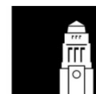


UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *A Linguistic and Philosophical Analysis of Emic and Etic and their Use in International Business Research*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/87152/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Buckley, PJ, Chapman, M, Clegg, J et al. (1 more author) (2014) A Linguistic and Philosophical Analysis of Emic and Etic and their Use in International Business Research. Management International Review, 54 (3). 307 - 324. ISSN 0938-8249

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-013-0193-0

Reuse
Unless indicated otherwise, fulltext items are protected by copyright with all rights reserved. The copyright exception in section 29 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 allows the making of a single copy solely for the purpose of non-commercial research or private study within the limits of fair dealing. The publisher or other rights-holder may allow further reproduction and re-use of this version - refer to the White Rose Research Online record for this item. Where records identify the publisher as the copyright holder, users can verify any specific terms of use on the publisher's website.

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

A linguistic and philosophical analysis of emic and etic and their use in international business research.

Peter J. Buckley, Malcolm Chapman, Jeremy Clegg, Hanna Gajewska-De Mattos.

University of Leeds

Introduction

Herodotus, writing in the fifth century B.C., has an early account of cultural differences and their importance.

> One might recall in particular, an account told of Darius. When he was King of Persia, he summoned the Greeks who happened to be present at his court, and asked them what they would take to eat the dead bodies of their fathers. They replied that they would not do it for any money in the world. Later, in the presence of the Greeks, and through an interpreter, so that they could understand what was said, he asked some Indians, of the tribe called Callatiae, who do in fact eat their parents' dead bodies, what they would take to burn them. They uttered a cry of horror and forbade him to mention such a dreadful thing. One can see by this what custom can do, and Pindar, in my opinion, was right when he called it 'king of all' (Herodotus 1972, p.187).

Darius did not feel it necessary to add that as a good Persian, the only way to dispose of the dead was to expose them on a high platform and let the carrion crows eat them!

This is a powerful example of the difficulty of distinguishing the universal from the particular in cross-cultural analysis. The culture-specific elements are so compelling, that they overwhelm the universal. If we try to abstract the universal from Herodotus's account, we might come up with something like 'what people do with the dead people in their society'. This is rather meaningless, and almost certainly inadequate to the different cultural specificities that we are trying to summarise. The 'dead' tangles us up immediately with theories of the afterlife, reincarnation, the spirit world, and all the rest. Our simple attempt to create a universal – the disposal of the dead – requires us to go back to the culturally specific, to cosmology, religion, diet, systems of classification of all kinds.

The distinction between universal and culture specific has often been conceptualised in international business research as an emic-etic dichotomy. This

dichotomy has intuitive appeal as it has been widely used in this sense by the researchers (see, for example: Adler 1983; Sekaran 1983; Chen and Li, 2005; Khatri et al. 2005; Leung et al. 2005; Ling et al., 2005; Zaheer and Zaheer 2005; Earley 2006; Pellegrini and Scandura 2006; Knight et al. 2007; Shapiro et al. 2007; Tung 2007; Hult et al. 2008; Styles et al. 2008). Etic is often used in this literature as an issue or category which is culturally 'comparable' (Berry 1980). As shown in our Herodotus example, this is problematic, as it is very difficult to identify all the culturally 'comparable' variations that can described and discussed, as their understanding and meaning will be very different in different cultural contexts.

Emic and etic perspectives, while being theoretically rather than methodologically defined, have traditionally been associated with qualitative and quantitative methods respectively (Morris et al. 1999). This association, however, is by no means absolute. As argued by Morris et al. (1999) in some cases quantitative surveys can be used within emic perspectives of indigenous constructs as well as ethnographic observation and qualitative data within etic perspectives.

This paper examines ways in which cross-cultural research in international business can use emic-etic approaches more effectively. Sinkovics et al. (2008) argue that the emic-etic dichotomy is "a hindrance to the development of the field" of international business (p. 693). While there have been discussions in the literature as to how to overcome this tension (e.g., Helfrich 1999; Peng et al. 1991; Lonner 1999; Peterson and Pike 2002; Peterson and Quintanilla 2003), these discussions did not find application in the practice of cross-cultural research (Sinkovics et al. 2008). While international business researchers mainly deal with cross-cultural data which is emic in nature (e.g., attitudinal and behavioural phenomena), the majority of research conducted in the field has been etic. As argued by Doz (2011), while there is a lot that qualitative research methods can offer to international business, the field has largely developed without benefiting from them. As a result cross-cultural comparisons have been ethnocentric and mostly biased towards Western perspectives. This has profound implications for the future direction of international business cross-cultural research design. With the rise of the emerging economies, far more of this research is conducted on economies that have greater apparent differences. What is more, the polarity of the investment direction is reversed – emerging economy firms are now investing in

advanced economies. This makes our research very timely as international business researchers are grappling with these new cross-cultural challenges.

We conduct a linguistic and philosophical analysis of emic and etic terms, and we provide examples from linguistics and international business research on German-Polish acquisitions. We make the case that the models used in social anthropology, deriving from the linguistic analogies of phonemic and phonetic analysis, deserve careful attention. We demonstrate that what conventional etic cross-cultural research perceives to be a problem is often an opportunity to gain deep insight. We argue that emic matters in some cases more that etic, and that the emic can add value beyond the etic in a large number of cases.

We conclude that a research strategy employing both emic and etic approaches is a vital step to enable cross-cultural researchers in international business to obtain more adequate and meaningful results. While most of international business researchers have treated the emic and etic approaches as dilemma, we demonstrate the benefits of treating them as equally applicable and complementary. Our conclusion points to the need for deep qualitative work in international business, with serious attention paid to 'native categories' (Buckley and Chapman 1997).

What do emic and etic mean in international business studies?

