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# Threatening and warning speech acts: A contrastive pragmatics study of Dominican Spanish and American English

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## Abstract

The present study examines threats and warnings in speech among Dominican speakers of Spanish and American speakers of English. The study employed a spoken discourse completion task (DCT), following the approach used by Nelson et al., (2002). The collected data was then coded and analyzed with consideration to the study's research questions; investigating which warning/threatening strategies are used most commonly by Dominican Spanish and American English Speakers, the similarities and differences in the rates of usage of indirectness strategies among the participant groups, and examined the relationship between the politeness parameters in a given situation and the level of indirectness in threats among both participant groups. The key finding from the study was that Dominican Spanish speakers produce threats and warnings with a higher level of directness than American speakers. Findings suggest that Dominican Spanish speakers and American English speakers employ mostly similar strategies when producing a threat or warning, with both groups most commonly employing the strategy of offering reason. However, the Dominican Spanish group displayed overall higher levels of directness than the American English participants.

*Keywords: Cross-cultural pragmatics, Speech acts, Threats, Warnings*

## Introduction

Within pragmatics research, the analysis of speech acts through the cross-cultural lens can provide crucial information on cross-cultural communication, second language instruction, and the sociocultural implications of language use. This research aims to bridge the gap between the cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) study of the Spanish language and warning and threatening acts in speech. The linguistic identity of Dominicans in the United States is complex and multifaceted. The Dominican dialect, and in turn, the Dominican people, are often regarded unfavorably, poorly educated, and impoverished by not only other Hispanic ethnic groups, but by Dominicans themselves (Terrell 1982; Zentella 2007; Carter, & Callesano, 2018). The works of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) introduced the foundational concepts of speech act theory, delineating the exact definition of a speech act, and how a speech act operates within verbal communication. Face-threatening acts, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), refer to speech acts that compromise the face of either the interlocutor or the addresser, and characterize threats and warnings as face-threatening acts. CCP research investigates language in the cultural context, and how sociocultural factors influence communicative interactions between humans. This study considers two cultural groups; American English speakers and Dominican Spanish speakers, and how these respective groups express threats and warnings in speech.

## Review of Previous Literature

López-Rousseau & Ketelaar (2004) argue that in speech, threats are the negative paradox to promises, while warnings are the negative paradox to advice. Because warnings functions as the opposing counterpart to advice, theories surrounding politeness and advice are relevant to consider. As they are perceived as impeding the interlocutor's ability to make their own decision, words of advice are largely considered as rude and

impolite amongst English speakers (Harrison & Barlow, 2009). Due to this perception, direct instruction is viewed negatively by English speakers and indirect advice is preferred. Contrarily, Spanish does not exhibit this avoidance of directness and does not share the feeling that offering direct guidance is unrefined or bad-mannered. Rather, giving advice is seen favorably, as signaling one's own confidence and self-assurance (Harrison & Barlow, 2009).

Previous research on face-threatening speech acts suggest that Spanish speakers more often favor directness when asserting a face-threatening act as compared to English speakers, as observed when making requests and apologies (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Marquez-Reiter, 2000). Marsily (2018) investigated directness and indirectness strategies between Belgian French and Peninsular Spanish; their conclusions corroborate previous research on the higher level of directness used in Spanish when compared to other languages. Pinto and Raschio (2007) compared requests between monolingual native Mexican Spanish speakers, bilingual Spanish-English speakers living in the United States, and monolingual American English speakers. Among the three groups, the monolingual Mexican Spanish group exhibited the highest level of directness, while the Spanish-English bilingual group produced requests more similarly to the monolingual English group, favoring indirectness.

A discourse completion task (DCT) is a data collection instrument that presents a participant with a hypothetical situation, with the goal to elicit a targeted speech act. Given their ability to be translated, delivered verbally or through a written medium, and its ability to be administered to a large number of participants, they make an optimal tool for comparative studies (Beebe & Cummings, 1985). Nevertheless, DCTs do pose disadvantages, as they do not represent an exact reproduction of spontaneous, real-time speech. Because DCTs tend to only consist of a few sentences, they lack the interactional contexts of a true conversation (Golato, 2003). Further, it must be taken into account that DCTs may present an issue eliciting target speech data from participants of non-western cultures (Rose, 1994, Rose & Ono, 1995, Hinkel, 1997).

While considering how Dominican people interact in American society, it is vital to also consider how they are perceived by the American people, the Latino community as a whole, and by Dominicans themselves. Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban Spanish compose the Caribbean dialect, with all nations sharing similar phonology and phonetics (Carter, & Callesano, 2018). Research has repeatedly found that Spanish speakers perceive Caribbean dialects more negatively than other dialects (Garcia et al., 1988, Alfaraz 2002, Otheguy et al., 2007). Just as other Spanish-speaking groups hold a negative image of Caribbean dialects, speakers of Caribbean dialects tend to perceive themselves negatively and stigmatize their own speech (Duany, 1998), further supported by the conclusions of Zentella (2007), finding that 20% of Dominican participants would feel insulted if they were identified as Dominican. Further, Dominicans strongly did not feel their dialect should be a variety taught in Spanish language instruction, at significantly higher rates than Colombians, Cubans, or Puerto Ricans (Zentella, 2007).

## **Research Questions**

This study serves to examine the use of threats and warnings in Dominican Spanish and American English. The research questions at hand are:

1. Which warning/threatening strategies are used most commonly utilized by Dominican Spanish and American English Speakers?
2. Are there differences in the rates of use of indirectness strategies among American English speakers and Dominican Spanish speakers?

3. What is the relationship between the politeness parameters in a given situation and the level of indirectness in threats?

### Methodology

The study included 32 participants, 16 English-speaking Americans, and 16 Dominican and Dominican-American Spanish speakers. Ten American participants identified as female, five as male, and one as non-binary. Thirteen Dominican participants identified as female, and three identified as male. Within the Dominican speaker group, all of the participants were fluent speakers of Spanish. 11 of the Dominican Spanish speakers had grown up Spanish-English bilingual, with both languages being their L1s, and the remainder of the Dominican participants reported only Spanish as their first language, though all Dominican participants had at least an intermediate level of English proficiency. All of the American participants were native, L1 speakers of English.

