DIFFERENT TIME PERCEPTION IN CREOLIZATION MIRRORED IN TRANSCULTURAL INTERFACE FOR "IMMEDIATE"

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Take time to deliberate; but when the time for action arrives, stop thinking and go in.

Napoleon Bonaparte

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify possible ethno-cultural differences that can endanger a just-in-time decision making process. In this context, revealing the different perception of time and its value for decision-makers belonging to different cultures or ethnic groups is the prime endeavour. When deciding upon a matter, the companies all over the world are using a Group Decision Support System (GDSS) which is a system for complex decision making characterized as being adaptable for a collaborative group of people, therefore this paper intends to present a possible solution by translating common concepts like time that sometimes are perceived differently by people belonging to different cultures. Due to the fact that just-in-time (JIT) decision making is the new black in collaborative intelligence, an interface that could help scheduling the online meetings in terms of cultural perception of time would be a real help, saving time for decisions and avoiding time perception ambiguities. The JIT paradigm refers to the desideratum that right information to be delivered, in context, to the right person at the right time.

In a decision making process the main actors are the decision makers that must make decisions and take actions in the rapidly changing world of the 21st century. In this regard, the fact that in a decision making process it often happens that the actively involved participants to belong to different cultures (especially in the case of multinational corporations) then it results that the concept of time can sometimes be differently perceived by people that doesn't share the same culture and time perception. A setback like this one can lead to a decision "just-in-case" and not just-in-time, therefore jeopardizing the solution of the issue(s).

Keywords

Transcultural Group Decision; Just In Time (JIT) Decision Making; Computer-Aided Semiosis (CAS); Creolization.

1   INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on presenting time perception mirrored in different cultures in the context of computer aided decision-making process. In this regard, the examples presented herein are emphasising the e-creolization and the "just-in-time" concept as an attribute in relation with the decisional process. To specify even clearer the approach, the prior mentioned concepts will be further explained in the related work and terminology section.

The toy problem of this paper is that across the world, cultures are "divided" from a time perspective in two categories: monochronic and polychronic cultures. To give just some examples, countries from Northern Europe are considered to be monochronic cultures because they are more time-oriented than Southern European countries like Italy or Slovenia. Obviously, these are some examples to emphasis the fact that Northerners seem to be mostly monochronic and Southerners polychronic cultures, but there are also exceptions to this assertion and to avoid listing them, one can assume that Central Europe encompasses the both. Furthermore, Italy or France, depending on regions can have both time-flexible and time-inflexible individuals. Generally speaking punctuality is a key requirement in decision-making, particularly when *immediate* decisions have to be made in order to solve a problem *on time*. In this regard, the aim of this paper is to present a possible solution for different perceptions of time in decision-making process. If some decision-makers are poor time keepers, others

apply Pünktlichkeit (English = punctuality) or Rechtzeitigkeit (English = the right time) as guiding principles. For such people, time is money.

To give a clear-cut example: if 10 o'clock means for Northern European people 10 o'clock sharp, for Southerners i.e. Balkans, this hour can range between 10 minutes before 10 o'clock and 10 minutes past 10 o'clock. Therefore the ethno-cultural differences in decision making should be taken very seriously since it can have an effect of delivering the right answer just-in-time. In the framework of the pervious researches [1], [11], [12], [13] Group Decision Support Systems [9] that are already implemented by many companies, can be improved by adding an important feature: the transcultural interface for *just-in-time decision making* i.e. decision delivered on time.

2 RELATED WORK AND TERMINOLOGY

In order to make the context clearer some concepts that are being used in this paper are explained in the further terminology that should get the readers more acquainted to them therefore to understand the purpose of this undertaking. In line with this terminology the related work will be presented so as with this section to explain all or at least a part of the operating concepts that otherwise could be differently interpreted. On short, this section has the purpose of disambiguating some terms that have a slightly different meaning in this paper than in general use.

Creolization – as a concept is old enough to be common for people since it emerged after the European discovered Americas to portray the process by which Old World life forms became indigenous in the New World. Presently, it appears in writings on globalization and postmodernism as a synonym of *hybridism* and *syncretism* to describe the mixtures occurring amongst societies in an age of migration and telecommunications. It has been intensely studied by linguists looking at the emergence of new languages from two or more prior languages [3]. In this paper the concept is referred to as a verb for users adopting different means of communication i.e. CAS [1] and, since the term *creole* is believed to have derived from the Latin word *creare* meaning *to create* [4], then its usage in the context of creating new means for communication is relevant.

Decision-making – two definitions for this concept presenting it: (1) as the study of identifying and choosing alternatives; the solution should have highest probability of success or effectiveness and (2) as the process of sufficiently reducing uncertainty and doubt about alternatives to allow a reasonable choice to be made from among them. This definition stresses the information-gathering function of decision making. It should be noted here that uncertainty is reduced rather than eliminated. Very few decisions are made with absolute certainty because complete knowledge about all the alternatives is seldom possible. Thus, every decision involves a certain amount of risk [6]. The aspects depicted in second definition are deepened in another *paper that focuses on gambler's fallacy belief in line with urgent decision-making* [9].