Within the domain of cross-cultural business studies, it has become standard to invoke the emic-etic distinction to mean this: emic is culture-specific and etic is universal. Adler (1983), for example, uses the terms to differentiate 'the universal from the particular', and defines them as follows:

> Emic: sounds which are specific to a particular language
> Etic: sounds which are similar in all languages (p.36)

The etic category is commonly used in such literature in the context of being cross-culturally 'comparable' as opposed to emic which does not allow such comparisons (Davidson et at. 1976).

These usages are only one interpretation of the linguistic analogies from which the terms derive. Their route into modern business studies goes through Pike (1954, 1955, 1960), through social psychology (e.g., Triandis and Berry 1980), and into the very

extensive domain of North American business studies which is influenced by social psychology.

> By dropping the root (phon), the two suffixes (emics, etics) become terms which are applicable to this local versus universal distinction in any discipline. By analogy, emics apply in only a particular society; etics are culture-free or universal aspects of the world (or if not entirely universal, operate in more than one society) (Berry 1980, p.11).

As further argued by Berry (1980) it is very difficult to produce descriptions of behaviour that would be meaningful to members of a particular culture and at the same time comparable across different cultures. The proposed solution (Berry 1980) involves an iterative process following the initial application of extant hypotheses concerning behaviour, until an emic description can be made by progressively altering the imposed etic until it matches a purely emic point of view. This convergent methodology however begs the question of how we should know when convergence has been attained.

Much of cross-cultural research is concerned with the search for various types of 'equivalence' (see Usunier 2009, for further discussion). Usunier and Lee (2013) distinguish between six types of equivalence: conceptual (meaning of concepts between different social units), functional (meaning of functions of similar products and activities), translation (lexical, idiomatic, grammatical-syntactical, experiential equivalence), measure equivalence (perceptual, metric, calibration and temporal), sample equivalence (sampling unit) and data collection equivalence (respondents' cooperation) (Usunier and Lee 2013). We would argue, however, that instead of searching for equivalence, we should look carefully from one emic to another. If we keep looking for equivalence, however hard and however often we try, we will always be looking for the 'some of the etic that is left' to which Berry referred, and which is of very little importance to what it is that is being studied as much of data is 'emic', and grounded in the categories and classifications of those who are being researched.

Let us illustrate this with an example of translation equivalence. As put by Ardener (1989):

> The paradox of total translation shows both that we do not want it, and that in life rather than in text (and here is our crucial break with high structuralism) we cannot have it (p.185).

One of the techniques commonly used by cross-cultural researchers in order to find translation ‘equivalence’ (in particular lexical and idiomatic) is back-translation. Within this approach a text is translated from a source language into a target language by one translator, and the translated text in a target language is then translated again, by a different translator (without prior knowledge of the source text), back into the source language. The two texts in the source language version are then compared in order to produce the final text in a target language (Usunier and Lee 2013). It is worth remarking, however, that back-translation is more of a ‘band-aid’ applied across the problem of equivalence (Usunier 2009) and it does not solve the fundamental incongruity of categories between systems. Back-translation may give you some clues that there are problems of incongruity, but even this outcome is not certain. Even where we have a category whose ‘content’ is ‘the same’, from one system to another, the ‘sameness’ is almost inevitably compromised by the different structure of the surrounding categories.

Sekaran (1983) points out the importance of experiential equivalence by giving an example of how a statement “I would like to be a florist” (p. 62), while perfectly applicable and understood in the U.S. may be completely lost in countries which do not have flowershops. We would argue that the problem is much more complex than the presence or absence of “flowershops”. It could potentially pertain to the existence or otherwise of an exchange economy; the medium of exchange (e.g., money); the possibility of different spheres of exchange; the existence or otherwise of shops, and what a shop is thought to be for; the existence or otherwise of patterns of gift-giving and the place of flowers in such patterns; the gender patterns of gift-giving specific to the context; the climate, seasonality and desirability of flowers in general and certain flowers in particular.

This problem is often ignored in cross-cultural management work deriving from cross-cultural psychology (Chapman 1996/7). For example, Haire et al. (1966) argued that while large scale questionnaires prevent any in-depth exploration of respondents’ attitudes, they assure the researcher that “each respondent answered exactly the same questions, and that the results are strictly comparable from one group to another” (Chapman 1996/7, p.2). This tradeoff between depth and breadth is an inevitable feature of social-scientific research, what is problematic here, however is a fact that the authors

are insisting that it is precisely lack of depth that allows them to ensure comparability of results between different groups that were studied. They secure this result, in their own view, by careful attention to translation, and rephrasing and eliminating questions which meaning would be sensitive to cultural differences. This is the search for "equivalence" in cross-cultural questionnaires.

The origin of the terms 'emic' and 'etic'

The emic and etic are the terms derived from the linguistic analogies of phonemic and phonetic analysis (see Saussure 1916; Sweet 1877; Robins 1967). The initial approach to studying and annotating spoken languages was positivist: methods were sought to recognise, describe and annotate the sounds of all languages, using an objective method of observation, and a universal system of annotation (see Sweet, 1877). A good deal of progress was made, and the 'universal system of annotation' came to exist as the 'International Phonetic Alphabet' (often abbreviated to IPA; see IPA 1949). On the route to this, however, observers were obliged to notice that their own linguistic apprehension of what constituted significant sound was radically challenged by that of speakers of other languages and dialects; other people persisted in grouping together large ranges of apparently disparate sounds, or differentiating between sounds that seemed to be the same: the 'phoneme' was, perforce, discovered (for a description of this process, see Robins 1967).

Phonemic analysis is based on the phonemes of a language. A phoneme is a range of sound possibilities, produced and perceived within any one language (or dialect), as if it were a single significant sound. The phonemes exist in an artificial system of boundaries and oppositions – a system which is arbitrary, arbitrarily imposed upon physical reality. The particular phonemic structure with which we are familiar dominates our perception and our production of sounds, and thereby our understanding of language. It is not the physical reality of sound which has significance for us, but the system we impose upon it. As O'Connor (1973) says: 'Our thinking is tied so very much to phonemes rather than to sounds that it is easier to see the relationship between the two in foreign languages than in our own' (p.66). Peoples generally enjoy making fun of the

way foreigners speak their languages: much of the entertainment derives from the meeting of different and incongruent phonemic systems.