The method of data collection in this study is a Discourse Completion Task (DCT), delivered verbally. The DCT, established by Beebe et al. (1990), was selected as the instrument for elicitation as it allowed for the complete customization of the situations to be presented, such as the power status of the participant, and allows for the acquisition of a large number of responses (Beebe & Cummings, 1985). When developing the DCT for this study, it was crucial to create scenarios that were feasible for the participants to envision themselves in, particularly concerning the situations in which the participant must place themselves in a hypothetical position of power over the interlocutor. Further, Yuan (1996, 2001) found that delivering a DCT verbally to participants may provide more accurate results, producing responses more similar to that of spontaneous speech, than written DCTs.

### Data Coding and Taxonomy

In order to analyze the data, the data was first codified using a deductive coding method. Through reviewing previous research (Al-Omari, 2007, Bataineh & Aljamal, 2014, Nelson et al., 2002), which investigated face-threatening acts using a DCT, I identified nine strategies that I felt were distinct and would be identifiable in the speech of both the American English and Dominican Spanish groups. The strategies of regret and offering reasoning were modeled after the taxonomy of Nelson et al. (2002). The request, mention of consequences, offering assistance, and advising strategies were modeled after the taxonomy of Bataineh and Aljamal (2014). The strategies of offering solutions and reminding were modeled from the taxonomy of Al-Omari (2007). The definitions of Palmer (1981) and Mey (2009) provided the framework of the direct strategy. To identify the strategies used within each response, the data was parsed, using procedures similar to Nelson et al. (2002), as introduced by Chafe (1980). Each response was dissected into communicative units, with each unit assigned its relevant code. Appendix 2 presents the data coding classifications and the taxonomy utilized to categorize the communicative units.

### Analysis and Findings

**Table 1: Total Strategy Counts**

	Total # of American English Strategies	Total # of Dominican Spanish Strategies
M	42.600	33.9
SD	6.670	9.315

Min	28.000	23.000
Max	51.000	557.000
Total # of communicative response units	427	339

The American English data set generated 427 verbal response units in total. Per situation, the minimum number of strategies elicited was 28, given by situation one. The maximum number of strategies elicited was 51, by situation ten. The average amount of strategies produced per situation is 42.6, with a standard deviation of 6.670. In total, the Dominican Spanish participant group yielded 339 communicative units. The minimum number of strategies produced in a given situation was 23, by situation three, whereas the maximum number of strategies was produced by situation two, generating 57 strategies. The mean number of strategies given per situation is 33.9, with a standard deviation of 9.315.

#### RQ 1: Frequency of Strategy Use Across Participant Groups

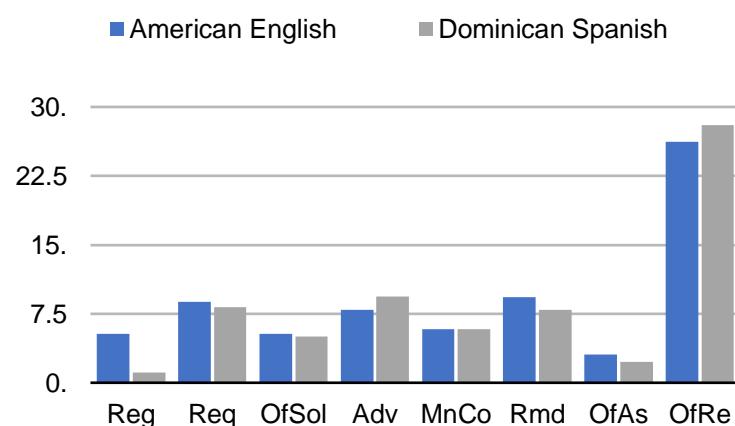
As shown in Figure 1, offering reasons (OfRe) was the most common strategy among both participant groups; the American English speaker group employed the OfRe strategy in 26.2 per 100 communicative units, and the Dominican Spanish speaker group employed the OfRe strategy in 28.02 per 100 communicative units. Regret (Reg) featured the largest difference in its rates of usage among the two participant groups, a difference of 4.2 (Figure 1).

#### RQ 2: Variation of Strategy Usage Across Participant Groups

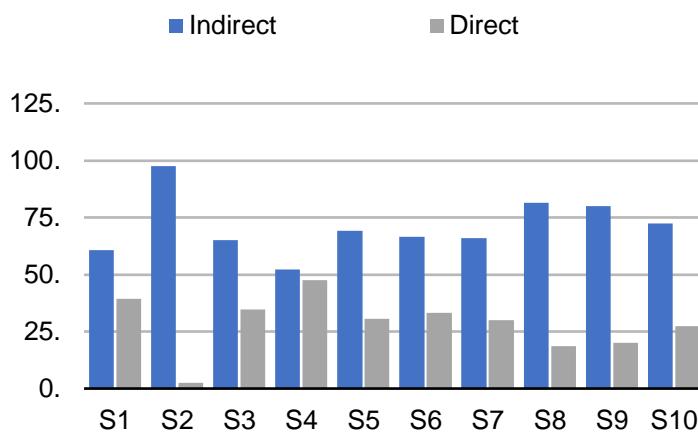
As displayed in Figures 2 & 3, both the American English speaker group and the Dominican Spanish speaker group favored indirect strategies over direct strategies in every situation (Figures 2 &

RQ 3: Politeness Parameters and Indirectness 3). Regarding direct strategies, American English participants averaged 28.3 per 100 response units while Dominican Spanish participants displayed a higher average of 34.9 per 100 response units (Figures 2 & 3).

