Chapter 10: Localize, Adapt, Reflect: A Review of Recent Research in Transnational and Intercultural TPC

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Abstract: Technical and professional communication (TPC) has been a border-crossing field since its inception, and as globalization continues to create new avenues for research and practice, now is an opportune time to review what kinds of intercultural and transnational projects are being pursued as well as to consider how to be ethical agents in these projects. After relating the fraught process of defining "transnational" and "intercultural," this chapter describes a meta-analysis of articles published in major TPC journals during a five-year window (2014-2018). The analysis categorizes different types of projects and seeks out advice emerging from scholars' experiences. The study reveals a wide range of transnational research settings which resist being easily delimited and determines that space in journal articles to reflect on cross-cultural complexities is scarce. Limited reflections from scholars in cross-cultural projects indicate that working in intercultural and transnational spaces requires persistent localization, ongoing adaptation, and a reflective, reflexive mindset. Taken together, these lessons point to ongoing (re)positionality at the center of successful intercultural work. Based on the results of this review, the author recommends the field develop a formal statement of ethics for transnational and intercultural research. That ethic should be human-centered and mindful of social justice principles.

Keywords: research, transnational, intercultural, positionality, ethics

By its very motivation and nature, technical and professional communication (TPC) has always been a border-crossing field and practice because it sits at the intersection of technical content and application of communication principles. The teaching of technical writing emerged from hybrid spaces in engineering programs of the early twentieth century (Connors, 1982), and the ongoing "role of the technical communication practitioner stems from the need for members from two distinct professions to connect" (Amare, 2002, p. 128). Beyond being a site where disciplines meet, TPC serves as a "high encompassing culture" bridging the sciences and humanities (Amare, 2002, p. 129). Technical communication professionals also cross divides in expertise and experience, between subject matter experts and varied audiences (Rice-Bailey, 2016). Spanning differences of language, perspective, and practice is at the heart of what we do, but what foundations have we developed in working across borders most effectively and

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ethically? And what innovations are going on in cross-cultural projects?

This chapter surveys the current state of a particular kind of TPC border crossing: transnational and intercultural. My purposes are to highlight the diverse sites and locations of TPC work and to critically examine our disciplinary discourses regarding the challenges of complex intercultural spaces. Despite TPC activities being situated in a wide array of locations, we have limited outlets through which to share our insights and lessons learned about the complexities of carefully and ethically navigating those situations. As TPC continues to evolve and grow, we grapple with defining and describing the notably far-reaching sites and goals of our discipline. I take up some of that grappling here through a survey of recent transnational projects, asking about the varieties of border-crossing they do as well as the lessons cultivated from research situated in complex spaces. Emerging through my study are ongoing struggles and limited successes in defining and describing the terms of "(inter)cultural" work despite TPC activities being located in a fascinating array of such situations.

Now into our second century as a discipline, forces of globalization continue to open new spaces, drive new questions and innovative practices, and provide new opportunities in learning to operate in culturally diverse situations. Scholarship has kept pace with these changes, particularly in the last two decades. For example, Barry Thatcher (2001) disrupted traditional notions of validity in intercultural research. J. Blake Scott and Bernadette Longo's (2006) special issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly* (*TCQ*) considered the complications of the field's "cultural turn" by "expanding methods for talking about the influences of sociocultural contexts [and by] foregrounding new critical perspectives on intercultural communication" (p. 4). Another *TCQ* special issue, edited by Huiling Ding and Gerald Savage (2013), pushed back against the traditional "nation-centric mindset" via a collection of articles on transnational communication processes and products. In that issue, Steven Fraiberg (2013) called for a "less bounded" and "less static" approach to methods and practices in global contexts. As his study demonstrated, more flexibility is needed to contextualize and untangle meaning when multiple culturally embedded symbol systems are at play (pp. 23-24). Guiseppe Getto's (2015) introduction to a special issue in *Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization* further applied the tricky concept of "culture" by tracing it along multiple axes. He framed technical communicators as "capacity builders" whose daily tasks make them "purveyors of a large variety of professional cultures" (p. 1). Barry Thatcher and Kirk St.Amant's (2011) edited collection spoke to the growth of TPC taught across borders and advised faculty on course and program level development. The first-hand storytelling by TPC practitioners in Han Yu and Gerald Savage's (2013) *Negotiating Cultural Encounters* invited readers to witness real-life complexities that intercultural tensions create in the workplace. Angela Haas and Michelle Eble's (2018) *Key Theoretical Frameworks: Teaching Technical Communication in the Twenty-First Century* interlocked social justice with the very nature of technical communication being intercultural and

potentially global (pp. 10-11). Issues of quality and methods when working across borders are foundational and perpetual to TPC's disciplinary identity.

Despite being part of TPC's foundation, present, and future, transnational and intercultural projects continue to be precarious affairs. For example, St.Amant (2017) described how development in Indian and Chinese markets consequently drives demand for online TPC courses to be delivered to overseas audiences. He advised course developers to consider infrastructure "friction points"—specific hardware, software, and bandwidth factors likely to impact course functionality for international users. In other words, St.Amant pointed out how, without careful consideration, an online course designed for global reach might not function within the real-world situation of the varied end users. Such design-user mismatches are not limited to educational endeavors. I have witnessed the potentially fraught nature of transnational and intercultural projects myself. For six years, I was on the faculty at an international branch campus of a USAmerican university in Qatar. During that time, I saw first-hand clumsy and privileged, yet well-intentioned, visiting researchers—most often USAmerican, western European, and White—desiring to use Middle Eastern spaces as locations of *outsider* knowledge making. In other words, these misguided attempts amounted to intellectual colonization and perpetuation of western domination. Such troubles extended to teaching, as my colleague and I have described (Rudd, 2018; Small, 2017).

As TPC continues to expand and evolve, particularly along with global developments, we must take stock of how we are designing and discussing our projects. Through discipline-wide reflection and conversation, we can better understand the state of our activities and identify principles of better practice that will help us avoid the "good intentions" trap (Gorski, 2008). We must continue to cultivate our discipline's cross-cultural ethics in support of designing and facilitating more socially just projects. In an effort to explore the recent range of and approaches to transnational and intercultural work in TPC and to consider our commitment to building better practices, I designed a literature review motivated by the following questions:

1. In what ways do TPC scholars work within or across transnational and intercultural spaces?
2. What lessons are TPC scholars sharing about their experiences in these spaces?
3. How can these individual lessons be gathered and organized in order to inform others about better practices in their own transnational and intercultural projects?