Let us go back to the emic-etic research perspective within which it is a desired and desirable outcome of research that an etic should be discovered, common across cultures. It is assumed and argued that this etic feature will be capable of generating theory and analysis of wider cross-cultural applicability than emic features alone. The researcher, within this perspective, continues to assume the capacity to make discriminations that the people under study do not make. The researcher continues to say, this part of the category is important, that part is less important. The researcher continues to maintain, as a desirable feature, a degree of objective and scientific distance from the culture under study. In this sense, it is no surprise that the research enterprise should continue to be regarded as one of the study of 'behaviour'. We have seen above that a phoneme does not exist in itself, but in a system of oppositions - it is defined by what it is not. It is this system of oppositions which determines the reality status of the phoneme, and not the relationship of the phoneme to underlying physical or material structures or manifestations. The challenge to a positivist view of the world is clear - if systems of opposition, socially constructed and arbitrary, are given the power to define the world, the securities of physicality and materiality are lost, at least in the social sphere. It is these securities which the term 'behaviour' seems to provide - behaviour, in the understanding of those that use the term, is in the external, observable, concrete realm.

What can international business studies learn from social anthropology?

A discipline which recognised that linguistics offered conjoint empirical and theoretical advances was social anthropology, which successfully applied the concepts from this field to studying cultures (e.g., Hjelmslev 1943; Leach 1961; Needham 1962; Lévi-Strauss 1962, 1963; Jones 1964; Douglas 1966; Parkin 1982; Ardener 1989, 1971a, 1971b). The idea of the phoneme gave rise to the idea that human and social realities were classified, by societies or cultures, into 'categories'. A phoneme groups together somewhat disparate sounds, into a unit which has significance in a particular language – within the unit, the meaning of the different sounds is the same. Each phoneme is

‘opposed’ to neighbouring phonemes. It is the system of opposition which gives each element within the system its significance. A social categorisation does the same thing, with material and ideological realities.

The issue was first examined using kinship examples. In English, there are series of commonly used kinship terms, which are used to talk about relationships to other people (father, mother, sister, brother, etc). Social anthropologists began to study other kinship systems with the assumption that these English categories were self-evident. They found, however, that other cultures had kinship systems which were unintelligible when viewed through the lense of English terminology. Other languages classified together individuals which English classified apart, and classified apart individuals which English classified together. For example, the English term ‘uncle’ specifies (at a minimum) ‘male parental siblings’ and it does not distinguish between “mother’s brother” and “father’s brother” as it is the case in other languages. We discover here a range of differentiating features which can be applied to related people. The different way in which these differentiating features are played out, in social life and language, gives rise to kinship and social structures which can be dramatically different from those familiar to most of people in the modern English-speaking world. This is particularly relevant to international business research as more and more international business activity is conducted with regard to emerging economies.

Again by analogy with the phonemic example, it is not necessarily useful or helpful to look across kinship systems, observe that a particular genealogically specified individual is common to two otherwise different categories, and to conclude that this part of the category (say “father’s brother”) is more real, cross-culturally valid, or etic, than the other parts of the categories (respectively, “mother’s brother” and “father’s brother’s son”). This is imputing a distinction which is neither lived, nor experienced, nor understood, in the two different systems of which we are talking.

This notion that culture could be regarded as a system of classifications came to be accepted within social anthropology. A single item could not be understood, in and of itself, without an understanding of its relationships to the other items surrounding it. A system makes sense, in its own terms, and that there will always and necessarily be problems of translation from one system to another, from one culture to another. This is

not regarded as a problem to be defined or researched away. It is, rather, the prime focus of interest and attention. Social anthropologists do not particularly expect 'equivalence' across cultures, and are suspicious of it when it seems to be apparent.

The difference in perspective between international business and social anthropology is profound. While we are examining systems which make sense internally, through opposition of elements within the system, and then trying to compare across systems, we find that it is not clear what should be compared with what. In some cases, we preserved the physical, acoustic possibility that there would be some common feature across all the systems. This is the exact analogy of Berry, with whom we started, saying 'if some of the etic is left', as we look across different systems, 'then a universal for that particular behaviour will be achieved'. But we have argued that this cross-system element is irrelevant, in the most profound way, to how the individual systems operate within themselves. We have some 'etic left', and it does us no good at all in analysis. Through finding the 'etic that is left', we have discovered something of very little importance, and potentially obscured many things, like a "disposal of the dead" from our Herodotus example above. In what follows we discuss how the ideas from linguistics and social anthropology can be applied to international business research in order to use emic and emic approaches more effectively. We do so by general examples and examples from international business research on German-Polish acquisitions.

How can emic and etic approaches be used more effectively in international business research?

Many usages of etic and emic imply that the former concerns objective culture-independent description, and the latter knowledge informed by the culture of those under study. The second of these, the emic perspective, as conceived in cross-cultural management studies, under the influence of Pike's ideas, is not unlike the idea of 'holistic system analysis', as derived from the idea of classification and definition by opposition.

The former, however, the etic perspective, conceived as an objective and culture-free account, is in practice much more problematic than is commonly supposed. In a strict linguistic sense, the phonetic implies an objective description, fully specified in all possible dimensions, and the phonemic implies a description which is based upon the

categories employed by the people under study. So, in the original linguistic examples, a complete phonetic description of how somebody says a particular vowel requires a complex description of tongue, teeth, mouth, lips, volume, timbre, pitch and so on. It is a hard thing to research and express. A phonemic description of how somebody from a particular linguistic community says a vowel can be much simpler – it summarises in one symbol the range of sounds which people speaking this language will hear and produce as appropriate. Ardener (1989) says:

> Essentially, phonemes were formulaic statements for the abstraction of significant units of speech. The analyst simplified the initial 'phonetic' data by using fewer terms but at the expense of requiring a book of rules to interpret them (p.31).

