Conceptualizing mindfulness–mindlessness in intercultural interaction

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The concept of 'mindfulness' is increasingly used in the intercultural literature and yet so far it is largely just a heterogeneous construct with underspecified theoretical content. In this paper we draw on multidisciplinary perspectives to address this shortcoming and develop an integrated analysis of this important construct. We relate 'mindfulness' explicitly to the Relevance-theoretic concept of "manifestness", and we incorporate insights from the psychology of motivation. We use extracts of authentic intercultural interactions to help explain and illustrate our arguments.

Keywords: mindfulness, relevance, manifestness, motivation, susceptibility. intercultural communication. attentional state

1. Introduction

The concept of "mindfulness" is widely used in the intercultural literature, and yet, so far it is a heterogeneous construct with underspecified theoretical content. It is associated with aspects of awareness, such as openness to novelty, alertness to distinction, sensitivity to different contexts, awareness (implicit if not explicit) of multiple perspectives, and an orientation to the present (Sternberg 2000: 12). Yet few explicit links are made with research into the related fields of communication, cognition and motivation, and although at first blush the relation of mindfulness to them may seem straightforward, the situation is actually far more complex than this.

In this paper we aim to address this need, drawing on concepts in Relevance-theoretic pragmatics and in the psychology of motivation. We argue that mindfulness is best characterized as psychological alertness (active attention) to the need for planning, producing, comprehending (i.e., interpreting) and negotiating communicative interaction in an optimally relevant way. In other words, "mindfulness" should be thought of as the disposition for active attention in seeking the

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cognitive and interactional strategies best suited to achieving communicative (and other) goals. Since a "strategy" is a means for achieving a goal, and since achieving (adequate) relevance is the goal in both communication and cognition, "mindfulness" can be described as alertness to the need for finding the best approach for achieving adequate relevance (and various other goals which depend on communication) in most situations of communication (as well as in many other situations where the achievement of a goal depends to a greater or lesser extent on heightened sensory awareness to potentially relevant inputs to cognitive processes).

Building on Krieger's (2005) proposed concept of "shared mindfulness," we take up her call to extend mindfulness theory beyond the individual cognitive level to the communicative interactional level. In the first half of the paper, we explore this from a conceptual point of view. We draw a distinction between individual mindfulness and mutual mindfulness, which we define in terms of the Relevance-theoretic concepts of individual and mutual manifestness and we argue that there can be a complex interplay between the individual and the mutual, with interactants potentially displaying different degrees of mindfulness for each. In the intercultural field, we are frequently urged to be mindful (e.g., Gudykunst 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999) and told of steps for achieving it. For example, Ting-Toomey (1999: 269) proposes the O-D-I-S acronym (observe–describe–interpret–suspend evaluation) to describe how we can achieve mindful observation. Yet achieving optimum levels of mindfulness is much easier said than done. People often become less mindful than is needed or than they themselves personally want. So the second half of the paper explores conceptual reasons for this, drawing on samples of data to illustrate our arguments. First, though, we explore the concept of mindfulness–mindlessness as a construct in psychology.

2. Mindfulness–mindlessness as a construct in psychology

Mindfulness has been described as a psychological disposition for actively seeking novel contexts for interpreting various inputs to cognitive processing. As Langer (1992: 289) observes: "Mindfulness is a state of conscious awareness in which the individual is implicitly aware of the *context and content of information. It is a state of openness to novelty* in which the individual actively constructs categories and distinctions."

On this view, "mindfulness" does not necessarily involve reflective consciousness, as the awareness may be "implicit" rather than "explicit," and so this should not be seen as either a necessary or a sufficient condition of mindfulness. This is clearly expressed in the following quote, also from Langer (1992: 289):

> Automatic vs controlled processing, while seemingly most similar to mindlessness/mindfulness, are orthogonal to them. One can process information in a controlled but mindless manner, or automatic but mindful. Related concepts like scripts, set, expectancy, labels, and roles direct behavior, but these too may be enacted mindlessly or mindfully.

Of course, there is no reason why a person could not be reflecting on the need to be mindful in a particular situation. Thus Sternberg (2000: 12) observes that mindfulness is characterized by: "(a) openness to novelty; (b) alertness to distinction; (c) sensitivity to different contexts; (d) *implicit, if not explicit*, awareness of multiple perspectives; and (e) orientation in the present."

By describing the awareness of multiple perspectives typical of a mindful person as "implicit, if not explicit," Sternberg (2000) seems to allow that "mindfulness" may involve reflective (i.e., explicit) consciousness. Gudykunst (2004: 253–255) focuses on the importance of reflective (i.e., explicit) reasoning: "When we are mindful, we can make conscious choices as to what we need to do in the particular situation in order to communicate effectively." In other words, we can be implicitly aware of possibilities, whereas making "conscious choices" seems to refer to explicit (i.e., reflective) decision-making.

Mindfulness is a gradable rather than a classificatory concept. That is to say, a person is not either mindful or mindless, but is more or less mindful. Moreover, although people vary in how mindful they are in general, the mindfulness of a person may vary from situation to situation. As Sternberg (2000: 20) observes:

> …the mindfulness construct may be more useful when conceived of in state rather than in trait terms. People may differ in their average levels of mindfulness, but perhaps the standard deviation in a person's mindfulness is a more interesting construct than is the mean. To the extent that this state can be measured successfully, such measurement will be a valuable contribution to our understanding of people's interactions with the contexts in which they live.