My chapter proceeds by defining key terms related to my inquiry, explaining my review method, and presenting results organized in response to my motivating questions. The primary outcome of my study is that transnational and intercultural research involves complex and multi-layered positionalities, and I conclude with that discussion as well as point towards future research.

Definitions

To begin answering my research questions, I first had to consider what the terms "transnational" and "intercultural" mean. In general, transnational work moves across borders that are geopolitical, cultural (including national, ethnic, dis/ability, gender, and socioeconomic), linguistic, disciplinary, organizational, temporal, modal, or a combination of these and others. Borders can be real, requiring documentation or cultural ambassadors to facilitate passage, or they can be imagined, assigned, or performed, such as those identity borders that diversify our individual and local community experiences. Movement across borders can be singular or multiple (for example, see Rose & Racadio, 2017, p. 8). The term "transnational" is contested because it centers on "nations" as a category of identity and because of its association with economic imbalance. Transnationalism is often explored in terms of "elites" and "migrant laborers" and, therefore, is associated with racism and socioeconomic disadvantage (Croucher, 2012, p. 18). Although transnational work is associated with economic forces of globalization, it can be understood in much broader ways. It links to thinking *beyond* national histories and singular perspectives on economic, social, and cultural flows. Transnationalism invokes movement, while the terms "multinationalism" or "multiculturalism" typically indicate diversity within the same site. Transnational work often is intercultural, but intercultural work is not necessarily transnational.

While establishing a working definition of "transnational" was relatively straight-forward, defining "intercultural" was a different story because pinpointing the meaning of "intercultural" involves the struggle of determining what counts as "culture." Although over 150 different definitions of culture exist, efforts at establishing a unified, shared definition fail. Instead, any singular definition risks monolithically essentializing, erroneously stabilizing, and failing to address the roles of ideology and power (Baldwin et al., 2006). In TPC, St.Amant (2013) broadly defined culture as "an organizational system, or a *worldview*" prescribing acceptable behaviors and therefore creating "the *rhetoric*—or the communication practices and style—its members use when interacting" (pp. 481-482). Culture can also be understood in processual terms of flows and border-working, such as moving across, transcending, and disrupting socially and politically constructed divisions (Ding & Savage, 2013, pp. 2-3). As Natasha Jones (2014) reflects, "Culture can be dynamic and fluid, even hard to define and identify" as well as "found in the most unexpected places" (p. 15).

Attempts to hem in "culture" as an element of communication are, by nature, partial and open to critique; therefore, TPC scholars often define culture indirectly through contextual factors. For example, Longo (1998) suggested that technical communicators and researchers conceive of cultural studies as being situated within histories "constructed at a certain place and time" (p. 64) and often focused on the functions and silences of everyday objects and practices (p. 67). Getto and St.Amant (2014) framed culture in terms of expectations, design, and

user experience. Proposing their process of persona development, they suggested a culturally complex persona should include demographic elements, attitudinal and behavioral indicators, and contextual data. Therefore, reversing their framing, a persona can represent a culture via aspects of identity, activity, and context (location, as well as history, social, political, and economic situations). Getto (2015) addressed the problem of complexity by examining culture from multiple perspectives: local, meso, and global (pp. 4-5). He demonstrated that any cultural perspective is automatically prismatic, as well as dependent upon the position from which you view it. Rather than define culture through a series of binary terms, Getto operationalized it along axial intersections: local-technological, local-cultural, global-technological, and global-cultural. Through applying his framework to a specific communication situation, we can understand "culture" as reified through tensions regarding local preferences and expressions of collective identity and in terms of broader contexts and networks that influence norms and practices. For Getto, "culture" is an integrated system of influences that co-create a particular site of inquiry. As the axes shift, the situation changes; some tensions are amplified while others are quieted.

In the wakes of TPC's epistemological turns towards social construction and social justice, a focus on communication between or among cultures invites more nuanced, critical, and complex study of the sociopolitical influences of the field (Scott & Longo, 2006). Haas and Eble (2018) asserted that "all technical communication contexts are multi- and inter-cultural" (p. 8), offering as an example ubiquitously globalized flows and distributions of communication (e.g., a "local" company may have international/multi-national stakeholders). They also established that intercultural communication is not limited to crossing geopolitical borders (Haas & Eble, 2018, p. 10). However, approaching a definition of culture through the lens of communicative competence is no less challenging and only reinforces the "field's reluctance to specify what intercultural competence means" (Yu, 2012, p. 170). Although Yu (2012) landed on a working definition of intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively in international and cross-cultural technical communication situations based on one's sensitivity, awareness, and skills" (p. 171), the nature of what constitutes a "culture" in her work as well as in Haas and Eble's introduction remains unspecified.

Scholars in decolonizing and critical cultural studies have emphasized the dangers of objectifying and isolating "culture" as an "object of study" (Powell et al., 2014). Powell et al. (2014) argued for an understanding of culture as "*relational and constellated*," based on "encounters people have with one another within and across particular systems of shared belief" (p. 5). The "constellation" perspective emphasizes multiple practices of meaning-making and "allows for multiply-situated subjects to connect to multiple discourses at the same time" and for relationships among actors and discourses "to shift and change without holding a subject captive" (Powell et al., p. 5). Shawn Wilson's (2008) paradigm for indige-

nous research addressed the dangers of treating cultures (and encultured people) as objects by promoting relationality, reciprocity, and respect in intercultural interactions.

Also resisting conceptions of culture that encase and petrify, Ding and Savage (2013) asked TPC scholars to adapt an "alternative conceptualization of cultures and the 'intercultural' that moves beyond the nation-centric mindset to investigate alternative approaches to straightforward applications of cultural heuristics and cultural dimensions" (p. 1). Although Ding and Savage did not specifically cite Geert Hofstede's (2001) ubiquitous *Culture's Consequences* as emblematic of a limited nation-centric heuristic point of view, other scholars have critiqued the reductive motivation to simplify and predict human identities and behaviors (Agboka, 2014, p. 299) as well as the outdated nature of Hofstede's study and its use in transnational and intercultural research (e.g., McSweeney, 2002; Osland et al., 2000;).