In the standard discourse of cross-cultural business studies, it is often implied that etic studies, because they use categories that are the same across all cultures, are somehow simpler, less empirically and conceptually challenging, than emic studies, which require the use of culture-specific categories. This is generally a misconception. The research, scientific and descriptive apparatus required to discover and express exactly how somebody says a particular vowel is formidably complex. The use of phonemic analysis allows the infinite range of possible vowel sounds to be broken into the locally relevant categories.

We can carry the analogy into the kinship example. When you talk to people about their kinship system, they give you what we might call their emic categories – the categories that are relevant to their system. We might want to say, well, what they think does not matter; we can simply go for objective genealogical descriptions, according to who is related to whom in a consanguineal or affinal sense. Empirically, methodologically, that is when the trouble starts. How do you find out? If you ask people, they give answers according to their categories. Looked at in this way, it is clear that we are necessarily dependent upon emic accounts in a great deal of our social scientific research. Every time we ask someone a question, we get an emic answer. We often cannot reduce the variety of emic answers to etic universals, without falling into the traps already described. The etic perspective is not somehow easier or more scientific – it is often quite simply unavailable. This is often true in cross-cultural management

research, and indeed in international business studies more generally; it is also usually unacknowledged.

Therefore, as argued by Buckley and Chapman (1997), taking emic (‘native’) categories into a consideration is a [...] “vital, step towards adequate positivist research” (p. 291). In their paper, they give an example of counting the number of policemen in a given culture, and argue that for this exercise to be meaningful a researcher should first find out how a policeman is defined by this culture, otherwise the results would be inadequate and ethnocentric. The same applies to forms of status differentiation, for example the idea of leadership as the “big man” in the Pacific Islands is very different from what it means in the rest of the world, as in that culture it has got a permanent status (Peterson and Quintanilla 2003). Another good example is a concept of ‘face’ which, while universally understood as “self-awareness of social evaluation” (Qi 2011, p. 280), it has got different contextual connotations in Chinese language for example, where there are two words representing it: mianzi (social face) and lian (moral face) (Qi 2011). Trying to discard this information, on the grounds of a lack of equivalence, would result in discarding what really matters for understanding these cultures, taking it into account, however, would result in a more comprehensive and adequate account of phenomena under investigation (leadership and face respectively). Also studying family firms across different cultures and only focusing on what these firms have got in common, would result in producing categories which were imposed upon cultural variety to which they were not appropriate, as the notion of family is very different in different cultures, reflecting differing kinship systems in those cultures. In rule-based countries like the United States or United Kingdom for example, kinship is limited to the immediate family, while in relation-based countries (e.g., Asia, Latin America, Southern Europe, etc.), it includes extended family of several generations. These examples demonstrate that what conventional etic cross-cultural research perceives to be a problem is often an opportunity to gain deep insight, as in many cases emic matters more that etic, and that the emic can often add value beyond the etic.

Emic and Etic Aspects of German-Polish Acquisitions

In this section we apply the proposed approach to our own research. The example discussed here derives from a series of open-ended interviews with the managers from German companies that acquired companies in Poland, and with managers from these. The main focus of inquiry was the impact of cultural differences on post-acquisition integration. The study adopted a broadly qualitative, interpretive approach, in order to access an understanding and knowledge of the post-acquisition process, from the point of view of those under study (D'Irbarne 1996/97, Miles and Huberman 1994, Yin 1994). The data was organised by using the QSR Nvivo 7. All interview material was coded and organized first under free nodes and then under tree nodes. Free nodes were used to capture the key ideas emerging from the data without imposing any structure on them and without assuming any relationships between them, as the researchers were looking for accounts of experience of acquisition process from both German and Polish side. Subsequently tree nodes were used to organise these ideas into conceptual groups (Bazeley 2008). And it was during that process, and after a number of attempts to achieve a coding that could capture both the German and Polish accounts of the experience of acquisition, the two authors most closely involved in the coding were baffled. Codes that worked for the material from Polish informants, seemed to offer no place or sense to the material from German informants, and vice versa. This was in spite of the fact that they were talking about the same companies, the same examples of acquisition and post-acquisition integration.

The two authors carrying out the coding approached one of the other authors, and described the problem. The coded data from the Polish managers was mostly about change, progress and success. The coded data from the German managers was mostly about lack of change, barriers to progress and failure. How could this data be sensibly related to what were the same events?

We need to stress that the data discussed here concerns cross-national, and specifically German-Polish, acquisitions. The German-Polish specificity has some importance. It has been argued that the German/Polish interaction, in recent centuries, has typically been one where the powers of definition lay in German hands (or in the German imagination), and where the Poles and Poland have been subject to German interpretation (Chapman et al. 2004 and Chapman et al. 2008). Because of this, in recent years

German/Polish interactions in the business sphere have tended to be lived as an ambition on the part of the Poles to meet German expectations, and an aspiration on the part of the Germans to bring the Poles up to their expectations. This has been particularly so since the demise of central planning in Central Europe. There is no particular problem with this. We might, as a result, readily envisage a world where the Poles were trying and succeeding to meet German expectations, and the Germans acknowledged the effort and success. We might equally envisage a world where the Poles were trying but failing to meet German expectations, and the Germans acknowledged the effort and the failure.

What we found was something rather different. The interviewed Poles and Germans give dramatically different accounts of the same events and experience. There is consistency, also, in the structure of the difference that emerges. Right across the range of interviews, the Poles talk of improvements and progress, and the Germans talk of obstacles and barriers to progress. They are talking about the same things. What are we to do about this?