This is important because it suggests that the optimal level and direction (or orientation) of mindfulness are context-dependent (or situation-dependent). The same level of conscious awareness of contexts, novel possibilities, and so on may be mindless in one situation and mindful in another. This brief overview of perspectives on mindfulness suggests that mindfulness is best defined as active attention, a controlled heightened level of sensory awareness to potentially relevant inputs to cognitive processes which inform and guide our actions. On this view, mindfulness may but need not be conscious; it may but need not involve reflective consciousness; it may be construed as a trait (some people are generally more alert than others), and it certainly is a state as it varies from situation to situation (as well as with physiological states of the person; e.g., tiredness tends

to cause lower levels of mindfulness, as does the consumption of alcohol and other drugs).

Krieger (2005: 138) points out that most work to date on mindfulness–mindlessness has focused on individual mindfulness, and she argues that since communication is co-constructed, this focus needs to be extended. She proposes the concept of shared mindfulness and explains it as follows:

> … past work in mindfulness research does not acknowledge the joint construction of a mindful state through the process of human interaction. To view mindfulness as it occurs within an interpersonal interaction, the elements of mindfulness as they relate to an involved state must be articulated. If mindfulness represents the active information processing at the individual intrapersonal level, shared mindfulness represents this activity at the interpersonal interaction level. Therefore, I propose the following definition: Shared mindfulness is a state of mindfulness achieved conjointly, whereby, in the communicative interaction, the individuals involved are in an active state of attending, responding, and perceiving information correctly. As a result, they are continually updating, attuned, and open to incoming data that are unexpected, disconfirming, improbable, implicit, and/or contested.

We agree with Krieger and argue below that analyzing mindfulness–mindlessness from a shared as well as an individual perspective will yield valuable new insights. In fact, the concept of "shared mindfulness" can be integrated well with a general theoretical model of human communication. We consider how this can be done by drawing on Relevance Theory (RT) (Sperber & Wilson 1986, 1995).

3. Individual and shared mindfulness

3.1 Insights from Relevance Theory

The most influential cognitive model of communication Relevance Theory (RT) (Sperber & Wilson 1986, 1995) builds on the view that people are predisposed to pay attention to phenomena in their environment when doing so is likely to bring about improvements in their belief system. In other words, our cognition is goal oriented: people tend to pay attention to stimuli which they expect will turn out to be relevant to them. This generalization (in a slightly more technical formulation) is known as the Cognitive Principle of Relevance (CPR): "Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance" (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 260).

Relevance is defined as a positive function of new worthwhile information (technically, "cognitive effects" or "contextual effects") and as a negative function of mental processing effort:

Relevance
A phenomenon is relevant to an individual:
(a) to the extent that the cognitive effects achieved when it is processed in context are large,
and
(b) to the extent that the processing effort required for achieving the effects is small. (Adapted from Sperber & Wilson 1986/95: 153)

An informal paraphrase of the CPR might be: People tend to be mindful. In other words, they should be aware of the need to [re]assess their priorities and goals and pay attention to those things which they think are likely to turn out to be important to them given their priorities and goals.

One of the main tenets of RT is that some stimuli, which include pointing gestures and utterances, are designed to create an expectation that paying attention to them will lead to significant cognitive rewards. In other words, they are designed to create expectations of their own relevance (informally, informativeness). Therefore, a communicative act (i.e., ostensive stimulus) conveys a tacit guarantee that it is adequately relevant. This generalization about human communication is known as the Communicative Principle of Relevance: "Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 260).

A communicative act is optimally relevant if its mental representation and processing lead to enough cognitive gains to offset the mental effort required for representing and processing that act. It follows from these observations about the main tenets of RT that we would expect people to be mindful in communicative interaction, both as communicators and as addressees. The communicator should be mindful in aiming to produce a communicative act which will: (a) convey all the information that the communicator intends to convey by that act; (b) not convey any information that the communicator would prefer not to convey; (c) not have any impact on the addressee which is undesirable from the communicator's point of view; and, (d) not put the addressee to the expenditure of greater processing effort than is necessary for inferring the communicator's intended message.

When we decide to pay attention to something, to represent it mentally and integrate this representation with various other belief-assumptions that we hold, we are oriented towards relevance. We are more or less mindful in displaying these orientations; in other words, we are more or less alert to the choices available to us. In allocating our cognitive resources, we estimate the risk of making the wrong decisions and the importance of making the right decisions.

On this view, the pursuit of relevance is always an individual enterprise, but it is often also a collaborative endeavor. Communication is cooperative, i.e., collaborative, in that the participants monitor each other's beliefs, interests, abilities,

goals, and competencies and this informs their communicative actions. The key concept for explaining the coordination of efforts in communicative interaction is "manifestness." In its technical sense, manifestness refers to a person's psychological disposition for belief representation, which is a function of his/her cognitive make-up and the physical environment. It is a gradable notion: the more conclusive the evidence an individual has for representing an assumption as a belief, the more manifest that assumption is to that individual. To be more specific: the act of communication modifies the interlocutors' belief systems. An assumption is manifest to the extent that the environment provides evidence for its adoption.

The set of all assumptions that are manifest to an individual is that individual's cognitive environment. The set of all assumptions that are manifest to two individuals is their shared cognitive environment. A shared cognitive environment in which it is manifest which people share it is what Sperber and Wilson (1986/95:41) call a mutual cognitive environment.

> The mutuality of cognitive environments is socially important for the following reason: "A change in the mutual cognitive environment of two people is a change in their possibilities of interaction (and, in particular, in their possibilities of further communication" (Sperber & Wilson 1986: 61–62).