Just-in-time – is differently exploited herein then its common use [8] because is seen as a concept that refers to a decision that must be taken *on time;* therefore, its presence in this paper is for emphasising the fact that in a decisional process, *time* is very important. In urgent situations, decisions must be made *immediately*. The catch is that if a decision is not made *just-in-time* it becomes a decision *just-in-case* i.e. which is the opposite, and it will no longer be worthy for the immediate issue, instead will become a prepared decision for a similar problem that could emerge at some point in the future.

Protensity – a member of the family of time-related features presented in detail in [5] and [12] – has several definitions, all of them revolving around the (human) perception of time. Also, it is used as an attribute that differentiates static (text or image-based) from dynamic information (sound-based messages ranging from simple sounds to more complex musical compositions) that need to unwind in time in order to be perceived. It is presented in this paper to support the description and explanations of the toy problem that are going to be presented in the following sections. However, to keep it simple, this concept represents the attribute of a process characterised by its temporality or movement forward in time.

Transcultural interface (TI) – is presented in more detail in an umbrella paper. Briefly, a TI is able to merge the two complementary premises of a communication between humans belonging to different cultures preserving the cultural identity and creating in the same time a common denominator between the national identity of a communication peer and the culture of the other [1].

3 "YOUR TIME" AND "MY TIME" IN CREOLIZATION

Creolization and decision making concepts are interrelated because creole and pidgin languages have emerged as a response to the need of a communication bridge between trading ethnic groups [14]. The term *creole* comes from French *créole*, from Spanish *criollo*, and from Portuguese *crioulo*, stemming from the verb *criar* (translated "to breed") from the Portuguese, or *creare* (translated "to create", "to produce") from Latin.

A simplified language derived from two or more languages is called a *pidgin*. It is a contact language developed and used by people who do not share a common language in a given geographical area. It is used in a limited way and the structure is very simplistic. Since they serve a single basic purpose (trading for example), they usually die out. However, if the pidgin is used long enough, it begins to evolve into a more rich language with a more complex structure and richer vocabulary. Once the pidgin has evolved and has acquired native speakers, it becomes a creole [7].

Since new languages had emerged as a need for communication in purposes like trading, new means of communication can also be created nowadays on the same basis, for helping people to express themselves in their own cultural patterns. Online tools are being developed continuously as it happens in this very moment, every tool being even more sophisticated as the pervious one, all being user-centred and meant to ease and aid people in every activity. In this context, creating such as transcultural interfaces which to translate cultural symbols, icons or perceptions into the corresponding cultural pattern of the communication peer seems natural as the technological development seeks human's need, the IT online tools become day after another more humanistic and user centred.

There is no doubt that every-day life activity is aided by the computer starting with basic needs (online purchasing for food and cloths) to personal fulfilment needs (reading, sharing thoughts or staying in touch with the dear ones), also business are being developed online: the decision-making process as element of this last category can nowadays be developed remotely between two or more decision-makers belonging to different geographical areas, owing this to the technological development. In the same manner pidgin languages had emerged, presently translation will progress from textual, semantically correct, to multimodal, culturally adequate, based on common concepts and "grammar" (rules to combine them into meaningful sentences) [1], [13], [12].

All cultures have unique concepts of time and ways of managing it; Edward T. Hall defines cultures as either monochronic or polychronic in respect of its attitude towards time. That does not mean that one culture is purely monochronic or purely polychronic. Undoubtedly, all cultures are to a certain extent both, but usually one of the sides dominates over the other [2].

Monochronism and polychronism concepts are related with many cultural aspects but in this very instance the focus is only on the time perspective in regards with them. On short, *the monochronic north* is characterized by an inflexible and corporeal time while the *polychronic south* is time flexible.

Monochronic or *scheduled cultures* are doing things by the clock: the emphasis is on the importance of planning every detail, keeping and adhering to strict timetables. This involves the development of medium- and long-term strategies, and a complicated system of business cases, revenue projection, agendas, memos, milestones, benchmarking and minutes to record plans and progress. There is a preference for written communication, especially for email, and decisions are based on facts and figures. Some European cultures that conform to this model include the Netherlands and the Nordic countries – Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland.

Polychronic or *flexible cultures* are almost diametrically opposed to scheduled cultures. They substitute vision for planning. They know where they want to go, but are flexible about how they get there. The watchword of a flexible culture is improvisation. Meetings may or may not start on time, and will never finish on time. This means that flexibility is needed in adjusting to timings and locations, since punctuality is not seen as an asset. The great benefit of a flexible society is that it is rapid in finding unanticipated solutions and can deal with crises faster than a scheduled culture. The reason is that effort is put into building social relationships over time, so that the relevant players know each other well and can do things easily and quickly on a personal basis. Above all, it's important to spend quality time in building relationships: a face-to-face meeting or a phone call is more important than emails and letters. The majority of the world conforms to this pattern, including the Mediterranean countries, France, Central and Eastern Europe [15] . Given these facts, in the globalizing world, where boundaries have ceased to exit and the creolization process, is developing as we speak, – a common denominator for time should exist to avoid common misunderstanding regarding it when appointing an online meeting. Consequently, the next section will present the experimental model.