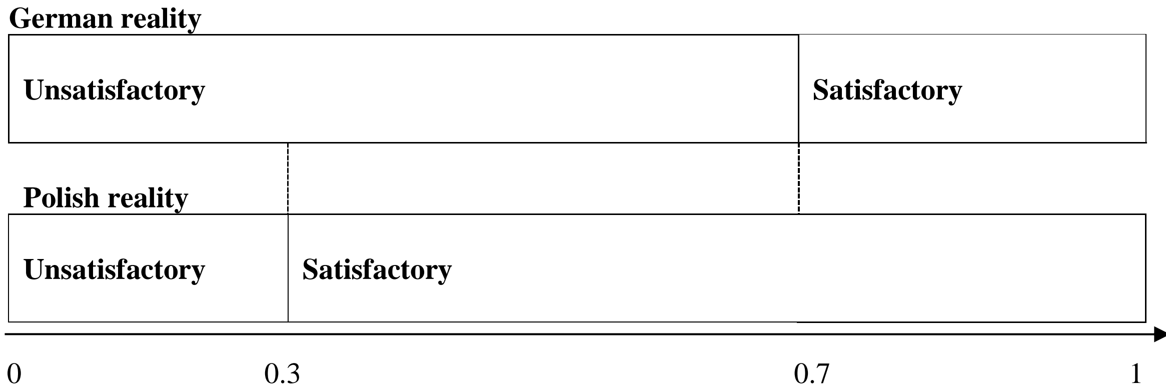
We argue that we can go directly to the ideas that we have discussed above. Using analogies from structural linguistics and structural anthropology, we can show that 'reality' can be structured into units which are defined by (and which derive their meaning from) other surrounding units. We can say that, for those who live within realities which are structured in this way, it is often difficult to experience or perceive other realities, and to appreciate the way in which meaning is structured in these other realities (see Chapman 1992, ch.10).

In the linguistic and kinship examples given above, we have seen that it is possible for the same 'objective reality' to be classified differently from one system to another. This means that the same 'objective reality' can be classified, as a unitary category, with different other 'objective realities' in one system and the other.

Figure 1, which is our etic approach, suggests that the Germans and the Poles are looking at the same continuous stretch of 'reality', but looking at it through different category systems, what Poles perceive to be progress, Germans see as barriers. We now must try to imagine that this reality is a variable organisational or social feature, which has a satisfactory/unsatisfactory, acceptable/unacceptable, normal/abnormal, or even

good/bad, distinction built into it. We must also try to imagine that this feature is continuously variable, in an objective sense.

Figure 1: German "reality" and Polish "reality" (etic approach)



We must then try to imagine that, for the Poles and the Germans, the boundary between the satisfactory and the unsatisfactory, on this continuously variable stretch of empirical reality, is differently placed. That is what Figure 1 illustrates. In order to better illustrate these empirical realities, we imposed values from 0 to 1 and on that scale what is between 0 and 0.3 is unsatisfactory and what is between 0.7 and 1 is satisfactory. The area between 0.3 and 0.7 is where both Polish and German "realities" overlap. What it tells us in terms of post-acquisition integration is that this could be potential area for negotiation which would narrow down the disputes in the process. Our "realities" in Figure 1 highlight the potential problems in post-acquisition integration (Poles see progress and Germans see barriers), but do not yet offer explanations of these problems or indeed solutions.

If we look now at Figure 2, representing emic approach, we can see, in the shaded area, that there is a stretch of objective reality which the Poles regard as 'satisfactory', and which the Germans regard as 'unsatisfactory'.

Figure 2: The meeting of "realities" – progress and barriers (emic approach)

German reality

Unsatisfactory		**Satisfactory**

Polish reality

Unsatisfactory		**Satisfactory**

Imagine now that the Poles are, as a result of contact with the Germans, pushing the boundary between what they consider to be satisfactory and unsatisfactory in a German direction. They are, in their own terms, making progress. What the Germans see, however, is that the Poles are still on the wrong side of the satisfactory/unsatisfactory frontier, as this is defined by the Germans. So where the Poles perceive progress, and congratulate themselves, the Germans perceive enduring barriers to progress, and express their perceptions in this way. By adopting an emic approach we were able to explain the problem and to bring it one step closer to finding a solution. This example illustrates that doing emic allows you to do better etic.

Figures 1 and 2 are intentionally content free. Any cultural meeting, and any account of cultural meeting, is multidimensional, and there are many different empirical issues which could be discussed in the context of Figures 1 and 2. The coding of our data, using NVivo, threw up the apparent paradox that the Poles saw 'progress', where the Germans saw 'barriers to progress'. When we looked again at the empirical domains from which these judgements emerged, we found a number of major themes.

One issue was punctuality. The Poles thought that their punctuality (in many different senses – meeting deadlines, ensuring that the workforce arrived on time, promptness in arriving at meetings, and so on) was improving. They recognised a deficiency, but considered that they had made genuine positive steps to rectifying this. The Germans, by contrast, thought that the Poles were still unpunctual.

A second issue concerned attitudes to cost and efficiency. We might broadly say that this issue concerned questions like: 'what is the company for?' 'for whose benefit

should the company be managed?', and so on. Two examples emerged. The first concerned the willingness to reduce jobs and head count in pursuit of efficiency and lower costs. The Poles came to this issue with a good deal of background – the importance, within once state-owned companies, of providing not only employment but also a range of social services to the workforce; the importance, within a centrally planned system that did not work very well, of informal networks of influence, patronage and favour. The Germans came to the issue with a rather clearer idea that the first objective of the company was to make profits, and that if jobs needed to go for this to be achieved, then the jobs should go. The Germans, of course, did not come to this issue without ideas of their own about the value of jobs, and the need to maintain stable employment where this was possible. What we might call the 'emic calculus' around these issues, however, on the part of the Poles and the Germans, led to very different conclusions about the balance of costs and benefits involved in suppressing jobs. The second example concerned the Polish willingness to spend lavishly on corporate facilities, decoration and furniture. The Poles saw this evidence that they were, as managers, successful. The Germans saw this as evidence that the Poles were incurably extravagant, and apparently incapable of grasping what real efficiency was.