The speaker must be able to estimate the cognitive resources of the hearer, including their likelihood of being deployed in a particular way in comprehension. Among the belief-assumptions which are manifest to the participants in the communication event are those about each other's level and direction of attention. The term "mutual mindfulness" could be defined usefully as: the awareness of each participant of their own as well as of other participants' levels and directions of active attention. A pleasing consequence of this definition is that it makes it possible to characterize the degree of mutual mindfulness reasonably explicitly. The participants in the communication are mutually mindful to the extent that each is mindful of their own and the other participants' levels and directions of active attention. In effect, "mutual mindfulness" is a kind of "meta-mindfulness." It seems clear that the term "mutual mindfulness" refers to the constantly updated dispositional states resulting from the interactants' mutual monitoring of each other's active attention in estimating the changes relevant to the communicative interaction between them at every point in the communication event. Interactants monitor each other's goals, abilities, and actions, and adjust them in the way which seems most conducive to achieving their mutual goal of successful communication and also their individual goals which depend on successful communication. However, for mindfulness in social interaction, it seems important to note that there are two aspects here: the process and the achievement. We suggest that Krieger's (2005: 138) concept of "shared mindfulness" in fact conflates two

different elements: the process of joint construction and the state of mindfulness achieved conjointly. So we propose the term "synchronizing mindfulness" to refer to the process, and "mutual mindfulness" to refer to the state.

Achieving any goal requires some degree of individual mindfulness; some goals can only be achieved provided two or more people are individually mindful in ways appropriate to the achievement of joint and individual goals, and some goals can only be achieved if the participants are mutually mindful (i.e., if each is aware that they are all aware of the need for active attention). Let us consider a few illustrative examples. Imagine you are riding a mountain bike on a deserted path in the countryside. Your goal is to get exercise and to enjoy the views without having an accident. In order to achieve this, you need to be mindful of a great many things: the uneven surface of the road, the need to avoid muddy areas, the need to monitor your level of tiredness and the time you have spent riding, and so on. This simple activity requires a reasonably high level of active attention, especially if you are not familiar with the track along which you are cycling. So, your goals in this situation can be achieved by relying on your individual mindfulness. Now imagine you are driving a car on the motorway on a nice day. Your goal is to reach your destination safely and it is shared with other drivers: they too aim to reach their destinations safely and efficiently. In average circumstances, you and other drivers on the same stretch of the motorway are mindful. Moreover, in normal circumstances (i.e., where nothing unusual and potentially dangerous is happening on the road), you and they will be individually mindful, but your decisions are also based on some presumptions about each other's mindfulness: you monitor the speed at which you are driving in relation to that of other vehicles, your decisions about the distance between your car and the one in front of yours are partly informed by the way the cars in front of you and behind you are driven, the road surface, various road traffic signs that you can see (and that you presume other drivers can see) and pay attention to. You also presume (in the absence of immediate perceptible evidence to the contrary) that other drivers are appropriately attentive. In other words, your decisions are based on your presumptions about a certain level of shared mindfulness.

However, there are situations where presumed shared mindfulness may not be sufficient. Consider the following situation: you are driving the car and you have stopped at the crossroads of two country roads. You want to turn right, but you see a car coming from your right-hand side. As the car approaches but is still some distance away from you, its left-hand-side indicator light is switched on and the car begins to slow down noticeably. You decide to pull out. In this situation, your decision is based not only on your individual mindfulness, nor on some general level of presumed shared mindfulness of you and the other driver. Rather, your decision is informed by your assumptions about the other driver's awareness of

your personal intentions and the other driver's awareness of your likely response resulting from your monitoring of his/her actions. In other words, you and the other driver are not acting merely on presumed shared mindfulness, but on mutual mindfulness (which you achieve through the process of synchronizing mindfulness): your awareness of each other's mindfulness (as well as of your own).

3.2 Mindfulness in communication

The distinctions between "individual mindfulness," "synchronizing mindfulness," and "mutual mindfulness" are pertinent to communication. Communication is a collaborative endeavor which leads not only to improvements in each individual's systems of beliefs, but to collective improvements in the beliefs of all participants, because through communication the improvements of individuals' knowledge are achieved by updating the set of their evidently shared beliefs (i.e., the cognitive environment). A certain level of synchronizing mindfulness is required for dealing with any situation characterized by some appreciable degree of uncertainty which calls for active attention. Of course, when the participants are very familiar with each other and are engaged in a typical communication event, they may proceed safely by simply presuming that they are appropriately mindful, without monitoring closely each other's level and direction of active attention.

However, the incremental improvements in the belief systems of the participants may need to include their perceptions about the degree (and direction) of each other's mindfulness. In other words, synchronized mindfulness may be a prerequisite for the participants in a communication event to be able to establish and maintain a mutual cognitive environment which is adequate for achieving their goals. This is particularly evident in situations of intercultural communication where the adequacy of the mutual cognitive environment of the participants, as well as the adequacy of their communication strategies at a given point in the communication event, cannot be taken for granted due to their different cultural backgrounds. Firth (1996: 248) describes such situations as "fragile." It stands to reason that fragile communication situations call for the participants' active attention oriented towards monitoring each other's level and direction of mindfulness (rather than treating the situation as routine and relying on presumed shared mindfulness). In fragile situations, mutual mindfulness provides a sound basis for making decisions not only in the planning and in the production of communicative acts (how informative to aim to be, how much effort it is reasonable to put the addressee to, in which context to expect the addressee to process the communicative act), but also in comprehension (given the addressee's resources and knowledge about the communicator, as well as the addressee's personal interests, how should the addressee allocate attention and other cognitive resources in

interpreting the communicative act?). Therefore, "individual mindfulness," "synchronizing mindfulness" (as a prerequisite for "mutual mindfulness") and "mutual mindfulness" all have a role to play in achieving successful communication.