**Figure 1: Usage of Indirectness Strategies (Normed per 100 Communicative Units)**



**Figure 2: American English Direct vs. Indirect Strategy Usage (Normed per 100)**



**Figure 3: Dominican Spanish Direct vs. Indirect Strategy Usage (Normed per 100)**

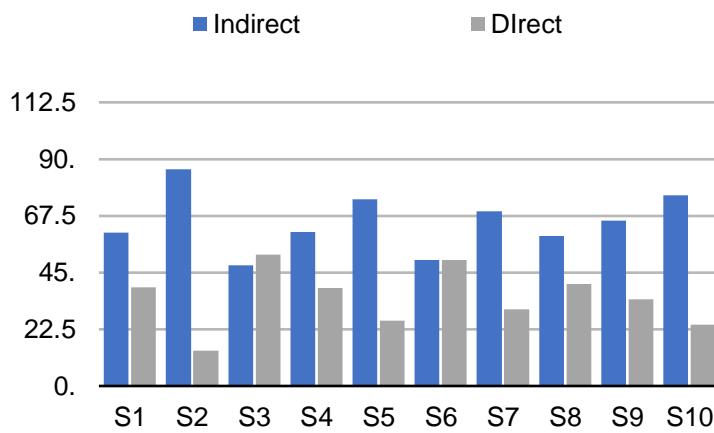


Table 2 explains the politeness parameters as per Scollon and Scollon's (1983) definitions, and identifies which politeness system each situation in the DCT adhered to.

**Table 2: Definitions of Politeness Parameters (Scollon & Scollon, 1983)**

Solidarity (DCT Situations 3, 6, 10)	Participants are close, and hold equal status
Hierarchy (DCT Situations 2, 5, 7)	Participants are not close, and the power status is imbalanced between participants.
Deference (DCT Situations 1, 4, 8,9)	There is an equal status of power, but participants are not close

Table 3, Table 4, and Figure 4 examine the link between the politeness system of a given situation (Scollon & Scollon, 1983), and the level of indirectness employed by the participants. The American English participants demonstrated higher levels of indirectness within every system of politeness when compared to the Dominican Spanish participants (Table 3, Table 4, and Figure 4). The solidarity system yielded the largest difference between indirectness levels among the two groups.

The American English participants produced 68.06 indirectness strategies per 100 units, while the Dominican Spanish participants produced 61.7 indirectness strategies per 100 units.

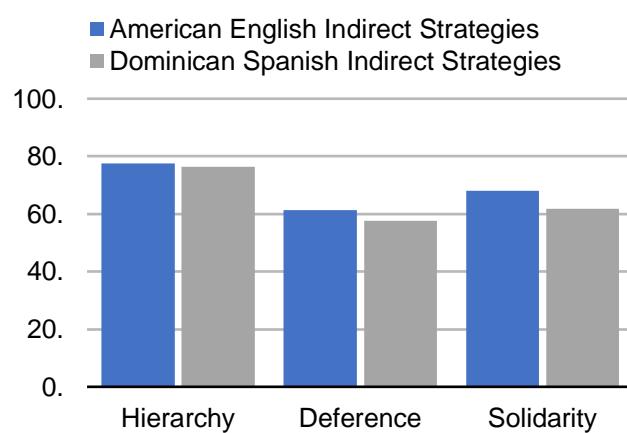
**Table 3: Dominican Spanish Indirect Strategy Usage by Politeness system (Normed per 100 Communicative Units)**

	Hierarchy	Solidarity	Deference	
M	76.4	57.7	61.7	
SD	8.5	15.3	2.6	
Min	69.4	47.8	59.4	
Max	85.9	75.5	65.6	

**Table 4: American English Indirect Strategy Usage by Politeness system (Normed per 100 Communicative Units)**

	Hierarchy	Deference	Solidarity	
M	77.6	61.3	68.0	
SD	17.3	13.0	3.9	
Min	66.0	52.3	65.1	
Max	97.6	80.0	72.5	

**Figure 4: Use of Indirectness Strategies by Politeness Strategy (Normed Per 100 Communicative Units)**



### Discussion and Conclusion

Past studies examining the use of face-threatening acts in the Spanish language include Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) and Marquez-Reiter (2000), which suggest that Spanish speakers more often favor directness strategies than their English-speaking counterparts when producing a face-threatening act in speech. Further, Marsily (2018) found that Peninsular Spanish speakers use directness strategies at a higher level than Belgian

French speakers when making requests. Moreover, Pinto and Raschio (2007) found that Mexican native speakers of Spanish elicited requests with a higher level of directness than American speakers of English, while bilingual speakers of English and Spanish produced requests with a level of similar directness as monolingual English speakers. The findings of this study support the conclusions of previous studies, suggesting that Spanish speakers do tend to employ more directness strategies in speech when producing a face-threatening act than English language speakers, and suggest that Dominican Spanish speakers consistently employ higher levels of directness strategies, regardless of the politeness parameters in a given situation, when compared to the American English speaker group.

Considering the study's first research question, the strategy of Offering reasons (OfRe), which occurred in 26.2 out of every 100 communication units for American English speakers and 28.02 out of every 100 communicative units for Dominican Spanish speakers, respectively, was by far the most often used by both groups. Resolving the second research question, both participant groups strongly favored using indirectness methods in their responses over direct strategies. However, when compared to the American English speaker group, the Dominican Spanish speaker group exhibited an overall higher degree of directness and a lower level of indirectness. Regarding the final research question, it was found that of the three politeness systems, the situations adhering to the hierarchy system produced the highest degrees of indirectness, present in both the Dominican Spanish and American English participant groups. The lowest rates of indirectness were seen in both groups under the situations that adhered to the deference system. With that being said, the American English participant group consistently displayed a higher level of indirectness than the Dominican Spanish group across all politeness frameworks.