A third issue concerned the Polish managerial reliance on political and family networks of trust and influence, as opposed to the German reliance on formal and contractual relationships. From a German perspective, the Polish reliance on informal networks seemed unreliable, chaotic, nepostic. From a Polish perspective, this was how things were done, and how security of outcome was achieved in an uncertain system. In important senses, the bases for decision making, for one side, were invisible to the other. Again, what we have called the 'emic calculus', as made by one side of the acquisition, occupied a concentual space that, while it involved the 'same' events, was differently structured.

A fourth issue concerned alcohol consumption. Heavy consumption of alcohol, particularly in the form of vodka, has long been recognised as a feature of the life of Slavonic speaking peoples. The drabness and frustrations of the planned economy did nothing to reduce this. Where a workforce was formally employed, but in practice generally underemployed, then a degree of alcohol consumption in the workplace was

tolerable and normal. State-owned companies which were over-manned, with poorly maintained equipment and drab facilities, were not places where alcohol consumption seemed particularly out of place. The Germans came to the problem from a dramatically different perspective. For them, any alcohol in the workplace was a problem. This gives us perhaps the simplest empirical illustration of figure 2 that we are able to offer. The presence of one half-empty bottle of vodka, in a locker or hidden behind a crate, was evidence for the Germans that the entire Polish outfit occupied the space 'unacceptable' [in German terms]. From a Polish perspective, the presence of only one half-empty bottle of vodka meant that the problem was pretty much solved, and that near-German standards of sobriety were being achieved.

We have said that the meaning of materialities, even when they are apparently the same from one structure to another, can vary according to the greater 'emic' category that they occupy. The half-empty vodka bottle does not change, but the conclusions drawn from it, according to the 'emic' categories surrounding it, are dramatically different.

The examples given above are illustrations of the general tendency, discovered from the coding of the interview data within Nvivo, for Polish and German managers to perceive the 'same' events in rather different ways. Does it still make sense to say that these were the 'same' events? The Germans and the Poles come away from these events, after all, with rather different accounts of them. The process by which the two accounts can be reconciled is not, in reality, a smooth one. Both Germans and Poles will be aware of dissatisfaction with the other, of a sense that something uncomfortable and at least in part inexplicable is happening. We can say, in general, that the problems that occur in culture meeting are those caused by the meeting of different and incongruent category systems (see Ardener 1989; Chapman 1992; McDonald 1989). Shenkar et al (2008) has recently argued that we should think of the problems caused by culture meeting as caused by 'friction'. We would argue that the meeting of incongruent category systems allows us to understand, in fine detail, the multi-dimensional meetings of interlocked ideas and materialities, which generate what Shenkar calls 'friction'.

Tung (2007) cites the Japanese businessman Takeo Fujisawa, to the effect that 'Japanese and American management practices are 95% the same and differ in all important ways'. She goes on to say 'The "95% similarity" that Fujisawa alluded to

would constitute the etic component of culture, whereas they "differ in all important ways" represents the emic dimension' (p.44). Of course Fujisawa's statement is a bon mot, rather than a theoretical statement, and it probably does not make much sense to put numbers to the problem in this way. Nevertheless, if we stay with these percentages, they perhaps provide us with another way of illustrating our argument. For the 5% of difference we can regard as distributed over the other 95%, such that everything is different; the 5% of difference does not come in a different package, separable and identifiable as such, but as virtually limitless incongruences (some small, some large) between the category systems of different cultures.

We can return here to the possibility of access to the etic reality. In every case which we have discussed, the interview data give us an emic view of the events within the acquired company. Any interview, any questionnaire, would always primarily be accessing such a view. This means that the resulting data needs to be put into a holistic context, where the meaning of the categories employed is determined, or at the very least illuminated, by the surrounding categories. Where we get two different emic perspectives meeting, then we have shown that we are able, with thought, and with a bit of help from anthropological analogies, to make some sense of the outcomes of the meeting. We have also seen, however, that many researchers have imagined that they could readily leave aside the emic perspective, and take an objective etic perspective. We have also argued that in many cases this etic perspective is not available.

Looking back to the kinship analogy which was argued above, we can turn our attention to the possibility of an etic understanding of how much alcohol is consumed in a Polish workplace. An emic study of how much Poles drink, and how much Germans think they drink, can be carried out by getting the Poles and Germans to talk about this. In this way, we will discover their categories for assessing this – their emic perspective. How would we do an etic study, however? To do that (and remembering the 'phonetic' analogy) we would need to measure every bottle and glass, be inside every locker and every office, be constantly alert to every corner of the workplace and the home, and know the exact strength of the alcohol being consumed. We clearly cannot do that – we do not have the research capacity, and the level of intrusion into social life that this would require would be totally unacceptable.

Could some of the differences in perceptions in our empirical example be differences in corporate rather than national culture? If we follow Hofstede (1991) then we can treat the differences in national cultures as deeply rooted values of these cultures which will shape how people from these cultures expect for the companies to be run. Therefore even if we distinguish between national cultures and corporate cultures these expectations are deeply rooted in national cultures. Furthermore, the different and opposing views of the protagonists' relationship found in our empirical example occur in many cultures. We also observe such inter-group dynamics within one culture. In the realm of corporate culture, common stories suggest that in merged companies members of the two previous organizations retain their own views of history and present ways of thinking and valuing for years, even decades. Research, for example, has found intergroup dynamics where two groups have quite different views of the same history and of their partnership and tend to disparage the other and make their own group more heroic are more prevalent when groups believe that they have competitive goals rather than cooperative ones (Vaara 2002). These intergroup dynamics have emic as well as etic aspects, as much of the context of the messages will depend upon the culture and aspects of the immediate situation.