Efforts to define "culture" as the central feature of "intercultural communication" have not brought me to a satisfying solution. Therefore, I offer the following definition solely for the purposes of moving forward on inquiring about the range of ways TPC scholars work in transnational and intercultural spaces: *Culture* is a situated, shared, and constantly shifting set of values, norms, symbols, and processes that motivate (re)creation of group or collective identity. Implicit in culture are real and imagined borders and borderlands inherent in the construction of "insiders," "outsiders," "in-betweeners," "crossers," and "returners." Although my literature survey narrows to focus on articles in a subset of border-crossing situations, intercultural communication can happen without any travel at all—with the people in our shared work and living spaces (see, for example, N. Jones, 2014). All are "contact zones," or "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). Even for researchers and practitioners who remain in their home places, sharing outcomes of their transnational activities can help us develop awareness of and sensitivity to issues of intercultural interactions in our own organizations and projects.

Methods

My research curiosities regarding transnational and intercultural TPC activities, lessons learned, and better practices invited a broad survey across the field to consider the diversity of projects published via our scholarly outlets. Because journals are published with more frequency than book-length works, I chose to design my inquiry as a meta-analysis of articles published in seven TPC outlets: *Communication Design Quarterly* (*CDQ*); *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* (*IEEE*); *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* (*JBTC*); *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* (*JTWC*); *Rhetoric, Professional Communication and Globalization* (*RPCG*); *Technical Communication* (*TC*); and *Technical Com-*

munication Quarterly (*TCQ*). The initial corpus consisted of 609 original articles in 126 issues published between 2014 and 2018. The five-year window encompassed the most recent research at the time, and although five years ultimately is an arbitrary cut-off point, it yielded a sufficiently large starting corpus. Most of these journals published four issues per year, with the exceptions being *RPCG*, which published one per year, and *CDQ*, which had an extra issue in 2016. I looked at original research articles but not book reviews or editorial commentaries. *IEEE* has a category for "teaching cases," and I included those because other journals publish similar materials as original articles. My inquiry did not include non-academic or book-length sources. Table 10.1 lists the volumes and numbers of articles per year.

Table 10.1. Corpus for journal analysis, publication years 2014-2018

Journal	Volume #s	# of Articles
CDQ	2-6	108
IEEE	57-61	111
JBTC	28-32	75
JTWC	44-48	100
RPCG	6-10	25
TC	61-65	96
TCQ	23-27	94
Totals	**126**	**609**

A first pass through the corpus involved reading abstracts and, if necessary, skimming the article for a better understanding of its focus, looking for projects that directly or indirectly engaged cultural differences and/or moved across borders. My analytical process started with pre-existing expected categories based on a general intercultural communication understanding of identities used to explore bordered groups (e.g., national, regional, ethnic/racial, linguistic, age, etc.). However, I also took a grounded-theory-inspired approach of being open to emergent themes. Through this process, I identified 143 articles, or 23 percent of the total corpus, as centered on at least one border-crossing factor. The first part of my results and discussion surveys these outcomes, which fell into the following categories:

- Disciplinary
- Academic/Practitioner/Public
- Temporal
- Digital or Technological
- Economic
- Generational
- Dis/Ability

- Linguistic (Translation)
- Cultural/Theoretical
- National

Although many articles crossed a combination of categories, my discussion provides examples according to which category emerged as primary in the study. In a second pass, I studied methods sections of transnational/intercultural studies for cues that the project included human participants as opposed to working only with texts, theories, or pre-existing data. Of the 143 articles in my first sample, 33 (23%) met this criterion. Because I was interested in TPC research activities beyond academy walls, I considered articles on local pedagogical practices and curriculum design outside the scope of this subset.

For the purposes of answering research questions two and three, I made a final pass focused specifically on articles where researchers reflected and shared "lessons learned" about transnational projects with human participants. Figure 10.1 summarizes my sorting process. The requirement for reflection further narrowed the sample of 33 down to just seven articles. In the following results and discussion section, I begin by describing the wide and varied ways TPC scholars work interculturally.

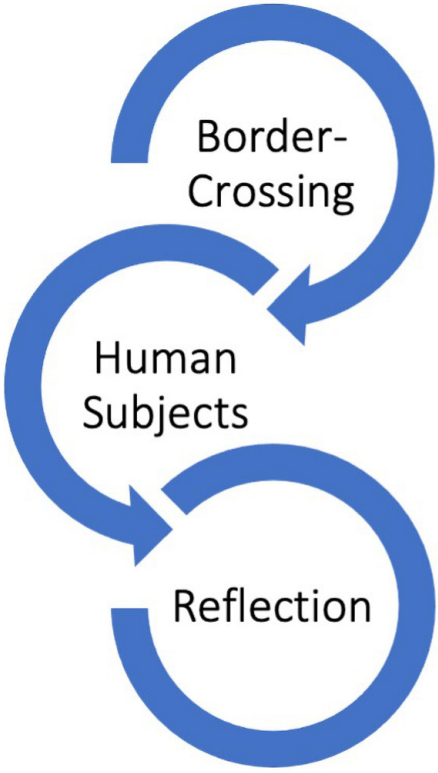

Figure 10.1. Sorting process.

Results and Discussion

Types of Transnational and Intercultural Research

The diversity of TPC's border-crossing activities was exciting and encouraging because the range of complex cultures within which our work is situated demonstrates the far reach of the field's curiosity and influence. Recent examples included Chad Wickman's (2015) connections between theoretical physics and TPC, and Susan Popham's (2014) argument for "multi-disciplinary identities" spanning social work and science. Another frequent topic—bridging the academic-practitioner and public divides—was intercultural communication awareness and skills. For example, Liberty Kohn's (2015) review of university-workplace partnerships and Russel Hirst's (2016) reflection on an academic partnership with the nuclear industry exemplified how professional identity—and in the case of Hirst, also disciplinary identity—continues to be a site of border crossing. Tatiana Batova's (2018a) scholarship was situated at the crossroads of academia and industry through a broad literature review combined with student feedback in service of developing a curriculum more effective at teaching USAmerican students about globalization and TPC. Bridging both disciplinary and academic-industry divides, Hirst's (2016) teaching case detailed how he set up a student intern project at a nuclear manufacturer and offered advice about how to make such partnerships run smoothly.