Individual mindfulness refers to the attention paid to personal communication goals. It can be both helpful and detrimental. For example, a communicator may have personal goals which are best achieved if the intention to achieve them is not made evident, and the addressee needs to be alert to this, especially when the benevolence of the interlocutor cannot be taken for granted. These points are part of folk wisdom, as vividly illustrated by Aesop's fable, "The Fox and the Raven" (2002: 53):

> The raven seized a piece of cheese and carried his spoils up to his perch high in a tree. A fox came up and walked in circles around the raven, planning a trick. "What is this?" cried the fox. "O raven, the elegant proportions of your body are remarkable, and you have a complexion that is worthy of the king of the birds! If only you had a voice to match, then you would be first among the fowl!" The fox said these things to trick the raven and the raven fell for it: he let out a great squawk and dropped his cheese. By thus showing off his voice, the raven let go of his spoils. The fox then grabbed the cheese and said, "O raven, you do have a voice, but no brains to go with it!"

Fox is mindful, but not in a cooperative way: he is aware that Raven's inflated ego is likely to make him susceptible to flattery and that even moderate criticism is likely to motivate him to prove Fox wrong (and let go of the cheese in the process). Raven's gullibility is "mindless." One likely reason for this is that he has an affective-emotional interest in accepting both Fox's praise of his physique and Fox's criticism of his vocal qualities as sincere: the former supports his positive self-image, while the latter makes a dent in it, and the very thought that Fox might hold a negative belief about his vocal qualities motivates Raven to take action to prove him wrong.

Moreover, if individual mindfulness becomes so important that it dominates the communicator's behavior too strongly, it can impair the achievement of mutual mindfulness and hence of the effectiveness of the interaction. Example 1 below illustrates this point.

Example 1: Research discussions between a British and a Chinese academic. This example comes from a meeting between some British and Chinese academics who were interested in undertaking some collaborative research. Since they did not know each other well, they first needed to describe their research backgrounds and interests to each other. In this extract, one of the Chinese academics, Zhang, is explaining his research to a British professor, Paul. Zhang could understand English quite well but had some difficulties expressing his ideas orally. Near the

beginning of the interaction (Meeting Extract One, lines 1–13), the two participants co-constructed mutual understanding both efficiently and effectively. For example, Paul used clarification checks (e.g., lines 9–10) and confirmation checks (e.g., line 12), and Zhang used discourse structuring (e.g., many examples in lines 1–8). Their goals were to understand each other clearly, both linguistically and conceptually, and they each used several different communication strategies to help achieve this. In other words, they each displayed high levels of synchronizing mindfulness and mutual mindfulness (i.e., awareness of their joint goals and of their need for high levels of alertness to various aspects of the interaction in order to co-ordinate their efforts in achieving those goals) and all was going well. However, a little while after this, some serious communication difficulties arose.

The first problem occurred just after Zhang had described his research area and had suggested a joint research topic that could be of mutual interest (lines 38–44). At this point, instead of responding to Zhang's suggestion, Paul referred back to something that Zhang had said much earlier about helping teachers with online instructional design (lines 26–27). Paul asked a follow-up question (line 45ff) on how the design of online materials is handled in China. However, he did not use any discourse markers to indicate that he was referring back to something that Zhang had said much earlier and that his question was therefore a non-sequitur to what Zhang had just suggested. In other words, Paul was displaying low levels of mutual mindfulness in asking this question. However, to make matters worse, Paul's question was quite long and complex, and Zhang was understandably confused. Interestingly, as soon as Paul had finished asking his question, he realized this immediately (lines 50–51). So he then carefully explained in more detail the two different viewpoints that exist in the European educational context and received an affirmative "yes" (line 62, stressed, strongly falling intonation), suggesting that Zhang understood the two different viewpoints. He then asked his question again (lines 62–64) to double-check that they had understood each other, and this time received a rather weaker affirmative answer (line 65: quieter "yes," with less strongly falling intonation). Paul then used a confirmation check (line 66), and received an even more tentative response (line 67). However, at this point, he simply accepted Zhang's superficially positive response, asserting that it was both very interesting and very important for their (potential) project that teachers were encouraged to be designers and authors in China. There is no indication that he doubted the veracity of his interpretation. Zhang, on the other hand, seemed more dubious. He re-asserted his earlier comments that there may be cultural differences between British and Chinese educational approaches and that these need to be researched. Even though he seemed aware of a possible misunderstanding, he "let it pass" (Firth 1996).

Actually, we know from the Chinese professor's comments earlier in the meeting (lines 6–7), as well as from Chinese Ministry of Education policy documents (see Huang et al 2007: 226), that a misunderstanding had occurred: the policy for e-learning design in China is closer to the first view (i.e., the central creation of materials) than to the second. However, Zhang did not seek further clarification, and Paul did not pick up on the uncertainties implied by Zhang. The chairperson then moved the meeting on and invited another Chinese professor to introduce his research interests, and neither Paul nor Zhang had the opportunity to return to the issue.

So we see from this extract that despite the high degrees of synchronizing and mutual mindfulness shown by both Paul and Zhang at the beginning of their interaction, this was not maintained. By asking a non-sequitur question and by not signaling this breach of convention in any way, despite the complexity of the topic and Zhang's mediocre level of English, Paul started displaying low levels of synchronizing mindfulness. When Zhang re-asserted the educational differences between Britain and China and the need for research in this area, Paul again ignored the point and simply added evaluative fillers to end this part of the interchange. He thus once more showed minimal levels of synchronizing mindfulness. Paul's lowered level of synchronizing mindfulness damaged his and Zhang's mutual mindfulness, because it was not picked up by Zhang (or by Paul himself) and so was allowed to have an adverse impact on communication.