The examples from our data allow us to understand both the 'socially constructed' aspects of these realities, and the 'positivist' realities which co-exist with them. There are 'categorical' features, which we can regard as the product of 'social construction' as well as 'statistical' features, which we could regard as real in a positivist sense. The 'categorical' features both generate the 'statistical' features, and are elements in their perception and relevance.

How can we actually research these? We can access 'categorical' features, which are derived from the imposition of culture-specific boundaries on reality, by getting people to talk about them. The 'statistical' features, the positivist realities, we can also access by standard scientific techniques (of counting and enumeration of various kinds). But, we need to acknowledge, to a far greater degree than has been common in international business research, that much of our data is emic, and grounded in the categories and classifications of those whom we are researching. We can then start to

think, in a way that does justice to the complexity of the phenomena, about the interaction between the 'socially constructed' realities, and the 'positivist' realities.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural analysis in international business is faced with challenges arising from the difficulty of distinguishing the universal from the particular. We argued that the models deriving from the linguistic analogies of phonemic and phonetic analysis, successfully (and appropriately) used in social anthropology, deserve careful attention, if we are to do justice to the complexity of the phenomena we are researching. We need to acknowledge, to a far greater degree than has been common in international business research, that much of our data is 'emic', and grounded in the categories and classifications of those under research.

Lessons for International Business Researchers

We have examined ways in which cross-cultural research in international business can use emic-etic approaches more effectively. Using examples from linguistics, kinship and our own research, we argued that international business researchers have to recognise the profound differences in culture, as the Herodotus example shows. In our empirical example, the categories utilised by the Polish and German managers did not match up and could not be made to match up. This was a research opportunity and not a research failure. What this means for the international business researchers, is that the search for equivalence should no longer be a prime ambition of cross-cultural research. If equivalence is there, then it can be embraced. If equivalence is not there, however, it should not be forced. There is no need to design the search for equivalence into all cross-cultural research. We have shown that what conventional cross-cultural research perceives to be a problem, should often be regarded instead as deep insight. This takes a degree of courage. We hope that this paper will empower qualitative researchers to follow such insights, rather than try to evade them or conceal them. This is not an easy thing to do. It is uncomfortable, and it is conceptually hard, both to grasp and to express. Emic and etic cannot co-exist with the notions of definition by opposition, system, value, and so on. The ideas cannot be introduced to one another in bits. The question has an 'all

or nothing' aspect. This paper has taken an uncompromising approach to this difficult issue, because the stakes are so high. Employing both emic and etic approaches is a vital step to enable cross-cultural researchers in international business to obtain more adequate and meaningful results, and there are clear benefits of treating them as complementary rather than dichotomous.

References

Adler, N. J. (1983). A typology of management studies involving culture. Journal of International Business Studies, 14(2), 29–47.

Ardener, E. (1971a). Social Anthropology and Language, introduction to Social Anthropology and Language. ASA Monographs 10. London: Tavistock: ix-cii.

Ardener, E. (1971b). The New Anthropology and its Critics. Man, 6(3), 449-67.

Ardener, E. (1989). The Voice of Prophecy and other essays. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bazeley, P. (2008). Qualitative Data Analysis with NVIVO. London: Sage Publications.

Berry, J. W. (1980). Acculturation as Varieties of Adaptation. In A. M. Padilla (Ed.), Acculturation: Theory, Models, and Some New Findings (pp. 9-25). Boulder: Westview.

Buckley, P.J., & Chapman, M. (1997). The Use of 'Native Categories' in Management Research. British Journal of Management, 8(3), 283–299.

Chapman, M., Clegg, J., & Gajewska-De Mattos, H. (2004). Poles and Germans: An International Business Relationship. Human Relations, 57(8), 983-1015.

Chapman, M. (1992). The Celts. The construction of a Myth. London: Macmillan.

Chapman, M. (1996/7). Social Anthropology, Business Studies and Cultural Issues. International Studies of Management and Organisation, 26(4), 3-29.

Chapman, M., Gajewska-De Mattos, H., Clegg, J., & Buckley, P.J. (2008). Close neighbours and distant friends: Perceptions of cultural distance. International Business Review, 17(3), 217-234.

Chen, X.P., & Li, S. (2005). Cross-national differences in cooperative decision-making in mixed-motive business contexts: the mediating effect of vertical and horizontal individualism. Journal of International Business Studies, 36(6), 622-636

Davidson, A.R., Jaccard, J.J., Triandis, H.C., Morales, M.L., & Diaz-Guerrero, R. (1976). Cross-cultural model testing: Toward a solution of the etic-emic dilemma. International Journal of Psychology, 11(1), 1-13.

D'Iribarne, P. (1996/97). The usefulness of ethnographic approach to international comparison of organisations. International Studies of Management and Organisation, 26(4), 30-47.

Douglas, M. (1966). Purity and Danger. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Doz, Y. (2011). Qualitative research for international business (Perspective). Journal of International Business Studies, 42(5), 582–590.

Earley, P. C. (2006). Leading cultural research in the future: a matter of paradigms and taste. Journal of International Business Studies, 37(6), 922-931.

Haire, M., Ghiselli, E., & Porter, L. (1966). Managerial Thinking – An International Study. New York, Wiley.

Helfrich, H. (1999). Beyond the dilemma of cross-cultural psychology: resolving the tension between etic and emic approaches. Culture and Psychology, 5(2), 131-153.

Herodotus (1972). The Histories Translated by Aubrey de Selincourt. (Revised Edition). London: Penguin.