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## **Appendix 1. The DCT, Spanish and English**

### **1. The English DCT**

**Instructions: You will have a hypothetical situation read out to you. You will respond with what you personally feel is the most appropriate response to the given situation. Please answer quickly with your most immediate and natural response is.**

1. You are in the car with your friend, sitting in the passenger seat. They are speeding slightly, going about 8 miles above the speed limit. Just up ahead you see a police car on the side of the road. What do you say to your friend?
2. You are working in an office as a supervisor. You oversee your coworker who's responsibilities including submitting a data report every week. It is now 24 hours before the data report is due and if your coworker is late on submitting this report they will face disciplinary action, plus your coworker had been late on the data report last week. How do you bring this up with your colleague?
3. You have just run into your next door neighbor, who has a bad habit of throwing loud parties late during most weeknights, and they have just had one again the night before. You have discussed this issue with them before but this behavior has not changed, and you are now considering taking further action legally. What will you say to your neighbor?
4. You and your friend are going on vacation together. You have a taxi booked to pick you both up and bring you to the airport. If you miss this taxi, you both will not have time to order a new one and you will miss your flight completely. The taxi is now just a few minutes away but your roommate is still not ready to leave yet. How do you address this with your friend?
5. You are the owner of an apartment which you rent to a tenant. Your tenant's rent bill is now due for the month and they still has not paid their share. If they miss this bill, you will have to evict them, as stated in the lease they signed. What do you say to them?
6. Your coworker has a habit of pinching your thigh every time you pass their desk. You have expressed that this makes you very uncomfortable, but they have not stopped doing it every time you walk past them. You are now planning on telling your boss about these incidents if they continue this behavior. How do you tell your coworker this?
7. You are babysitting your neighbor's 9 year old son. His bedtime is 10 pm, but it is now 10:30 pm and he is refusing to go to sleep. You were instructed by his parents to call them if he gives you any behavioral issues. How do you express this to him?
8. Your roommate has been stealing your groceries from the fridge without your permission. You were planning to sign a lease for next year with them, but this behavior is making you rethink that decision. How do you express this to them?

9. You are out at the bar with your friend. They have had a few too many drinks, and are now acting a bit rowdy. The bouncer has just pulled you aside and said if your friend does not calm down, they will be kicked out. What do you say to your friend?

10. The woman in the apartment next to yours has a very loud dog that barks throughout the night making it hard to sleep. You have expressed this issue to her numerous times, but she does not take it seriously. You are now planning to complain to the owner of the building about this ongoing issue if it does not stop. How do you express these plans to her?

## **2. Spanish Translation of the DCT**

**Instrucciones: Se le leerá una situación hipotética. Responderá con lo que personalmente sienta que es la respuesta más apropiada para la situación dada. Por favor responda rápidamente con su respuesta más inmediata y natural.**

1. Estás en el carro con tu amigo, sentado en la silla del pasajero. Tu amigo van un poco rápido, van como 8 millas por encima del límite de velocidad. Un poco más adelante ve un carro de policía al costado de la calle. ¿Qué le dices a tu amigo?

2. Tú estás trabajando en una oficina como supervisor. Usted supervisa a tu compañero de trabajo, quién tiene responsabilidades incluyen que enviar un informe de datos cada semana. Ahora son veinticuatro horas antes de la fecha de vencimiento y si llega tarde, tu compañero enfrentará una acción disciplinaria, además de eso, tu compañero llegó tarde la semana pasada. ¿Cómo le dices esto a tu compañero?

3. Te acabas de encontrar con tu vecino de al lado, quien usualmente organizar fiestas ruidosas hasta tarde la mayoría de las noches entre semana, y acaba de tener una la noche anterior. Ha discutido este problema con ellos antes, pero este comportamiento no ha cambiado, y ahora está considerando tomar medidas legales. ¿Qué le dirás a tu vecino?

4. Tú y tu amigo se van de vacaciones juntos. Tienes reservado un taxi para que te recoja y te lleve al aeropuerto. Si pierde este taxi, ninguno de los dos tendrá tiempo de pedir uno nuevo y perderá su vuelo por completo. El taxi está ahora a solo unos minutos de distancia, pero tu amigo no está listo para irse. ¿Qué le dices a tu amigo?

5. Tú es el propietario de un apartamento que rentan a un inquilino. La factura de su inquilino ahora vence por el mes, pero no ha pagado su parte. Si no pagan esta factura, tendrá que desalojarlos, como se indica en el contrato que firmaron. Qué les dices a ellos?

6. Tu compañero de trabajo te pellizca la pierna cada vez que pasas por su escritorio. Has expresado que esto te incomoda mucho, pero no han dejado de hacerlo cada vez que pasas junto a ellos. ahora planea contarle a su jefe sobre estos incidentes si continúa. ¿Cómo le dices esto a tu compañero de trabajo?

7. Estás cuidando al hijo de tu vecino, tiene 9 años. Su hora de acostarse es a las diez, pero ahora son las diez y media y se niega a ir a dormir. Sus padres le dijeron que los llamara si tenía algún problema. ¿Qué le dices?

8. Tu compañero de cuarto te ha estado robando tu comida sin tu permiso. Estaba planeando firmar un contrato de arrendamiento para el próximo año con ellos, pero este problema te está haciendo reconsiderar esa decisión. ¿Cómo le dices a tu compañera de cuarto esto?

9. Estás en el bar con tu amigo. Han tomado demasiados bebidas y ahora están actuando un poco borracho. El portero acaba de apartarte y te dice que si tu amigo no se calma, lo echarán. ¿Qué le dices a tu amigo?

10. La señora del apartamento de al lado tiene un perro muy ruidoso que ladra toda la noche. por eso es difícil para dormir. Le has expresado este problema en numerosas ocasiones, pero ella no se lo toma en serio. Ahora planea quejarse al propietario del edificio sobre este problema. Qué le dices a tu vecina?

## Appendix 2: Taxonomy of Warning and Threatening Strategies

Strategy and Strategy Code	Definition of Strategy	Examples from the Data Set
<b>Direct Threat / Warning (Dir)</b>	A direct threat or warning can appear explicit or implicitly, and are typically easy for the interlocutor to identify as a warning or threat, in the case of warnings the act being performed can be named in the utterance (Palmer 1981), but not always. Direct utterances can be implicit, in which the overt naming of the behaviour is absent (Mey, 2009).	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Participant 1)  I'm gonna have to call your mom and dad if you don't if you don't go to sleep soon (Participant 12)
<b>Regret (Rgt)</b>	Regret strategies involve the expression of contrition, usually including a statement of apology, sorrow, or dissatisfaction towards the actions the speaker is going to take.	Porque yo, lo siento no soy egoísta <i>Because I'm sorry I'm not selfish</i> (Participant 6)  I didn't really want this to happen but you're leaving me no choice (Participant 11)
<b>Request (Req)</b>	A request is a directive which functions to conduct the interlocutor to complete an action (Searle 1969). The strategy of request typically is expressed as an interrogative by the addressor to the interlocutor, as a method to express the action they want performed.	por favor para  <i>Please stop</i> (Participant 15)  Please let me know if that's gonna be a possibility or not (Participant 16)
<b>Offering solutions (OfSo)</b>	Offering solutions involves the speaker offering alternative courses of action to the interlocutor in order for the speaker's intended outcome to still be achieved.	O ya si quieres ser mitad y mitad pues está otra cosa  <i>Or if you want to be half and half then there's something else</i> (Participant 2)  You know if you if you go right now I don't have to call them (Participant 4)