Including but also extending beyond disciplinary and public divides, TPC research moves across time and spaces. For example, Chelsea Milbourne (2016) argued that eighteenth-century science displays shaped audiences' reception of and expectations regarding both social and material worlds. John Ramey (2014) traversed time and regional culture by writing about an eighteenth-century Creole lawyer living in San Domingo and a technical manual for slave ownership. Other articles brought nineteenth-century Chinese business communication (Sinclair & Blachford, 2015) and Song Dynasty medical texts (Zhang, 2016) into contemporary conversation. Not surprising considering TPC's focus on communication technologies, extension from analog into digital and cyber contexts remains at the forefront in TPC publications. For example, recent articles by Jennifer Sano-Franchini (2017), Douglas Walls (2017), Josephine Walwema (2016), Wang and Gu (2015), and Jo Mackiewicz (2014) analyzed websites and social media through a variety of cultural perspectives, including Dutch, German, and Chinese lenses.

Recent publications also confirm TPC's concerns about communicating across socioeconomic classes, generations, and dis/ability statuses. Emma Rose's (2016) study of how people function in "*resource-constrained contexts*" (p. 433) considered how bus riders who were homeless or experiencing shelter precarity navigated public transportation in Seattle, Washington. Kim Campbell et al.'s (2017) inquiry into plain language in the US included a comparison of

blue-collar, pink-collar, and white-collar style preferences across economic (as well as linguistic and ethnic/racial) borders. Two examples foregrounding questions of cross-generation TPC were Rhonda Stanton's (2017) challenge of age-based stereotypes in the workplace and N. Lamar Reinsch and Jonathan Gardner's (2014) study of communication abilities as a factor in promotion for baby boomers and Gen-Xers. Articles by Liz Hutter and Hutter Lawrence (2018) as well as Sushil Oswal (2014) offered insights from the deaf community and from disability studies to suggest how researchers and practitioners can improve usability testing and participatory design.

The next categories foreground two types of translation: linguistic conversion of meaning from one symbolic system to another and the translation required when using theory developed in one cultural context to explain activities in another cultural context. Researching across national, regional, and ethnic cultures inspires questions about developing better theories and practices of translation. For example, Laura Gonzales and Heather Turner (2017) described how translators in the US worked with a variety of technical communication tools, including information design and usability observations, as integral to their daily work. Additional studies in the US asked how health and medical systems can be designed to better meet the needs of immigrants with varying English language skills (Koerber & Graham, 2017; Rose et al., 2017). Articles coded for the "cultural/theoretical" category proved intercultural in their analytical moves, applying a theory from one broad culture (usually western/European/USAmerican) to a different cultural context. For example, Ding's (2018) article defined and contextualized "whistle-blowing" through the U.S. legal system yet applied the concept to a case study of "a 76-year-old veteran physician who retired from the China People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Hospital" (p. 38). Similarly, Jung-Yoon Yum and Se-Hoon Jeong (2015) applied western theories of crisis communication and attribution to an experiment using undergraduates in a South Korean university. What might be the implications of working across these kinds of borders, where cultural assumptions embedded in the theories shape interpretations of local practices?

My last category of transnational and intercultural research tacks in to studies that spoke to my own experiences crossing national borders. In his 2017 article, Fraiberg, listed as a professor at a U.S. university, returned to Israel to continue studying TPC, this time focusing on entrepreneurship and rhetoric. His project demonstrated the important role of translation in transnational work, as he provided his readers both with literal conversion of Hebrew conversations into English and with rich contextualization and interpretation of his data. Rebecca Walton et al. (2016) conducted a study in an international humanitarian organization, which began with 25 online video interviews with people from 19 countries and included an additional 95 interviews over "two-week research visits to six countries" (p. 89). Their conclusions broadly called for fieldwork as a means of understanding textual production—in other words, they argue

that TPC research is better when it does not rely on textual analysis alone. In another study, set in Vietnam, Rebecca Walton and Sarah Beth Hopton (2018) interviewed local participants to better understand non-western perspectives on the use of Agent Orange. Their project argued that community-based research must attend to the local situation and not necessarily generalize from strategies used in western contexts.

In answer to my first research question—"In what ways do TPC scholars work within or across transnational and intercultural spaces?"—journal publications represented an expanding range of TPC border crossings. However, although compelling, these results were neither simple nor straightforward. As the next section details, surveying these types of activities reaffirmed the complex diversity of how intercultural research can unfold.

Questions Emerging from the Results

Even as my literature review began to yield answers, it generated new possibilities and conundrums concerning cross-cultural project design. Some studies published in US-based journals were located in other countries and were conducted and authored by researchers at universities in those same countries. For example, Jenni Virtaluoto and colleagues (2016) were all at a Finnish university and conducted their research at Finnish locations. Yvonne Cleary (2016), affiliated with an Irish university, conducted her inquiry into communities of practice in Ireland. Rodney Jones (2014) published on food labels in Hong Kong while working at a university there. Of course, the place where a researcher works does not dictate the person's cultural identity (although it may shape that identity indeed), but authorial information in TPC publications does not offer enough detail to know how familiar, adapted, or assimilated the researchers are to their contexts. Publishing international research in U.S. journals—which are also subscribed to by people around the world—means that all our work is transnational and intercultural, as scholarship circulates globally.

Not knowing a researcher/author's self-ascribed identify is not necessarily a problem, but when values, attitudes, and perceptions of a localized group are discussed, readers may wonder about how the writer's positioning as a local and cultural insider and/or outsider shapes their interpretations. For example, Nikita Basov and Vera Minina (2018), affiliated with a Russian university, used interview data from another study to analyze collaborations in Portugal in their article on professional networks (also a discipline-spanning project). The study is interesting and well written but leads to questions about how the researchers addressed a complexity of multiple cultural identities and positionalities in their data interpretation. Xiaobo Wang and Baotong Gu (2015) provided rich explanations of cultural values in their study of the social media platform WeChat in China but did not identify their own positioning or sources of expertise for their interpretive insights.