Hjelmslev, L. (1943). Omkring Sprogteoriens Grundlaeggelse. Copenhagen, Munksgaard (trans. 1963 by J. Whitfield, Prolegomena to a Theory of Language, Menasha: Wis., University of Wisconsin).

Hofstede, G. (1991). Cultures and organisations: Software of the mind. London: McGraw-Hill.

Hult, G. T. M., Ketchen, D. J., Griffith, D. A., Finnegan, C. A., Gonzalez-Padron, T., Harmancioglu, N., Huang, Y., Talay, M. B., & Cavusgil S. T. (2008). Data equivalence in cross-cultural international business research: assessment and guidelines. Journal of International Business Studies, 39(6), 1027-1044.

IPA (1949). Principles of the International Phonetic Association. London: International Phonetic Association.
Jones, D. (1964). *The History and Meaning of the Term 'Phoneme'*. London, International Phonetic Association.
Khatri, N., Tsang, E.W.K., & Begley, T.M. (2005). Cronyism: a cross-cultural analysis. Journal of International Business Studies, 37(1), 61-75.
Knight, J. G., Holdsworth, D. K., & Mather, D. W. (2007). Country-of-origin and choice of food imports: an in-depth study of European distribution channel gatekeepers. Journal of International Business Studies, 38(1), 107-125.
Leach, E. (1961). Rethinking Anthropology. London: Athlone Press.
Leung, K., Bhagat, R., Buchan, N., Erez, M., & Gibson, C. (2005). Culture and international business: recent advances and their implications for future research. Journal of International Business Studies, 36(4), 357-378.
Levi-Strauss, C. (1962). Le Totemisme Aujourd'hui. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France (trans. as Totemism, 1963a, by R. Needham. Boston, Beacon Press).
Levi-Strauss, C. (1963). Structural Anthropology. New York: Basic Books.
Ling, Y., Floyd, S.W., & Baldridge, D.C. (2005). Toward a model of issue-selling by subsidiary managers in multinational organizations. Journal of International Business Studies, 36(6), 637-654.
Lonner, W.J. (1999). Helfrich's 'Principle of Triarchic Resonance': A commentary on yet another perspective on the on-going and tenacious etic-emic debate. Culture and Psychology, 5(2), 173-181.
McDonald, M. (1989). We are not French! – Language, Culture and Identity in Brittany. London: Tavistock.
Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative Data Analysis. An Expanded Sourcebook, 2nd edition: Sage Publications.
Morris M., Leung K., Ames D., & Lickel B. (1999). Views from inside and outside: Integrating emic and etic insights about culture and justice judgement. Academy of Management Review, 24(4), 1781-796.
Needham, R. (1962). Structure and Sentiment. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
O'Connor, J. (1973). Phonetics. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Parkin, D. (Ed.) (1982). Semantic Anthropology. London: Academic.
Pellegrini, E. K., & Scandura, T A. (2006). Leader–member exchange (LMX), paternalism, and delegation in the Turkish business culture: An empirical investigation. Journal of International Business Studies, 37(2), 264-279.
Peng, T.K., Peterson, M.F., & Shyi, Y-P. (1991). Quantitative methods in Cross-National Management research: Trends and Equivalence Issues. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 12(2), 87-107.
Peterson, M.F., & Pike, K.L. (2002). Emics and etics for organizational studies: A lesson in contrast from linguistics. International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management, 2(1), 5-19.
Peterson, M.F., & Quintanilla, S.A.R. (2003). Using emics and etics in cross-cultural organizational studies: Universal and local, tacit and explicit. In Tjosvold, D. et al. (Eds.), Cross-Cultural Management: Foundations and Future.
Pike, K. (1954, 1955, 1960). Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour. 3 vols Glendale Summer Institute of Linguistics.
Qi, X. (2011). Face: A Chinese concept in a global sociology. Journal of Sociology. http://jos.sagepub.com/content/47/3/279.full.pdf+html. Accessed 14 March 2013.
Robins, R. (1967). A short history of linguistics. Harlow: Longman.
Saussure, F. de. (1916). Cours de Linguistique Generale. Paris: Payot.
Sekaran, U. (1983). Methodological and Theoretical Issues and Advancements in Cross-Cultural Research. Journal of International Business Studies, 14(2), 61-73.
Shapiro, J M., Ozanne, J L., & Saatcioglu, B. (2008). An interpretive examination of the development of cultural sensitivity in international business. Journal of International Business Studies, 39(1), 71-87.
Shenkar, O., Luo, Y., & Yeheskel, O. (2008). From "Distance" to "Friction": Substituting Metaphors and Redirecting Intercultural Research. Academy of Management Review, 33(4), 905-923.
Sinkovics, R. R., Penz, E., & Ghauri, P.N. (2008). Enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research in international business. Management International Review, 48(6), 689-713.

Styles, C. Patterson, P G., & Ahmed, F. (2008). A relational model of export performance. Journal of International Business Studies, 39(5), 880-900.
Sweet, H. (1877). Handbook of Phonetics, Oxford.
Triandis, H., & Berry, J. (eds). (1980). Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 2, Methodology. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
Tung, R. L. (2007). The cross-cultural research imperative: the need to balance cross-national and intra-national diversity. Journal of International Business Studies, 39(1), 41-46.
Usunier, J-C. (2009). Language as a key input in investigating conceptual equivalence in cross-cultural management research. Paper presented at the Workshop on Language and Multilingualism in Management: Themes, Concepts and Methodologies, Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki, June 2009
Usunier, J-C., & Lee, J.A. (2013). Marketing Across Cultures (6th edition). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
Vaara, E. (2002). On the discursive construction of success/failure in narratives of post-merger integration. Organization Studies, 23(2), 211–248.
Yin, R.K. (1994). Case Study Research. Design and Methods. Applied Social Research Methods Series, 2nd edition: Sage Publications.
Zaheer, S., & Zaheer, A. (2006). Trust across borders. Journal of International Business Studies, 37(1), 21-29.