identities in virtual exchange (Helm, 2018) appear to be firmly anchored in mutual orientations to the participants' whereabouts and related claims of local knowledge relevant for the assignment at hand.

Through their elaborate category work, the students problematise the notion of the local as homogeneous. Both locations are constructed as frequented by different groups of people: national representatives and exchange students in the case of the whereabouts of Finland-based participants, and different customer groups in the grocery landscape of the Netherlands-based students. Doing "being knowledgeable" about the location does allow the participants some leeway in terms of producing identity as local—while the participants might, indeed, make this connection relevant, they also display an agreement that being knowledgeable about culinary practices in one's whereabouts does not necessarily amount to following such practic-

es oneself and, by extension, being local. Underpinning this inferential logic is the notion of food and the people who prepare and eat it becoming categories bound together in one collection (see Zaneri, 2013). Simply put, you are what you eat, and you can distance yourself from a specific identity through culinary othering (Wilczek-Watson, 2018) by dismissing or ridiculing specific types of food.

The students draw on different membership categories to accomplish a range of social actions with which they move their collaboration forward, including accounting for the incomplete course task, justifying choices made in the assignment, and managing the problem of being categorised by others as a local representative while not being local. Different categorisations are dynamically talked into being and then replaced with other more fitting ones—such as when Josh first acts as a local expert by correcting Pete's attribution of the predicate of eating "smelly fish" to locals in Finland, only to replace this categorisation with one of a guest or visitor in the Finnish culinary landscape. Different categories are also mobilised simultaneously when the participants both construct and align with the construct of the Netherlands-based students as belonging to the hardcore student category while acknowledging their shared membership in the category student. This points to the students' concern with preserving group harmony while getting on with the task, much alike what Peng and Dervin (2022) observed in their study of online interactions among Finnish and Chinese students. Building on the notion of identity work as the modification or maintenance of understandings of self and other to preserve coherence (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), it is notable that in our data this coherence relates to interactional harmony rather than to individual identities.

The students' interaction is rich in identity work that defies traditional understandings of the intercultural and intercultural communication competence. What do our findings tell us about intercultural communication competence as a process of coordinated, reflexive navigation where participants critically examine diverse perspectives, engage with both differences and commonalities, and explore as well as negotiate multiple identities? We argue that the students "do" interculturality in competent—elaborate and nuanced—ways that, indeed, allow them to attend to the business of online collaboration. Someone might criticise this claim by pointing out that instances of culinary othering can be identified in the data. What we find noteworthy is that culinary othering is only one type of momentary action and that the students also navigate their way out of it. Moreover, culinary othering appears to be a method for the participants to make a non-local student identity relevant (see Dai & Davey, 2024) and deal with the dilemma of being in a position where one is expected to represent the specific national context in the virtual exchange arrangements while not being "local" oneself. In doing so, the students make visible the overly simplistic assumption embedded in COIL—that students situated in different national locations naturally serve as bearers of their respective "national cultures." Their category work exposes just how multiply diverse—and thus how inherently turbulent—the social landscape actually is, and how poorly current COIL discourse aligns with that complexity. This insight offers a clear pedagogical implication: as communication teachers, we must design exchanges that open up a wider range of possibilities for what it means to interact with someone "from abroad," and foster reflective practices that loosen expectations of diversity as something predictable or determined primarily by nationality.

Critically oriented intercultural communication research often argues that intercultural education should help students overcome essentialist views to enable meaningful interaction (e.g., Holliday & Amadasi, 2020; Piller, 2017). We question whether this idealistic and normative approach is the most constructive or feasible way to support students in developing the capacity to navigate social complexity and to interact constructively with those they perceive as different from themselves. Over the longer term, we are likewise skeptical that this idealised stance, especially when applied unreflexively or in a superficial or romanticised fashion that overlooks contextual complexity, can meaningfully counter rising social polarisation. Our concern is that overly radical pedagogical initiatives may alienate students, provoke radicalised responses, and unintentionally reinforce binary oppositions rather than destabilising them (see, e.g., Rambukwella & Zavala, 2025, for a critique of applications of decoloniality).

We align with calls for interculturality scholars to acknowledge and embrace the fragmented, dilemmatic, and contradictory ways in which interculturality is imagined (e.g., Dervin, 2022). Dervin (e.g., 2017) has proposed expanding critical notions of intercultural communication competence through the concept of simplexity. Originally introduced in philosophy, biology, and neuroscience, simplexity combines "simplicity" and "complexity" to describe adaptive strategies that enable living organisms to process complex situations efficiently by developing simplifying mechanisms (Berthoz, 2012). Applied to intercultural communication, simplexity underscores how social interaction requires constant shifts between simple (essentialist, othering) and complex (fluid, belonging-oriented) understandings of self and others (Dervin, 2017). Importantly, simplexifying does not eliminate complexity; rather, it emerges through the interplay between the simple and the complex (Berthoz, 2012).

Employing simplexity as an analytical lens means relinquishing idealistic notions and appreciating and reflecting on what people do in interaction as they organise their social worlds. Our study sheds light on simplexifying as jointly accomplished in interaction as the participants coordinate their identity work and oscillate between simplistic and more elaborate identity constructs to preserve group harmony and proceed with their tasks. Such coordinated simplexifying may be regarded as a core dimension of the students' jointly accomplished intercultural communication competence. Similar observations have been made in research on interprofessional collaboration in healthcare (e.g., Karppinen et al., 2025), where practitioners have been found to skilfully navigate between essentialist and non-essentialist professional identity constructs to structure their joint work effectively while maintaining team cohesion and a patient-centered focus.

From a pedagogical perspective, supporting intercultural communication competence as the ability to simplexify together means creating opportunities for participants to engage in interaction and equipping them with the tools to critically analyse their own communicative practices. In this way, learners are encouraged to recognise which identity constructs are mobilised in interaction, by whom, for what purposes, and with what consequences (see Piller, 2017). Importantly, the point of such an approach is not to dismiss othering as an undesirable phenomenon to be eliminated, but rather to examine critically what it does in interaction.

When situated in today's turbulent global context marked by heightened mobility and intensified (online) contact but also polarisation and

competing narratives of belonging, there is a pressing need for intercultural communication pedagogy to move beyond normative ideals of "overcoming stereotypes." Instead, educators should provide students with opportunities and analytical tools to engage with the processes, tensions, and consequences of identity work as they unfold in interaction.

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OTSIKKO JA ASIASANAT SUOMEKSI:

"Sellaista ihan tosi hardcore opiskelijaruokaa": Identiteettityötä ruokapuheessa virtuaalisessa opiskelijavaihtoprojektissa

ASIASANAT: identiteettityö, jäsenkategorisointianalyysi, kulttuurienvälinen vuorovaikutusosaaminen, ruokapuhe, virtuaalinen opiskelijavaihto, vuorovaikutus

Appendix

Transcription Conventions

.	falling intonation contour
,	level intonation contour
¿	slightly rising intonation contour
?	rising intonation contour
↑	sharp rise in pitch
↓	sharp fall in pitch
ketchup	emphasis
FOOD	strong emphasis
[	beginning of simultaneous talk
]	end of simultaneous talk
(.)	micropause
(0.5)	silences in tens of a second
(( ))	transcriber’s comments, descriptions of nonverbal actions
:	preceding sound is stretched
se-	glottal stop or cut off
°yes°	whispered talk
=	latches between words or turns
>yes<	increased speech rate
<yes>	decreased speech rate
.h	audible inhalation
h	audible aspiration
( )	uncertain hearing
£I see£	smiley voice