At other points in the interchange, Paul seemed to be paying close attention to what Zhang was saying. For example, he sensed almost instantaneously when Zhang did not understand his question (lines 50–51) and immediately rephrased it. However, at these points he was pursuing his personal goal of finding out how online design is handled in China. As the pursuit of this goal did not depend on mutual mindfulness, displaying a high level of individual mindfulness was sufficient for achieving it, but Paul was not aware that this was hampering him from maintaining an appropriate level of mutual mindfulness, because he had opted out of synchronizing mindfulness, while Zhang's concern for maintaining this process (evidenced by his hesitant responses) did not remedy the situation, as he appeared not to know what he could do to bring things back on track. This then raises two fundamental questions: what are the factors that influence the interplay between individual mindfulness, synchronizing mindfulness, and mutual mindfulness, and how does the nature of the interplay influence communicative success/effectiveness? We address these questions in the following section by considering the influence of motivational and attentional states.

Meeting Extract One

Zhang I first get the masters degree in mathematics and also I get a PhD in educational technology, so for me uh my research areas are of two kinds. one is for higher education and the second is for K12 schools. in higher education area my research focuses on three points. one is the course curriculum standards for for how use ICT in the classroom in courses. so the China have a plan (.) maybe they in five years they will put 1500 courses in the internet for resources selling, so I direct a group team for making the standards for the the courses on the internet. and the second=

Paul =sorry can I, do you mean standards for interoperability or do you mean standards of quality.

Zhang for quality.

Paul quality.

Zhang yes, quality.

{//} {… *continues describing his own research, with occasional questions from Paul*}

Zhang in my philosophy, especially in China, we send experts to tell the technologies very well but in the classroom in the campus the achievement the quality is not very well. and also we teach the teachers how to make instruction design, but also the achievement is not very well. so what's the problem? in my opinion I think the first one is the students' learning ability, many learning strategies and learning styles are different, so this is a problem, how to train the abilities of the students to learn, especially for distance education and learning. The second problem is how the students can manage their knowledge and [thirdly] in the future students may study not in the classroom so group learning and cooperative learning may be more important. so my research these three points is the foundations.

{//} {… *continues describing his own research, with occasional questions from Paul*}

Zhang but for this cooperation, about this project, the west and the east students and the countries there are many differences. for the culture differences there are many studies about it, but how the culture influences the students' learning and influences teachers' teaching there is less research. in the eastern world, especially in China, the students highly rely on teachers and the students' learning is controlled by the teachers. {…} so it is very important to do this research.

Paul can I just ask, sorry, do you mind, can I just ask one question /mhm/ if I understood you uhm (.) you were talking about you know the (.) our aspirations for teachers /mhm/ and I think you used the word their knowledge of design. /uhuh/ does that imply that you see the role of teachers /mhm/ as authoring and creating their own materials /uhuh/ for use in computer based learning. /uhuh/ sorry, should I read that into what you say. {*immediately turns to others*} oh maybe I'm not clear. /mhm/ in Europe /mhm/, there seems to be two different developments going on in different countries. /mhm yes/ in one set of countries, the UK is one, /yes/ the aim seems to be to produce very

54		high quality materials, /mhm/ of a professional standard, /yes/ with organi-
55		zations /I see/ like the BBC. /yes/ and to basically download that in schools.
56		that is one model of the teacher. /yes/ and the teacher has to learn to use that
57		material and incorporate that material. and then there are other countries like
58		uh Holland for example where they are saying no, there shouldn't be central
59		creation of material, we should create a database of learning objects /yes/ and
60		then teachers have to develop the professional skill to combine those objects /
61		yes/ for their own lesson plans. /yes/so there's tension at the moment between
62		two very different views /yes↓/ of where we want teachers to be. are you say-
63		ing that you think in China it's the second one of those, /uhuh/ teachers as
64		designers and authors?
65	Zhang	yes`
66	Paul	that's what you're aiming for.
67	Zhang	yeh yeh I I think` so.
68	Paul	right, that's very interesting, 'cos that's very important for this project.
69	Zhang	the high quality for UK but it may not be suitable for Chinese students and
70		also for teachers /right/ so we need to /yes/ understand the differences and
71		compare them.
72	Paul	yes, very interesting. fine. very good.

[See Appendix 1 for transcription conventions]

4. Factors influencing levels of mindfulness

4.1 Motivational state and mindfulness–mindlessness

When we think of motivation in relation to mindfulness, we need to consider a range of aspects. Most fundamental is the *motivation to be mindful*, since, in order to exercise mindfulness, a person needs to be motivated to do so. In other words, it is a *necessary antecedent* of mindfulness. This motivation may be channeled by, but is conceptually distinct from, the various motivations or goals the person may have (e.g., the motivation to finalize a business deal, obtain specific information, or create a positive impression) for participating in a particular interaction.

In addition, people's motivations, and in turn their levels of mindfulness, are influenced by affective states. In motivational psychology and particularly in the field of education, intrinsic motivation is generally lauded as the optimal form of motivation to be nurtured. Intrinsically motivating activities are those which are inherently pleasurable, stimulating or satisfying, and they contrast with extrinsically motivating ones which entail doing something as a means to some separable outcome (Ryan & Deci 2000). Intrinsically motivating goals and activities are thus naturally self-sustaining and result in high-quality engagement, performance, and