As another example, James Kiwanuka-Tondo and Keon Pettiway (2016), researchers from U.S. universities, wrote a SWOT analysis of how complex climate change data in Kenya is designed for a variety of audiences, including sector officers, media outlets, politicians and policy makers from the sub-region, and end users ("farmers, women, youths, traders, and fishermen"; p. 80). That analysis was an exemplar for localized research projects by unpacking the range of needs to which the study responded. However, little information was provided on how the researchers' backgrounds prepared them for their analysis. One of them, Kiwanuka-Tondo, spent about five weeks in Kenya gathering documents (p. 77), but no biographical information is provided about the author other than his affiliation with North Carolina State University, leaving readers unsure of his positionality as insider/outsider. Kiwanuka-Tondo and Pettiway's goal for their analysis was to propose more effective information design methods for authors working with "complex climate science information" (p. 78), a process which should involve deep knowledge about the audiences, contexts, and uses of the science information. Indeed, the authors do focus on audience (pp. 80-82); however, the "study did not investigate the production, consumption, or reception of messages or interfaces" of the documents they studied (Kiwanuka-Tondo & Pettiway, 2016, p. 82). If the authors did not study the reception of the climate data through primary research with actual audience members, then their analysis seems to be based on assumptions about the specific audiences, especially those that are local.

Other studies did not provide sufficient information to know how cultural differences might be taken into account. For example, a survey conducted with engineering students about their experience with a writing center did not include a demographic breakdown of the students (Weissbach & Pflueger, 2018). Although this study spanned across disciplinary borders—engineering and writing studies—information about the cultural and even educational backgrounds of the tutors and their student clients may have added further nuance to evaluating the effectiveness of feedback. An assumption seems to be that a shared U.S. university culture supersedes the impact of individual student backgrounds. A survey of technical editors (Kreth & Bowen, 2017) included responses from international participants but either did not gather information about or did not explain how those international/transnational spaces might have affected editorial processes or products. A study of cultural conflict in student teams (Wang, 2018) did not include information on the students' ethnic, national, or other cultural identities even though student backgrounds could have impacted conflict and negotiation styles.

Another question this review brought up is this: what counts as a "crossing"? For example, do live video interactions allowing researchers to stay in their own home spaces while communicating with people around the world count as transnational? Stefania Passera et al.'s (2017) project is a case in point. They conducted a mixed-methods survey and experiment engaging 122 business professionals in 24 countries; however, the researchers remained in their Finland location while

using live video (a "webinar") to interact with their participants. At first glance, the project does seem to be transnational. After all, it connected people across borders. However, because the researchers stayed in their home country, they did not have access to the rich and varied contexts within which their participants worked. Having lived abroad, I experienced the significant difference between being an online visitor to another place, a tourist only on the ground for a few days or weeks, a long-term visitor to the country living and working in that host environment, and a resident with more permanent notions of belonging. In other words, technology offers the chance to connect with transnational (and intercultural) places, but remains limited in the depth and breadth of that connection.

Border crossings are not binary either, and transnational/intercultural meeting spaces become hybrid sites of work and research. Projects located in MNCs, or multinational corporations (e.g., Shin et al., 2015; Batova, 2018b; Yin et al., 2015), create even further complexity. In these studies, participants might come from a range of different national and/or regional cultural perspectives yet may have also adapted to their host nation where the MNC is located. The MNC itself may become a hybrid space with a broader general culture—and specific organizational culture—of its own. Transnational education projects are equally complicated. Robert Davison et al. (2017) sought better practices in establishing online international student teams. Their project spanned three sets of countries: Hong Kong and the US, Hong Kong and the UK, and Hong Kong and Singapore. The Hong Kong-Singapore location was even more culturally complex because the Singapore team included Norwegian students on an exchange program. Beyond that, teams identified by national location included students identified by another nationality. For example, the UK team included a Greek student, and a team in Singapore included a Norwegian exchange student (Davison, 2017, p. 323). Davison et al. identified challenges for student teams, particularly around forming relationships and trust, and discussed setting up teams from an instructor's point of view. But the informative study did not address yet another layer of cultural complexity: face-to-face "local" teams had collaborated transnationally via virtual technologies, meaning their activities were set in a hybrid space, both physical (for the local teams) *and* online (for the team-to-team meetings). While the article provided excellent recommendations about ice breakers, trust, and time, it did not discuss how the limitations and constraints of the virtual space created a culture of its own. In sum, some of the challenges—such as those associated with tone and word choice—could have factored into the feel and functioning of the text-based digital environment.

Although lack of specific information about intercultural factors and silence regarding their potential impacts on the research process might be frustrating, I remain sympathetic to these researcher/writer situations. Studies set in border-crossing contexts—which can cover a wide variety of intercultural locations—can be exceptionally complex, and authors simply do not have the space in a standard research publication to address everything. Addressing in-

fluential identities, positionality, and contexts is challenging, and based on the general trend of omission, reviewers and editors either do not want to read that information or do not think to ask about its inclusion. In my own experience, such metacommentary and reflexive work is generally cut from our manuscripts, deemed outside of the write-up's scope. Similarly, publications present scholarly work as a cleanly conceived and executed process. Although Peter Smagorinsky (2008) implores us to make the methods section the "epicenter" of our scholarly write-ups, publication processes more often whitewash challenges and struggles. Editors, reviewers, and readers are perceived as only wanting to see the version of the methods that "worked," as a model of rigor and thoroughness. Yet researchers know that our work is never cleanly conceived or executed. Reflections on a study's limitations are common and often required, but broader sharing about actual struggles in the planning, data collection, interpretation, and writing processes—crucial to ethical and rigorous research practices—proves uncommon.