<b>Advising (Adv)</b>	The action of advising operates similarly to advice, in which the speaker gives the interlocutor a conditional tip, where the interlocutor has a degree of control over the subsequent action (Wray et al, 2015).	Toman las cosas mas importantes  <i>Take the most important things</i> (Participant 8)  You should slow down (Participant 3)
<b>Mention of consequences (MnCo)</b>	This strategy involves the addressor presenting the potential consequences of the interlocutor's actions, or lack of actions, as a means to threaten or warn the addressee.	Y recurso humano toman las propias medidas para recorrer, para corregir lo  <i>and human resources will take their own measures to correct, to correct them</i> (Participant 11)  Because there is the possible possibility of disciplinary action being taken against them (Participant 16)
<b>Reminding (Rmd)</b>	The strategy of reminding involves prompting the interlocutor with the issue at hand and action you want them to complete. It prompts the action to the interlocutor, without the speaker having to utilize another strategy in order to achieve the desired goal.	Porque no controla su perro?  <i>Why don't you control your dog?</i> (Participant 12)  Hey how was your night last night? (Participant 7)
<b>Offering Assistance (OfAs)</b>	Offering assistance functions similarly to reminding, where the issue which the speaker is attempting to warn or threaten is promoted to the interlocutor. However in this strategy, the speaker offers aid to the interlocutor.	Necesitas ayuda?  Do you need help? (Participant 8)  Do you need help with any rental assistance programs (Participant 7)
<b>Offering Reasoning (OfRe)</b>	The strategy functions to offer an explanation or justification to the interlocutor as to why they are being warned or threatened by the speaker in the given situation.	Es muy serio la situación  <i>The situation is very serious</i> (Participant 8)  It's very annoying to be hearing loud noises all the time (Participant 11)

# **‘They’re succinct nuggets of knowledge building’: Digital micro learning and lecturer identities**

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## **Abstract**

Situated in the context of prolific continuous professional development interventions across international higher education, this paper reports on digital micro learning and lecturer identities. While digital micro learning has been heralded as offering a nonintrusive, granular and engaging approach to continuing professional development, there is a paucity of qualitative studies in this domain. Seeking to bridge this gap, semi-structured, visual elicitation interviews with lecturers in a United Arab Emirates’ college and a document analysis yielded a rich description of the situated learning experiences of the participants. Applying a socio-cultural identity lens, the thematic analysis revealed the avenues for identity reification and the barriers which trigger marginalised identities. Course accessibility advantages, small batch learning and meaningful reflexive opportunities were drivers to engagement, learning and imagining future professional selves. Meanwhile, impediments to digital micro learning which constrained identity negotiation were forced compliance with mandatory courses and perfunctory, ineffective digital peer collaboration.

*Key words: continuous professional development, micro learning, higher education, identity*

## **Introduction**

Digital micro learning (DML) is a relatively new, and under-researched, approach to continuous professional development (CPD) (Jomah et al., 2016). This paper presents findings from a larger qualitative study in college in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which sought to examine the relationship between DML and lecturer identities, mobilising Wenger’s (1998) seminal framework of identity-in-practice (IiP). Following a thematic analysis of interview transcripts and documents, the research revealed that while some design aspects of DML interventions contributed to the positive reification of lecturer identities, there were other DML factors which restricted learner engagement and marginalised identities.

## **Continuous professional development and digital micro learning**

In higher education, the pursuance of professionalism is often associated with lecturers actively seeking out advanced knowledge and skills to connect, engage and legitimise their professional regime of competence (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). This critical aspect of lecturer identity formation is linked to a commitment to lifelong learning which is often operationalised through extensive involvement in CPD activities (Armour & Makopoulou, 2012). Alongside this, institutional CPD offerings, such as workshops and courses, have been increasingly introduced in higher education in response to the performativity agenda, accountability demands and evolving forms of digital edtech which require substantial training (Bamber & Stefani, 2016).

Digital CPD is also becoming more pervasive as it may harmonise educators’ learning with their busy occupational schedules and personal commitments (Vu et al., 2014). The flexibility of digital learning was foregrounded even further due to the disruptions precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic when face to face courses were inaccessible. Digital CPD is now often leveraged to create bounded online spaces in which

professional learners can participate in pedagogical discourse with peers, engage in deep reflective practice and enjoy the freedom of self-directed learning (Signer, 2008). While there is much academic discourse relating to the value of social interaction and online learning communities, there is a paucity of evidence relating to concrete principles that might foster substantive learning (Teräs, 2016). Moreover, digital CPD learners have reported challenges spanning excessive course demands, technological difficulties, absence of motivation and inadequate support (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2020).

In contrast, DML interventions might be more effective since they offer opportunities to increase lecturer-as-learner commitment through absorbable, memorable small chunks of content (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2020) with assignments accomplished at the learner's own pace, raising autonomy and allowing the management of one's own knowledge acquisition (Wynants & Dennis, 2018). However, the efficacy of this digital form of instruction is dependent on the organisation's willingness and ability to proffer applicable learning trajectories, clarify the relevance of learning outcomes and provide dedicated faculty support (Coakley et al., 2017). Furthermore, to achieve micro learning objectives, digital course sites should permit accessible and ongoing interactions between specialists and participants, encourage critical thinking, employ andragogical precepts and invoke curiosity (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2020). At the research site, both mandatory and elective micro courses form part of distinct learning pathways and are two hours in length. One hour is devoted to online instructional time, and the remaining hour used for reflective posts and discussion fora interactions, which involve commenting constructively on at least two colleagues' reflective posts. Some examples are shown in Table 1, below.