creativity. However, from a mindfulness perspective they can lead to problems. Motivation that is driven by feelings of enjoyment, interest, challenge, intellectual stimulation, creativity, or sheer curiosity can become self-sustaining and self-absorbing, as reflected for example in the hours that many people will happily spend playing computer games, listening to their favorite music, or engaging in a particular hobby. In psychology this motivational phenomenon has been described as "flow" experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), characterized as an optimal state of complete concentration, focused motivation, and intense absorption in a task, to the extent that those who experience "flow" may lose reflective self-consciousness and also lose track of time. As a result, the self-sustaining and self-absorbing nature of intrinsic motivation may have less positive repercussions in situations where there are competing demands on attentional resources or where there are the interests and perspectives of others to consider. In such circumstances, it is conceivable that a person's intrinsic motivations may lead to behavior that is less mindful, in the sense that it is particularly difficult to be mindful of (and to hold at bay) one's intrinsic interests when these are naturally aroused in a situation. Furthermore, since showing and expressing interest during an intercultural encounter would be regarded as a positive aspect of mindful behavior, being mindful by showing interest in what one's interlocutor has said may, paradoxically, lead one to be less mindful in pursuing something that one finds intrinsically interesting but that is perhaps less relevant to the focus of communication. Such motivational behavior might characterize certain digressive or tangential episodes in an interaction.

Paul's behavior in Example 1 above can be explained in this way. One of Zhang's comments stimulated his interest and Paul started focusing on it. Paul became so absorbed in following it up that he started ignoring their initial joint goal of finding a topic of mutual research interest. Instead, his quest for insights became a "flow" experience for him, and he no longer paid adequate attention to the messages that Zhang was trying to convey about joint research ideas.

Another affective source that can influence levels of mindfulness, and the interplay between individual and mutual mindfulness, is personal sensitivities. Žegarac and Spencer-Oatey (2013) describe a China-UK negotiation meeting in which this occurs. Project participants were trying to agree on a collaborative research project, but after lengthy discussions, it unexpectedly emerged that the Chinese stakeholders seemed to have extremely different goals for the collaboration than the British stakeholders and project participants had been aware of. However, instead of trying to clarify exactly what the Chinese stakeholders' goals were, the UK program manager kept pointing out that the British should have been told about this earlier. Žegarac and Spencer-Oatey (2013: 448) argue that in doing so, the manager was displaying high levels of "self-orientation" and that one of the main reasons for this was face concerns. They explain it as follows:

> Eva [the UK program manager] was placed in a very face-threatening as well as operationally difficult situation. When Fan [a Chinese project participant] revealed publicly that the Chinese stakeholders were expecting a certain type of overarching research, this was very problematic for her. In her role as the UK Programme Manager, she could be expected to know about this and to have conveyed it to the British teams, so the fact that she had not done so could imply that she was incompetent in understanding and/or communicating what the Chinese stakeholders wanted. Moreover, Eva and the British stakeholders had already commissioned other professionals to deal with two of the issues identified by Fan since they were integral elements of the materials development projects […]. So to now agree to […] going along with the Chinese stakeholders' expectations (as reported by Fan) would have led to major programme management difficulties and embarrassment for the British stakeholders. So from this viewpoint, it is understandable that Eva's response was to justify her (and the British stakeholders') position, rather than to seek further clarification from Fan. However, her self-orientation for both herself and the British stakeholders whom she represented (which occurred several times in this way throughout the rest of the day's meeting) had a major negative impact on the achievement of mutual understanding.

In other words, emotional sensitivities (or more formally, face sensitivities) like emotional engagement can lead to self-oriented behavior and low levels of mutual mindfulness.

4.2 Attentional state and mindlessness–mindfulness

Quite closely related to motivational state is the issue of attentional state. Thinking again of Example 1, Paul became less collaboratively mindful and more individually mindful not only because of the level of arousal of his interests, but also because his fascination made him susceptible to a processing limitation. He was unable to retain mindfulness with respect to his and Zhang's initial joint goal, as he did not have enough self-regulatory capacity to allocate appropriate levels of attention to both their joint goal and his individual one. He thus switched his primary attention to his individual goal and, when pursuing this topic that was so fascinating to him, he continued to show high levels of mindfulness over the questions he asked. However, this then resulted in low levels of synchronizing mindfulness with respect to their joint goal and the end result was a confusing mixture of low levels of synchronizing mindfulness (and hence of mutual mindfulness) combined with occasional high levels of individual mindfulness.

The orientation of human cognition and communication towards maximizing relevance is hugely beneficial in that it gives access to a wide range of inputs to cognitive processing (memory, perception, communication, imagination) and

the ability to integrate them in deriving worthwhile information. However, these relevance-driven mechanisms are not fail-safe. In virtue of this, human communication has distinct advantages over the communication systems found in other species, but also the disadvantage of being comparatively prone to failure. This is best explained in terms of Sperber's (1996: 66–67) distinction between "dispositions" and "susceptibilities":

> Some of the effects of our genetic endowment can be described as dispositions, others as susceptibilities, although the distinction is not always easy to draw. Dispositions have been positively selected in the process of biological evolution; susceptibilities are side-effects of dispositions.
>
> …
>
> *Homo sapiens*, for instance, has a disposition to eat sweet food. In the natural environment in which the species developed, this was of obvious adaptive value in helping individuals to select the most appropriate nutrients. In the modern environment, in which sugar is artificially produced, this brings out a susceptibility to over-consumption of sugar, with all its well-known detrimental effects.

Being oriented towards relevance means aiming to maximize cognitive gains while keeping down the expenditure of processing effort. The orientation towards minimizing mental effort is hardly surprising. The human brain makes up 2% of the total body mass, but accounts for 20% of the total energy used by the body. The brain is a comparatively expensive organ to run. So, how can we keep down the cost? The answer is complex but follows in a fairly straightforward way from the Cognitive Principle of Relevance and Relevance-theoretic assumptions about the processing of inputs to the cognitive system.