Reflections and "Lessons Learned"

After identifying complicated outcomes for my first research question, my second question led to a deeper look at the subset of national border-crossing projects to better understand the lessons scholars have learned working in complex spaces. Of the articles emerging from the specific focus on transnational work with human participants, three offered brief reflection while four were more substantive in their metacommentary. Sean Williams et al. (2016) studied entrepreneurship through narrative interviews with professionals in China, Spain, and the US. Translation was not an issue because each of the authors was fluent in the language of one of the three countries, and the authors noted that their positionings as cultural insiders supported their interpretations of the data. Their other main reflection was that they refrained from considering the cultures they were studying as homogenized monoliths (Williams et al., 2016, p. 382). Bin Ai and Lifei Wang (2017) co-authored a case study about "Jack," a Chinese-Australian immigrant. Both authors identified themselves as Chinese cultural insiders, which boosted the ethos of their contextualized interpretations. Additionally, Ai shared that he was an immigrant himself, lending him special insight into Jack's world: "[Ai's] layered and shifting identities enable [him] to reflect upon his identity work in [Jack's] transnational business world" (Ai & Wang, 2017, p. 205). Ai also reflected on a change in research methods—his diary became a data source (p. 205)—and shared some of those diary entries, allowing readers to witness the researcher's (Ai's) approaches as he built a relationship with Jack (p. 207).

While reflections in these articles boosted author ethos by identifying close cultural and interpersonal connections, Andrew Mara (2017) illustrated how transnational projects can be challenging for outsider researchers. Mara reported on a user-experience design project at a Kenyan university and provided insight into how local contexts affected the project's design. His article shared some

study complexities, including an "awakening" to understand that Kenyan cancer statistics were compiled in ways other than what had been assumed, the "surprising differences" in how different audiences read similar information, and the decision to "take greater care" in understanding his participants' perceptions (Mara, 2017, p. 51). Andrew Mara was involved in a second Kenya-based study along with Miriam Mara, and outcomes of Mara (2017) may have helped revise the research design for Mara and Mara (2018), discussed below.

Before getting to the heart of TPC scholars' advice on transnational research, I pause here for a bit of a cheater's move. Because my process of narrowing the scholarship brought me to a sample size of only four articles with substantive transnational research reflection, I added two more that were part of my corpus but technically did not meet my criteria because they were located in US-based spaces. N. Jones (2014) wrote about her experiences observing a nonprofit agency, and she pointedly argued that, in TPC, organizations should be considered as "cultures." Her reframing of workplace environments as spaces of shared symbolic systems in which "culture is a lot more subtle than most people realize" (N. Jones, 2014, p. 15) extended the importance of my inquiry back to "non-transnational" spaces. As Godwin Agboka (2014) confirmed, "academic research is always *cultural,* in many respects, and is always laden with political, power, and social justice concerns" (p. 299). My second addition is by Emma Rose and Robert Racadio (2017). They provided a fuller retrospective critique based on their study working with immigrant populations who needed information about health care in Seattle, Washington. Although their work was physically located in the US, they crossed intercultural borders via their participants' national identities and first languages. Their rich detail on the research team's background allowed readers to better understand the intercultural dynamics affecting the study design. Their discussion of the effects of back translation, challenges of translation precision, scenario design, and facilitation style demonstrated an array of ways the study could have been redesigned in response to intercultural differences among the team and participants.

I am also making an organizational shift from the previous category-based approach to a now thematic review. In answer to my second research question about "lessons learned," three themes emerged from the substantive reflections found in Agboka (2014), N. Jones (2014), Longo (2014), Mara and Mara (2018), Rose and Racadio (2017), and Walton et al. (2015). Those themes are lessons learned about localization, adaptation, and reflexivity. Together, they reveal a multilayered and dynamic TPC researcher positionality. The scope of this chapter precludes a thorough explication of all insights these scholars shared about their experiences, so the following paragraphs only provide highlights. If you are interested in intercultural and transnational research, all six original articles are worth careful reading.

The first central theme emerging from lessons learned about transnational and intercultural research is the imperative to localize the project by centering the

host country contexts as well as the needs of the host country stakeholders. The groundwork has already been laid connecting "participatory localization" methods to intercultural work and social justice (Agboka, 2013). Walton et al. (2015) spend seven pages of their article detailing how they localized their Rwandan project at every phase from design to dissemination of the results. Engaging a local translator as a co-investigator provided crucial expertise, and their reflection foregrounds the potential articulatory functions translators play as cultural ambassadors, contextualizers, and data analyzers (Walton et al., 2015, pp. 49-50). An emphasis on working with—rather than observing—host participants and others at the project site requires researchers to step outside of the typical confines of the researcher role. For example, Rose and Racadio (2017) wished they had spent more time "training and mentoring" the staff at their Seattle community health center (pp. 21-22). Sharing their knowledge on how to observe user experiences would have served everyone in the center and would have contributed to a bigger positive impact. Longo (2014) described an almost four-year project that sought to locate then relocate a collaboration between her team in the US and partners in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Longo's article, an experience report-style case study, tells the story of her sustained attempts to provide host country organizations with technologies to address their needs. She writes about the challenges of "'making sense' of the research situation and relationships" and how "significant differences of worldview" ultimately doomed the endeavor (Longo, 2014, pp. 208-209). She reflects that relationship-building—in other words, the time and money to travel—was needed to bridge those differences. In all these reflection-heavy articles, localization is a product of relationship-building, whether through a cultural ambassador such as a translator, through time spent in the research location, or through being fully embedded in the research context.

Relationships take time to build, and cross-cultural relationships can require significant commitment because they bridge differences in worldviews and values. For example, Mara and Mara (2018) spent 11 months over a five-year period learning the language, observing local contexts, growing a network of contexts, developing localized subject matter expertise, studying literary works, and learning about the local culture. Many researchers do not have the resources for such investments, however (see Rose & Racadio, 2017, pp. 21-22). Relationships can be complicated by the insider/outsider status of the researcher (Agboka, 2014, p. 307), can change when new stakeholders or participants enter the project, and can have lasting consequences. Relationships are risky, inviting emotional ties and empathy, and when authentic and successful, can lead to more substantive understanding in the project and a "warming sense of acceptance" (N. Jones, 2014, p. 37). However, when relationships fail to develop, projects can feel disjointed and lead to troubling questions of whether or not the work will have any benefit to host participants (see Longo, 2014, pp. 212-213). "Relational accountabilities" are tied to ethical issues of respect and reciprocity, and indicate more than bonds between humans (Wilson, 2008). Relationality is multidimensional, interweav-

ing histories and ancestors, lands and locations, rituals and practices, and more. Scholars and practitioners working in transnational and intercultural spaces engage in much more than consent form signing and data gathering, and learning to build relationships, to act ethically (contextualized within cultures, too), and to enact respect and reciprocity can leave us feeling unsure of ourselves.