**Table 1** *Learning pathways and example courses*

DML learning pathway	Example courses
<i>Technology for teaching</i>	Introduction to Nearpod Planning with the TPACK framework
<i>Instructional principles</i>	Bloom's taxonomy Instructional design tips
<i>The learning management system</i>	Creating an assignment Using rubrics effectively

### **Identity-in-practice**

Through a social-cultural lens, identities are not characterised as fixed and stable, but rather they are dynamic and in flux (Howard, 2021). For Wenger (1998, p. 151) identity work takes place through practice 'in the constant work of negotiating the self'. Wenger's (1998) work examined this phenomenon at length, resulting in his advancement of the triadic model of IIP which is experienced through engagement, alignment and imagination. Firstly, engagement is reflected in the social actor's personal investment in tasks and activities as they work with others in enterprises and negotiate meaning. This aspect of IIP helps to build up contextualised images of the self (Trent, 2011). Additionally, alignment pertains to how individuals consolidate their awareness of their practice into the wider domain of coordinating and collaborating with others (Wenger, 1998). Lastly, while 'extrapolating beyond our own experience' (Trent, 2011, p. 615) we may envision future and past trajectories, which is viewed by Wenger as the third tenet of IIP: imagination. Thus, the capacity for imaginative work corresponds with how actors can conceive images of the self, which are extraneous to the immediate social practices in which they are engaged (Wenger, 1998). In the current, high pressured climate of higher education, and the increasing CPD demands exerted on academics, it is conceivable that ongoing interventions might yield opportunities and embed constraints in the negotiation of lecturers' learner and professional identities (Webster-Wright, 2009). As the literature regarding lecturers'

enactment of DML is noticeably sparse, it was anticipated that this study could yield insight into the relationship between DML and lecturer identities. The research question framing this study is: *How do lecturers negotiate identities-in-practice as they engage in DML?*

### **Research design**

This was a small-scale localised study conducted at a federal college in the UAE. Guided by the constructivist paradigm (Howard, 2022), I adopted a hermeneutic lens to interpret the lecturers' lived reality by 'grasping the relevant features' of the interventions and interpreting their influences (Schwandt, 2005, p. 98).

### **Participants**

Using a purposive strategy, I targeted lecturers from varied academic divisions to ameliorate potential bias (Abma, 2006). Five participant transcripts were used in this paper, although the original study reported on the accounts of twelve interviewees (Howard, 2021). The lecturers work in the English, Computer Science, General Education, Mathematics and Applied Media divisions. In the interests of privacy and due to the protectionist nature of the cultural context, all identifying information regarding the participants has been withheld (Howard, 2020).

### **Semi-structured visual elicitation interviews**

Collecting self-report data respects lecturers' professional identities and in-depth interviews are useful in giving voice to lecturers to gain a rich responsive understanding, or *verstehen*, of their learning experiences (Howard, 2019). As this study was conducted at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote interviews took place on Zoom. I opted to use semi-structured interviews for their flexibility and incorporated an authentic text visual elicitation technique - displaying the participants' DML transcripts and course descriptions to promote discussion and reflection (Pauwels, 2020).

### **Documents**

The participants kindly agreed to share their DML transcripts and discussion-board posts. These documents were instructive in understanding the range and number of micro-courses they had completed and evidenced the types of reflective practice they engaged in following the instructional hour of each course. Furthermore, it was possible to see how collaboration with others in the discussion fora unfolded.

### **Analysis**

I utilised Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis approach to present rich depictions of the lecturers' perspectives and experiences (Aronson, 1995). To begin, I uploaded the transcripts into *Atlas.ti 8*. I read each transcript multiple times to engage with the data, whilst writing descriptive memos and pondering initial ideas for codes (Wynants & Dennis, 2018). Next, I started to apply analytical codes by searching for patterns both in the data and from the literature previously reviewed (Wynants & Dennis, 2018). The finalised codes were arranged into themes, which was supported by the analytical tools offered by *Atlas.ti 8*, to 'reflect and describe a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 63). This paper will present two themes.

## Ethics

Ethical approval was conferred from both Lancaster University and the participating college. The lecturers were provided with a detailed information sheet and signed a consent form. I ultilsed Zoom as it offers secure recording and storage capabilities that do not necessitate access to third-party software (Archibald et al., 2019).

## Findings and discussion

In the exposition of findings below, participant's quotations are embedded in an interpretive account grounded in the relevant identity and CPD literature.

### Reification of identities

Opportunities for robust lecturer-as-professional learner identities were facilitated by the features of the DML interventions including digital delivery, short course format and the opportunities for extensive reflection permitted through the posts that were required for completion of each micro-course.

*The structure of the courses really suits me because it gives enough context to learn something new and doesn't take long to complete. It is preferable to me sitting in a room and having to listen to a presentation. It feels more like I am in control of the pace, and I can find a quiet time to do the assignment which suits me too.* (Lecturer E)

*Having this amount of control makes me want to learn and engage.* (Lecturer A)

Through the anytime, anywhere access to learning content, as described above, the lecturers were highly motivated to participate in micro learning. The analysis revealed that by utilising andragogical principles of flexibility in course design (Webster-Wright, 2009) lecturers were well positioned to leverage self-regulated approaches to their CPD. Rather than attend in-person sessions, which were seen as an onerous burden on the participants, the ability to study according to personal preferences aligned with their occupational lives and was a driver to their engagement. With DML appearing to mesh with individual development affinities (Noonan, 2018), this may add to the ongoing reification of a lifelong learning identity (Coffield et al., 2004).