In general, a self-centered approach, one which focuses only on one's own current perspective, is more economical, in terms of mental effort, than taking account of other possible ways of looking at a particular issue. Moreover, we approach every situation with an existing mindset. The more time and effort we have invested in forming that mindset in anticipation of the future situation, the more effort will be required to change it. To give but one example, this may explain some findings relating to differences in EFL learners' performance reported in Nitta and Nakatsuhara (2014):

> Galaczi (2008: 149) identified three distinct global patterns for interactions in the paired discussion part of the Cambridge FCE, viz., *collaborative*, *parallel*, and *asymmetric*. In the *collaborative* pattern of interactions, participants would shift their interactional roles between listener and speaker, and support the development of topics initiated by both parties. The *parallel* pattern resembled "solo versus solo" interaction, in which both speakers would initiate and develop their own topics but would have limited engagement with the other's ideas. The *asymmetric*

pattern was characterized by unbalanced contributions to the quantity of talk and topic development in the dyad, with one speaker leading the interaction and the other taking a secondary role. Galaczi (2008) revealed that high scores on the "interactive communication" scale were generally associated with a collaborative pattern of interaction, while a parallel pattern led to low scores. This has also been confirmed by Gan's (2010) group oral study.

What is particularly interesting is that learners who had been given time to pre-plan the task used the parallel pattern, communicating more poorly, while those for whom the task was new opted for the collaborative pattern and communicated more effectively on the task. This is easy to explain in terms of Relevance-theoretic predictions about economy of effort. Once mental effort has been invested in the pre-planning stage in developing an individual, self-oriented approach to the problem, the change to the other-oriented (collaborative approach) requires some considerable mental effort, as the learner needs to discard various assumptions that had already required some investment of mental effort, and to redirect attention towards the interlocutor and the potential for problem-solving through collaboration.

In other words, our existing mindset and attentional state can influence our mindfulness levels and interplay between individual and mutual mindfulness through the synchronizing mindfulness process. We illustrate this through a second example.

Example 2: Chair's introduction to a meeting between British and Chinese academics. Our second example comes from the start of a meeting, again between some British and Chinese academics. The participants had not met previously, except for a social dinner the previous evening, and the purpose of the meeting was to explore possibilities for collaborative research. Two of the Chinese spoke fluent English, one spoke mediocre English, and one spoke no English at all and needed one of his colleagues to interpret for him. The Chair, who is Scottish and a senior manager, introduced the meeting as shown in Meeting Extract Two.

Meeting Extract Two

1	British	right I think we'll make a start now. it's a very warm afternoon for getting
2	Chair:	down to business, but uh we have some exciting discussions to have this
3		afternoon. uh we're going to focus on research. I'm going to ask everybody to
4		speak (.) very clearly and uh without heavy accents if possible
5	Everyone:	{*Laughter, as the Chair speaks with a pronounced Scottish accent*}
6	British	and we may take some pauses just to make sure everybody uhm uh is is
7	Chair:	keeping up with the conversation cause we can sometimes (.) each of us speak
8		very quickly when we get excited. uh this afternoon is a chance for us really
9		to explore the research issues (.) tell each other what we're doing (3) tell each
10		other what we hope to achieve what we're aspiring to (3) and it would

11 be wonderful if we could perhaps focus on the use of technology in learning
12 (..) if that was of interest to you (5) so what I I'd like to do is I think it would
13 be very helpful for one of our colleagues to volunteer to >as we say in (.) in
14 Scotland start the ball rolling cause we really love football<. Uh I think I
15 think it would be fair to ask one of our colleagues to start the ball rolling and
16 [name of British colleague] if you would like to kick off for us.

[See Appendix 1 for transcription conventions]

As can be seen, the Chair started by asking everyone to pay attention to the manner of their speech — to be clear (line 4), to avoid heavy accents (line 4), and to include some pauses and avoid speaking too fast (lines 6–8). In saying this, she implicitly indicated that she held negative expectations of the participants' communication — that they were likely to speak unclearly and too fast, and hence needed reminding of the need to pay careful attention to this. When making these points, she focused her gaze on the British participants, who were nearly all seated down one side of the table. In addressing the British academics in this way, in one sense she could be seen as being collaboratively mindful. Studies (e.g., Sweeney & Zhu 2010) have found that highly fluent speakers do not adjust their language as much as needed when interacting with less fluent speakers, and some interculturalists give just the advice that the Chair gave. For example, Ting-Toomey (1999: 112) gives a number of recommendations for communicating mindfully, including speaking slowly and inserting comprehension pauses. So in one sense, the Chair was very helpfully warning the British to be collaboratively mindful of the proficiency level of the Chinese guests; in other words, she was drawing their conscious attention to the importance of conveying their message clearly, and to the importance of giving the Chinese guests enough time to process what they said, as well as for the interpreter to convey it in Chinese.

In certain respects, the Chair put her advice into practice in that she paused a number of times (e.g., lines 9, 10, and 12) and tried to minimize her Scottish accent. However, shortly after this (lines 13–14), she sped up her delivery (contrary to her advice in lines 6–8), fell into a more pronounced Scottish accent (contrary to her advice in line 4), and used an idiomatic expression which was rather culture-specific and potentially confusing "to start the ball rolling" (contrary to her advice in line 4 to speak clearly). In other words, she started displaying much lower levels of synchronizing mindfulness. We cannot be sure of the reason for the change, but the most likely is her attentional state. As an experienced chairperson of meetings, when she came to starting the meeting, she probably "went onto automatic pilot" and started focusing on the business at hand rather than her need for carefulness of speech.