A second theme in recent scholars' lessons learned is a tolerance for uncertainty and a willingness to adapt to circumstances in host spaces. The unpredictable nature of transnational and intercultural research means that it has been called "messy," meaning "unpredictable, mutable, contingent, serendipitous, complex, and challenging" (Walton et al., 2015, p. 45). Uncertainty may lead a researcher to feel her "position as the researcher and author of [her] research is unstable and decentered" (Longo, 2014, p. 208). Adaptation may involve a revision of basic research questions and methods, when time and relationship-building with participants reveal your original questions to be "heavily biased" and based on "hasty generalization," applying western assumptions about communication practices to the host site (Agboka, 2014, p. 309). Adapting can mean changes to interview questions and method protocols (N. Jones, 2014, p. 31; Rose & Racadio, 2017, p. 17) and/or the "power distribution [being] flipped" and a complete revision of post-research results dissemination in the host location (Walton et al., 2015, p. 61). Rather than *in-situ* amendments, adaptation may be an anticipated part of the project-planning process, as Mara and Mara (2018) demonstrated when they kept their "interview protocol and survey deliberately broad" (p. 100). They also allowed time at their Kenyan locations to get to know the location, then drew interview participants from "personal connections, community member suggestions, and in-person requests at health care facilities" (Mara & Mara, 2018, p. 102). In other words, they prioritized relationship-building as a means of directing their data gathering.

Recent TPC scholarship on engaging uncertainty through analytical frameworks extends the usefulness of "agile thinking" from a usability methodology to being a means of repositioning and reconceptualizing uncertainty as generative (Walsh & Walker, 2016). However, within the confines of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals, limited time and travel resources, and the academic publishing pressure cooker, uncertainty and surprises are viewed less as opportunities for repositioning and creative problem-solving and more as anxiety- and frustration-producing "messy challenges." Another area of TPC scholarship addressing uncertainty is "metis" intelligence, similar to Anzaldúa's (1987) *mestiza* consciousness. Metis intelligence, or metis thinking, is an agile and flexible approach to settings and situations that "are complicated, messy, chaotic, changeable, and ambiguous" (Pope-Ruark, 2014, p. 337). Metis thinking can unbind researchers and practitioners from self-imposed constraints regarding what is possible. A metis-based praxis "rounds out the profile of a civically engaged rhetor" (Pope-Ruark, 2014, p. 336). Therefore, this mindset is a strong match for transnational and intercultural research because it is a means of localizing and adapting.

A third theme emerging from the most substantively reflective articles is the need to be reflexive in intercultural spaces. Reflexivity begins in reflection (of one's own positioning, power, and privilege) but then goes further to consider broader contextual factors as well as how the researcher's chosen theoretical and methodological lenses shape all stages of a research project (N. Jones, 2014, p. 25). Reflexive thinking underpins the first two themes, localization and adaptation, as it pushes scholars to become aware of their own positions within their intercultural research contexts and how their own identities as scholars as well as insiders/outsiders affect the organizations and relationships within which they work. For example, N. Jones (2014) described her own grappling with identity and "othering" of her participants (p. 27). Reflexive thinking can reveal researchers' blind spots and assumptions of how their own cultures and educations have served as a form of indoctrination working against better practices (Agboka, 2014, p. 308). Through reflexive thinking, scholars become more aware of how local cultural logics beyond their control shape their transnational and intercultural locations (Mara & Mara, 2018, p. 96-97). For Agboka (2014), reflexive thinking invited "unlearning" a colonial mindset (p. 304). For Longo (2014), responsiveness to those logics and realities became a "matter of personal ethics more than professional responsibility or participatory design" (p. 214). Agboka (2014) calls on TPC scholars to use reflexivity as part of confronting harmful colonizing practices. He says we must constantly "question our own assumptions . . . be critical of our own approaches; question our insider posture . . . ; and be humble in our contacts with participants" (p. 299). Humility and willingness to cede control—as products of reflective and reflexive thinking—are persistently associated with lessons learned in transnational and intercultural spaces (N. Jones, 2014, p. 37; Longo, 2014, p. 212; Walton et al., 2015, p. 63).

Positionality Writ Large and Ongoing

Taken together, stories of "lessons learned" regarding localization, adaptability, and reflexivity constellate into a narrative of *positionality writ large* and *positionality as an ongoing process*. "Positionality refers to the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization or the participant group" and begins with locating the researcher along a continuum of insider-outsider identities (Rowe, 2014, p. 627). This view of positionality grounds it in the relative privilege that the researcher has in relation to the project participants and stakeholders. In other words, "One person's position is usually in relation to other people's positions, is shaped by history, and is highly contextualized" (Jones et al., 2016, p. 220). The relational nature of positionality can reveal power imbalances and systemic unearned advantages (see Walton, et. al., 2019). However, positionality is also multidimensional and dynamic. In studying the reflections of authors working in intercultural and transnational spaces, terms of "positionality" become even more important and complex.

The "highly contextualized" nature of positionality means it is more than a matter of how researcher(s) are stationed in comparison to their colleagues, participants, and stakeholders. Contextualization means that a researcher's positionality is a complex function of interwoven relationships to host organizations (e.g., N. Jones, 2014); to local hierarchies (Agboka, 2014, pp. 307-308); to local symbolic systems and norms (e.g., requiring translation and cultural ambassadors); to local legal systems (Mara & Mara, 2018, p. 100); to local social, economic, and political contexts (Longo, 2014, p. 207, 213); and more. Outside of the project's location, positionality extends to larger epistemological and methodological relationships: the researchers to their theories, methods, and goals. An ongoing reflexive practice and agile attitude mean positionality is an ongoing *re*-positioning as a project proceeds, as relationships develop, and as power dynamics emerge. As recent TPC scholarship has argued, we must continually (re)localize our work—which includes repositioning ourselves—specifically in relation to how we continue to (re)define users, communities, and diversity (Shivers-McNair & San Diego, 2017).