4   EXPERIMENTAL MODEL

To support the explanation regarding the experimental model, two countries will be presented as to make more understandable the toy problem of this paper (Figure 1). The solution of the toy problem could be implemented as a plug-in for any instant messages service, preserving also the common communication methods: chat, voice and video. To help emphasising the toy problem, France – as a polychronic culture and Germany – a strict monochronic culture –, are chosen as models.
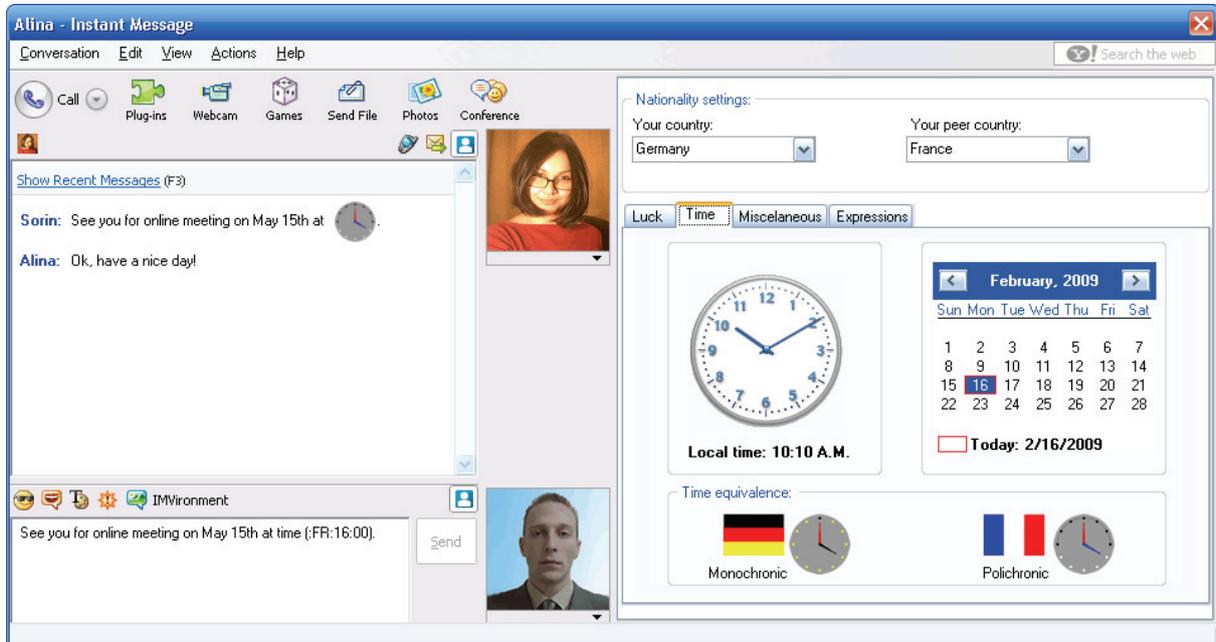

Figure 1. A possible solution for time perception ambiguity in French versus German appointment scheduling

Meetings and negotiations in France are flexible considering the polychronic feature of their culture. *Punctuality* is a relaxed affair. Being fifteen minutes late is perfectly acceptable and the further south you travel, the more flexible this becomes. *Negotiations* can become passionate. Argumentation is not meant to be quarrelsome but rather a means to question the matter in discussion, logically. The solution is to avoid overstatements [10].

Conversely, Germans stick to punctuality. An invitation for 4:00 p.m. means *exactly* 4:00 p.m.; not 15 minutes earlier and not 15 minutes later. *Fashionably late* is not a German custom. Arriving late will certainly draw a comment and, in a business situation can put one in a compromised position [16].

5   CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Even lacking yet a "time-oriented" ontology, such a solution can be workable for toy problems and easy to implement. It is promising for interpreting icon-based messages and, hence, for CAS as a whole by enabling users to schedule online meetings and avoiding culturally conditioned time perception ambiguities.

Immediate objectives are to continue the research in the domain of CAS in relation with creolization and culturally conditioned time perception (focusing also on the protensional characteristics of the messages). In line with this objective, an ontology with a powerful temporal dimension should be created.

The future researches will focus on creating TIs for different toy problems from diverse online activity domains. Even if the proposed scenario is relevant, unfortunately the dialog presented in the example might be seen as self-indulgent, that is why the authors are emphasising whenever possible the need of a transdiciplinary team for this kind of research.

6   ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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