This example also raises another issue: the extent to which we are able to implement through self-regulation as well as competence all that we ideally want to

achieve. The exercise of metacognitive or self-regulatory skills such as mindfulness presupposes a level of intentionality or motivation to apply and control higher-order thinking processes. This tight interface between motivation and metacognition is a basic principle in the psychological literature on self-regulation in human behavior (e.g., Boekaerts, Pintrich & Zeidner 2005), and is captured nicely in the catchphrase "will and skill" (McCombs & Marzano 1990), where "will" refers to willingness or motivation to exercise the metacognitive "skill" needed to regulate complex cognitive behavior. Being mindful thus entails integrating "will and skill" to regulate one's cognitive, affective and perceptual processes in situations that call for a heightened level of openness and sensitivity.

According to McCombs (1994: 49–50), an important precondition for the exercise of will and skill is awareness of our own agency in constructing the thoughts, beliefs, goals, and expectations that shape our motivation, and hence awareness of our agency in regulating and adapting our thinking and our motivation: "How aware individuals are that they have voluntary control over their thinking, including being able to step outside the boundaries of their own constructed thoughts, is what fundamentally fuels or motivates self-regulated behaviors." As she writes, "an awareness of agency is the basis for self-determination" (1994: 51), whereby one's thoughts, actions, motivations, and behaviors are perceived to originate from the self and to be an authentic expression of the self and the self's internal values. Significantly, this sense of personal agency and self-determined motivation important for psychological well-being is not necessarily incompatible with external social influences and other people's agencies and motivations: "Indeed, one can quite autonomously enact values and behaviors that others have requested or forwarded, provided that one congruently endorses them" (Ryan & Deci 2002: 8). In other words, when there is congruence between other peoples' goals or motivations and our own, or when we are happy to align ourselves with external social influences and values and to integrate these into the self, we act in ways that are self-determined and authentic to the self (Noels 2009). On the other hand, when we experience tension rather than congruence between external and internal values or motives, or when we act with compliance and conformity rather than authenticity, our sense of self-determination is compromised, and this may have repercussions for exercising will and skill, or mindfulness.

Returning to the concept of mindfulness, then, it seems that our capacity to be mindful has a motivational basis; in other words, we need *to want to be mindful*. Wanting to be mindful depends on our recognition that we have *voluntary* control over our thought processes and motivations and can adapt these in response to the unfolding situation or interaction in a self-determined way. At the same time, when the evolving situation or interaction challenges or subverts our motivations, thoughts, and values to the extent that we no longer feel (consciously or

unconsciously) in control, remaining mindful may become increasingly difficult to sustain, resulting in less mindful or more mindless behavior. This suggests that the motivation to be mindful in intercultural encounters may be vulnerable if it is not an explicitly shared and mutually supported enterprise among the interactants so that congruence (and shared voluntary control) at this fundamental level of intentionality is achieved, even if the various motivations, purposes, and interests brought to the interaction may differ.

5. Concluding comments

While it is a matter of general consensus that the technical terms used in describing communication events need to have adequate theoretical contents, the psychological construct of "mindfulness" as used in existing intercultural pragmatics research falls short of meeting this requirement because it is not grounded in a general theory of human communication. In this paper we have addressed this shortcoming by explicitly relating "mindfulness" to the Relevance-theoretic concept of "manifestness."

In a nutshell, the argument runs as follows: communicative interaction depends critically on the coordination of the participants' efforts, and the key concept for explaining this coordination is "manifestness" (a person's psychological disposition for belief representation, which is a function of his/her cognitive make-up and the physical environment). The speaker must be able to estimate the cognitive resources of the hearer, including their likelihood of being deployed in a particular way in comprehension. Among the belief-assumptions which are manifest to the participants in the communication event are those about each other's level and direction of attention and motivation. Mindfulness, then, refers to the manifestness of the evidence of participants' active attention. By analogy with the Relevance-theoretic distinction between "manifestness" and "mutual manifestness," we introduced the notions of "individual mindfulness" and "mutual mindfulness," where "mutual mindfulness" is defined as the awareness of each participant of their own as well as of other participants' levels and directions of active attention. However, we also made a case for the notion of "synchronizing mindfulness": the process of monitoring levels and directions of individual and mutual mindfulness in the communication process. We then proceeded to show how these terms help describe and explain communicative interaction by considering a few "critical incidents" from intercultural communication situations. The analysis lends support to the view that the "mindfulness" is needed in order to counter our susceptibility to comparative "mindlessness." This susceptibility arises from the complex interplay between the interactants' motivational states (e.g., orientation towards particular goals, such as protecting one's own

existing self-image, succeeding in a collaborative activity, furthering personal interests and aims) and their attentional states under specific situational pressures.

Intercultural interactions often put particular pressure on participants' cognitive resources, and so the need for mindfulness is especially great in such situations. This is no doubt why mindfulness is emphasized so frequently in the intercultural field. However, as our examples have illustrated, people may easily display inadequate levels of mindfulness, even when intending to be extremely mindful. We suggest that a greater awareness of the factors that can inhibit their mindfulness could help them be more effectively vigilant, and so we recommend more research in this area. This research needs to investigate in more detail the complex interplay between external (ecological) and internal (cognitive-psychological) determinants of mindfulness in social interaction, examining authentic interaction in a variety of situations from this perspective.

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Appendix 1: Transcription conventions

Meaning	Symbol
Transcriber's commentary	{ *word word word*}
Omitted section of text	{…}
Connections between words or utterances	
Brief pause	(.)
Pause of indicated length (in secs.)	(5)
Latching, i.e., two utterances run together with no pause	=
Backchannel	/uhm/ /yes/
Words spoken differently from surrounding text	
Strong falling intonation	word↓
Gently falling intonation	word`
Emphasized word or phrase	<u>word</u>
Increased speed	>word word word<

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