As an ongoing process of planning and adapting, positionality continues after data collection concludes, throughout interpretation and processes of representation (e.g., write-up and dissemination of results). As TPC scholars and professionals move through this process, positionality yet again shifts. Researchers and practitioners move from primary accountability being with their local participants to it being with their reviewers, editors, and other audiences. That shift in positionality and accountability—from our host locations to the series of publication gatekeepers—may be one reason why not much reflection on the influence of intercultural complexity is included in our collective scholarly work. Whereas ongoing reflexivity and (re)positioning are intense parts of the planning and data gathering project phases, the writing and publication phases typically streamline the focus to include only a description of what "worked" and not how the process demanded adaptation. Revealing our uncertainties and agilities should reinforce—rather than risk—representing ourselves as methodical and rigorous.

An agile attitude towards shifting positionality aligns with our field's history of continually reexamining itself (see St.Amant & Melonçon, 2016, pp. 271-272). Researcher positionality goes hand-in-hand with TPC's orientation towards praxis and social justice. But how? If positionality is at the heart of our work and if border crossing permeates much of what we do, then what gravitational force is at the center of our individual and collective positions? How do we avoid simply stumbling across shifting sands? The answer, as Walton (2016) asserts, is that we must ground what we do in a "human-centered" principle. That principle requires a persistent, reflexive (re)consideration of our positionings and how they are intertwined with power and privilege. By considering how the "3Ps" of positionality, privilege, and power shape TPC, we can "examine macrolevel concepts that can impact social capital and agency" (Jones et al., 2016, p. 220). In other words, a localized, adaptable,

and reflexive (re)positioning in all of our culturally infused research spaces should motivate our efforts to justly address issues of power and hierarchy.

Conclusions

This literature review set out to explore three questions about the nature of transnational and intercultural research in TPC, about the lessons border crossers are learning, and about how individual reflections can be gathered and organized to help other researchers and practitioners make better informed, more ethical, and more socially just decisions about their own projects. The project has revealed that transnational and/or intercultural research is a healthy part of both our foundations and a source of innovative methods and knowledge making. My project has illustrated that recent TPC border crossing happens in a myriad of interesting and overlapping ways, from inquiries that jump across time to those that bridge generational, linguistic, and embodied perspectives. Even defining "intercultural" remains complex and generates as many questions as it does answers. Specifically focusing on transnational research with human participants, recent publications in TPC reveal a range of globalized projects, yet only a limited number of the scholars offer influential reflections and advice concerning the challenges of working across national and cultural borders. Their lessons center on the importance of localization, of being flexible or agile, and of constantly learning (and unlearning) through reflective and reflexive thinking.

We now arrive at my last research question, about how we can organize and share transnational and intercultural research advice to promote better practices in the field. First, authors must be encouraged to share the ways their projects met challenges, adapted, and resulted in rich reflections. Beyond the solidly written methods section, authors must be offered (and must take up) the space for sharing such metacommentary. But even if we have a growing movement to do that sharing, TPC as a field of research and practice should do more. We have strong statements on ethics from the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (n.d.), the National Council of Teachers of English (2015), and the Society for Technical Communication (1998). However, none includes guidance on better practices for transnational and/or intercultural projects, perhaps because they assume that ethics transcend borders. However, because cultures have their own attendant norms and systems, that assumption will not necessarily hold, and because of the expanding ways we work, a statement of transnational and intercultural ethics would be timely and useful for both researchers and practitioners in the field. The ethic should consider methods of increasing inclusion, building relationships, sharing power, decolonizing practices, and pursuing more just practices at all phases of the research process: planning, gathering, analyzing, and representing outcomes. Kirk St.Amant and Lisa Melonçon (2016) "encourage researchers to think more broadly about what it is that TPC does while also thinking more narrowly about how individual research projects contribute to the

larger whole" (p. 274). Creating a shared statement of transnational and intercultural research ethics would make progress towards their call, and, although addressing only one aspect of what we do (research across borders), ethic-building conversations that focus on research topics, practices, and praxes also can generate reflection that may yield additional ideas for unifying common grounds regarding the field.

The scholars and articles discussed here offer a starting point, but I also acknowledge that defining my study's scope and choosing to narrow my corpus in the way I did introduced limitations. If I were to change my definition of "intercultural" based on N. Jones' (2014) call to address organizations as cultural groups, then many more of the 609 articles in my original corpus would have counted in the sorting process. By choosing to leave out pedagogy-focused articles, I may have missed other thoughtful advice (e.g., Ballentine, 2015), and by focusing primarily on projects involving human participants, I likely missed additional frameworks and guidance (e.g., St.Amant, 2015). By limiting my scope to articles, I also have not delved into edited collections or other manuscripts. Moving towards an ethic would require casting a broader net as well as engaging in deeper discussions and collaborations with representatives from across TPC.

Through developing an ethic, we can continue the conversation of amorphous concepts such as "culture," "borders," and "transnational." The process of discussing, proposing, testing, creating, and recreating a shared ethic would reveal and amplify questions about TPC priorities and realities. It would support the continued development and evolving skill sets demanded by the field (Shalamova et al., 2018) and should contribute broader disciplinary commitments to socially just ways of researching, collaborating, and generally being in the world (Walton et al., 2019). We can also use a research ethic to inform ongoing innovation in research methods. As technologies continue to transform possibilities for researching across places and spaces, thinking about the implications of our processes remains crucial. Finally, researchers who are new to moving across borders would benefit from both the ethic and the shared reflections it would inspire. An ethic should hold the TPC field to high standards and support excellence in the teaching and mentoring of future transnational and intercultural researchers. However, it should also guide researchers to action: "research is not seen as worthy or ethical if it does not help to improve the reality of the research participants," and the best research changes the researchers themselves (Wilson, 2008, p. 37). Striving for better—more informed, more critically examined—practices will indeed be "messy" and complex but will serve to strengthen TPC as a field.

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