In addition, micro learning content has been suggested to conform to optimal forms of information processing (Jomah et al., 2016), since new knowledge is received in manageable portions, which, for most lecturers aided their retention of information. Lecturer B's fragment below, summarises this sub-text and reflects the views of several other participants:

*The courses provide succinct nuggets of knowledge building which is much more in line with how academic life is nowadays. Everyone is so busy and long courses would be an added stress. This form of learning delivers a manageable amount of information and because of that, it is definitely easier to remember and apply.*

The reflective assignments which formed half of the course requirements were cited as highly beneficial by several participants. Since reflective practice involves contemplating learning with 'new eyes' (Wenger, 1998, p. 272) and reinterpreting past and future experiences, the assignments prompted lecturers to consciously analyse their praxis in a valued space. Within this digital space, they could imagine themselves, their idealised practice and desired results with learners (Howard, 2023). Moreover, they could experience identification with their professionalism, beyond engagement, as their knowledge was augmented (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). This was evidenced in the posts analysed, supported by the lecturers' narratives, for example:

*I've been in this profession for 24 years, and I sometimes feel like I am stuck in a rut [...] like being an experienced driver yet picking up those bad habits through the years. Devoting time and space to really*

*reflect on what I am doing and will do in the future really helps me to address that and apply my learning in practice.* (Lecturer C)

Meaningful reflection thus permitted the lecturers-as-learners to activate schemata and associate this with identifiable issues in their praxis. This presented the opportunity for faculty to challenge extant beliefs and assumptions (Rizzuto, 2017), and in turn, prompted self-exploration and negotiation as the lecturers aligned their professional identities with their learner selves (Trent, 2011). Moreover, this demonstrates how through the imaginative facet of identity negotiation, the lecturers could shape future frames of themselves which assisted in ‘the formation of emergent identities as increasingly effective, developing practitioners’ (Howard, 2021, p. 7).

### **Marginalisation of identities**

Notwithstanding the avenues for the reification of identities as described above, there were also two salient barriers to DML acceptance, evidenced in the collaborative aspect of the reflective assignments in which lecturers were required to engage with other course participants in the fora. Additionally, when there was incongruity between the institution’s mandated courses and the lecturers’ perceived expertise, this caused tension and acted as a barrier to learning and engagement.

Whilst research suggests that online collaboration can extrinsically motivate learners to be socially present and active in constructive discussion (deNoyelles et al., 2014), the lecturers’ accounts largely negated this perspective. Peer feedback was repeatedly characterised as superficial and apathetic: *There’s really no point, as nobody takes it seriously or even appears to read the post they’re commenting on* (Lecturer D). Most lecturers desired authentic discussion with their peers and could imagine its potential affordances, yet they were resolutely disappointed with the outcome in practice: *The [forums] should be really helpful because you get to learn and implement others’ ideas, but nobody does it properly* (Lecturer A). Thus, the actualised online interactions fall short of the objective of online collaboration, engender an ambivalent attitude and thus fail to promote productive shared identities of colleagues who are mutually committed to the DML process (Kreijns et al., 2014).

Secondly, the discord between institutional CPD directives, existing knowledge and course content led to a dissonance, in which learner identities could not be accommodated or aligned (Wenger, 2010). Frustration was invoked when lecturers felt compelled to trudge through recycled content (McChesney & Aldridge, 2018), especially in the predominantly theoretical courses (e.g., Bloom’s Taxonomy). As lecturers-as-learners are thought to shape their identities partially through their learning journeys, identity alignment is restrained when specific knowledge has been previously acquired, sedimented and is incompatible with some DML interventions (Wenger, 1998):

*The college should understand that some people already know the content. If you’re coming from an education background, you have studied this stuff already. It might be novel to someone coming directly from industry, but not for others. We shouldn’t all be lumped together as that is bordering on insulting.* (Lecturer C)

The preceding excerpt revealed how identities can be discredited when expertise is overlooked (Wenger, 1998). This lecturer (and others) viewed this positioning by the institution as unwarranted and it directly contravened their imagined self as a knowledgeable professional, given their subject discipline. The compulsory, yet redundant course content, regardless of its duration, is indicated as an affront to one’s professional identity and aligning oneself with colleagues who lack the same competence and knowledge is untenable.

## Conclusion

Learner and professional identities appear likely to undergo reification when lectures are afforded the opportunity to learn where and when is most conducive for them, when knowledge is delivered in digestible chunks and when extensive reflection is encouraged. On the other hand, marginalised, fragile identities may emerge when an individual's expertise is denied and redundancy in learning is unavoidable. DML CPD specialists and the broader stakeholders may benefit from regularly surveying course participants to raise awareness of the ambivalent reality of online collaboration. Acknowledging lecturers' histories and regimes of learning by embedding customised development trajectories are suggestions which could encourage lecturers to fully engage with DML, align their newly acquired knowledge with institutional goals and promote a sense of belonging and identity commitment to DML interventions (Wenger, 1998). As DML is a relatively new approach, future research could examine additional intervention features in different geographical contexts to further our understanding of this relative terra incognita.

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# ***Shojo Vocalization: How JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stone Ocean and Cheating Allowed challenged the visual KITTEN metaphor in the contemporary Japanese animation?***

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## **Abstract**

Since the increase in Otaku consumption and the popularization of Kawaii aesthetics in Japan around the 1990s, *Shojo* has become one of the most appealing and most profitable types of screen image in the contemporary anime industry. Behind this prosperity, the representations of these adorable *Shojo* characters usually follow the conceptual metaphor: SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE FEMALES ARE KITTENS, through which cognitive mechanism the *Shojo* characters are objectified as domestic kitten depriving of human intellect. Through examining the visual representation of *Shojo* characters in two recently released anime series, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stone Ocean* (2021-2023) and *Cheating Allowed* (2017), this study suggests the mainstream *Shojo* metaphorical model in Japanese anime industry can be subverted through de-gendering female bodies and exaggeratedly presenting female sexual desire. The findings indicate the representations of the two female protagonists in these two cases challenged the formulaic conventions of portraying *Shojo* characters and empowered female characters with subjectivity. The study adds new mappings to the traditional conceptual metaphor to break the predicament of the *Shojo* characters as the “muted others” in anime market.

