

Constructing Identity among Italians at NC State

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Background

Research on transnational migration, displacement, and diaspora applied to the recent international scope of academic institutions.

- Previous research on transnational issues in relation to language has been conducted by:
- Dick (2010) on non-migrant Mexicans
 - Koven (2013) on Luso-descendants in France
 - De Fina (2003) on undocumented Mexican migrants to the US
 - Bolonyai (2010, 2012, 2013) on Hungarian-Americans in NC

Theoretical framework

Discourse-narrative analysis and the notion of chronotope (Bakhtin).

- Identity from the social constructionist perspective as “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz & Hall 2009)
- “Identity emerges from the specific conditions of linguistic interactions” (Bucholtz and Hall 2009)
- “Through telling stories, we say who we are and who we are not” (Thornborrow & Coates 2005)
- Chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981) as a “sketch of personhood in time and place” (Agha 2007)

Research Questions

- Do recent transnational migrants in an academic setting display similar identity discourses as long-term immigrants documented in previous research?
- How do recent transnational migrants organize their changing experience chronotopically?

Method

Data collected among 12 Italian students and faculty at NC State through audio-recorded small-group interviews, which were then transcribed and translated from Italian into English.

Analysis

C9: Being transplanted across the pond i::s (.), I mean, it causes some stress to our cultural immune system.

1 The Arrival

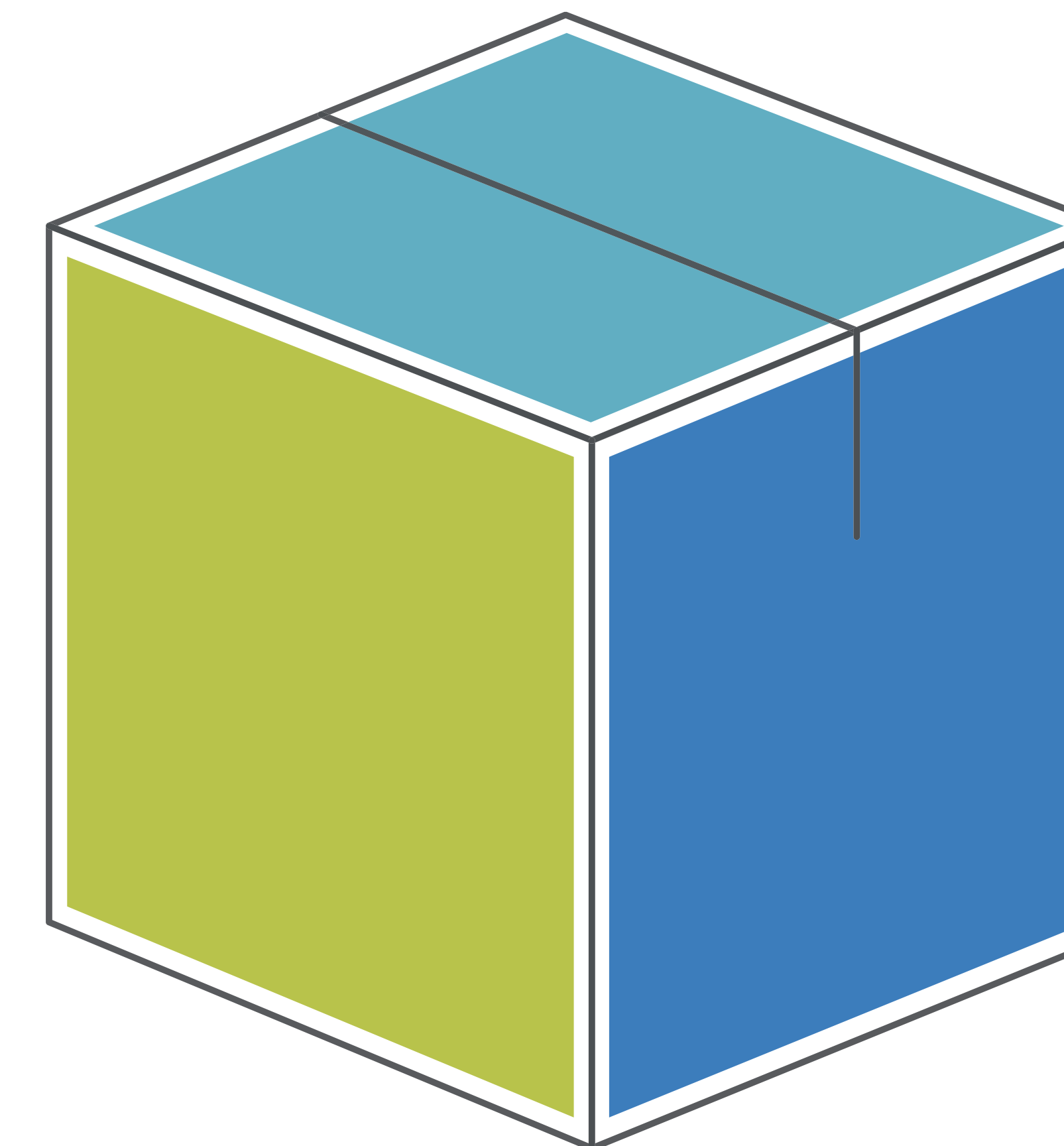
- Focus on space description: “a story structure where space becomes more important than time” (De Fina 2003)
- The new chronotope as a de-humanized void spaces symbolically carrying no meaning
- The metaphors of the desert, the forest, and the Far West

A2: When I got to the:: (.) the dorm, ES King Village. No one was there, The desert, <i mean>, literally the desert.

2 The First Encounters

- From void spaces to stages for identity making
- The ratification of the others
- Inhabiting the chronotope

A4: Because I was lost, I was really lost, Google Maps was not working (.) I was really feeling bad. It was dark and the sun was gone already (.) Until I suddenly see this couple, these tow good souls, with these two, cute doggies, so I walk closer to tem and say:“Listen, I am an international stude::nt”.



Conclusion

- Similarities with other discourses of transnational migration and diaspora that call for a multi-layered chronotopic framework > e.g. nativist chronotope vs. modernist chronotope
- Specific features due to unique spacial configurations and kind of displaced persons > e.g. the relationship with the home country
- Not yet a “multiscalar cosmopolitan identification” (Bolonyai)

3 Chronotopic Conflict 2.0

- 3 main topics: home, personae, and broad cultural views
- Constancy against change (Bamberg et al. 2011)
- Mobility against stability toward “restless belonging” (Bolonyai)

C9: [...] Everything breathes culture in Europe, everything is culture, everything is tradition >and so on<. Here in the States instead everything is fusion, everything is innovation, everything is disruptive.

Next Steps

How do other kinds of Italian migrants react to the same new chronotope? | How do study-abroad students from countries other than Italy construct their identity given the same new chronotope? | How do study-abroad students from Italy construct their identity with a new different chronotope?

Selected references

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
 Benwell, Bethan and Elizabeth Stokoe. *Discourse and Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.
 Thornborrow, Johanna and Jennifer Coates. *The Sociolinguistics of Narrative*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005.