**Key words:** *Shojo character, Japanese animation, conceptual metaphor theory*

## **Introduction**

In the history of contemporary Japanese animation, *Shojo* is a classic and well-received character archetype on screen, which generally refers to the young girl who is in her innocent, pure, but sensitive school-age. In many mainstream genre animations, the image of this character often displays the traits of childlike cuteness and vulnerability. Since the late 90s, influenced by the visual motif of animal cosplay (costume role-playing) in *galgames*<sup>1</sup> and *manga*, major animation studios have also attempted to glamorize the representation of *Shojo* characters by adding cat-like accessories (furry tail or pointy ears) to the human body (Sharp, 2011). This aesthetic confluence created the notion of kitten girl/cat-ear girl. Subsequently, in some animation hits released in the new century, the obvious accessories were replaced by some abstract and implicit cat-like elements, such as ear-like headwear and double ponytail hairstyle. This constant visual interaction between *Shojo* characters and cats generates the linguistic metaphor “*Shojo* characters are kittens” which is the instantiation of the conceptual metaphor SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN ARE KITTENS (Kövecses 2010, p.153) enhancing audience comprehension of animation artworks.

In 2017, MAPPA<sup>2</sup> studio adapted and produced the TV animation series *Cheating Allowed*. The protagonist Jabami Yumeko sometimes gives audiences a sexy kitten-like posture denoting her strong sexual

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<sup>1</sup> A popular form of digital games in the 90s. The player could imitate the process of building romantic relationship by choosing from the options that fictional character gives.

<sup>2</sup> Maruyama Animation Produce Project Association, launched in Tokyo in 2011.

attractiveness. This over-erotic representation of Yumeko's body deviates from the audience's habitual perception of the asexual *Shojo* characters. Four years later, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stone Ocean* (2021-2023) made by David Production was released on Netflix stream. As the sixth sequel, it was the first time the JoJo series animation featured a *Shojo* protagonist in the story. Even though some peaceful scenes occasionally suggest that her hairstyle is a perfect variation of the cat-ear accessory, the rough and muscular image of the protagonist Cujoh Julyne claims some fresh and rare stylistic traits.

## Literature review

### *Shojo* characters in contemporary Japanese animation

The research attention given to *Shojo* characters is much lower compared to its prominence in the cultural industry. Since the late 90s, the research on *Shojo* characters has often emerged as a supplement to the research on the controversial phenomenon of the rising *Otaku* culture. Saito Tamaki (2000), a Japanese psychologist, reviewed the development of Japanese animation in the past decades. He mainly focused on *Otaku*'s imaginary and hypothetical relationships with fictional characters while also offering a thorough view of the past dynamics of animation stylistics in the genealogical study of *Shojo* characters. Based on a similar interest in the stylistic form, Luke Sharp (2011) studied the representation of anime *Shojo* characters wearing maid costumes and cat-like accessories. This research clearly examined the formulaic aesthetics of *Shojo* characters, especially in romantic genre animation, which includes the design of costume, posture, and color. More importantly, the relevant background of the *Kawaii* style that Sharp introduced provides us with a basic point to anchor our analysis of stylistic conventions. Galbraith (2009, 2014), a cultural specialist, separately recorded the conversations with over ten "insiders" (anime-makers and fans). Although offering less theoretical analysis, these two interview collections update our understanding of *Shojo* characters by retracing the practice of anime-making. Accordingly, being distinguished from the mainstream discussion of how animation *affects* social ideology, our research intends to expand the examination of how *Shojo* characters are *represented* on screen. Based on the previous studies on animation stylistics, we expect the research can reiterate the attention to the *style and form* of *Shojo* characters in contemporary Japanese animation.

### Conceptual metaphor

Metaphor has long been considered a rhetorical device ever since Aristotle's times. However, cognitive linguistics (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, also see Kövecses 2010) did not rely on the metaphorical correlation merely on the resemblance between entities. Instead, they argued that metaphor is abundant and pervasive not just in language but in our conceptual system influencing the way we think and act (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p.3). They called it *conceptual metaphor*—"understanding one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete)" which is achieved through systematic correspondences (Kövecses, 2010). Lakoff and Johnson proposed "Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)" to characterize cognitive activities, which has later been thoroughly elaborated by Kövecses (2010). According to CMT, the "conceptual domain" refers to "any coherent organization of experience" (Kövecses 2010, p.4). One conceptual metaphor contains at least two conceptual domains by which one is understood (the target domain) by mapping the elements and relations of another (the source domain) into it. A very important parameter to roughly categorize conceptual metaphors is to judge whether it is more conventional or novel. Conventional means that language communities habitually use and accept certain words or phrases. By contrast, novel metaphor is the infrequent and unfamiliar usage of metaphor expression (Phillip, 2016). There

are four means for a conventional conceptual metaphor to become less conventional and more productive or imaginative (Kövecses 2010, pp.53-55):

- 1) Extending: adding new elements into the source domains
- 2) Elaborating: explaining the source domains in an unusual way
- 3) Combining: integrating the conceptual metaphor with another one
- 4) Questioning: doubting the rationality of the original conceptual metaphor

Because what we analyzed are images from animation series, they belong to *pictorial conceptual metaphor* with the following sub-categorizations (Refaie 2016, p.150):

- 1) Hybrid metaphor: presenting at least part of the source and the target and combining as a unit.
- 2) Pictorial Simile: emphasizing the similarities of the separate source and the target.
- 3) Contextual Metaphor: showing only one domain with information indicating the other.
- 4) Integrated Metaphor: using one domain as the gestalt to represent the other.

### Research questions and methodology

Since this research stands at the intersection of animation stylistic study and linguistic study, we took an interdisciplinary perspective and integrate the two research questions into a consistent framework, as shown in Figure 1. Firstly, we attempted to find out how the stylistic devices in *Cheating Allowed* and *JoJo* violate the conventional *Shojo* characters in contemporary Japanese animation. In this analysis, we assume that every animation is an art craft resulting from active making. Then, the particulars in each frame could be the materials to examine the image of *Shojo* characters. Secondly, we tried to answer how the images of these two *Shojo* protagonists separately challenge the conventional conceptual metaphor SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN ARE KITTENS. Through the lens of CMT, the linguistic analysis focused on the type of pictorial metaphor the data belong to and how the characters transfer the conventional KITTEN metaphor to novel ones.

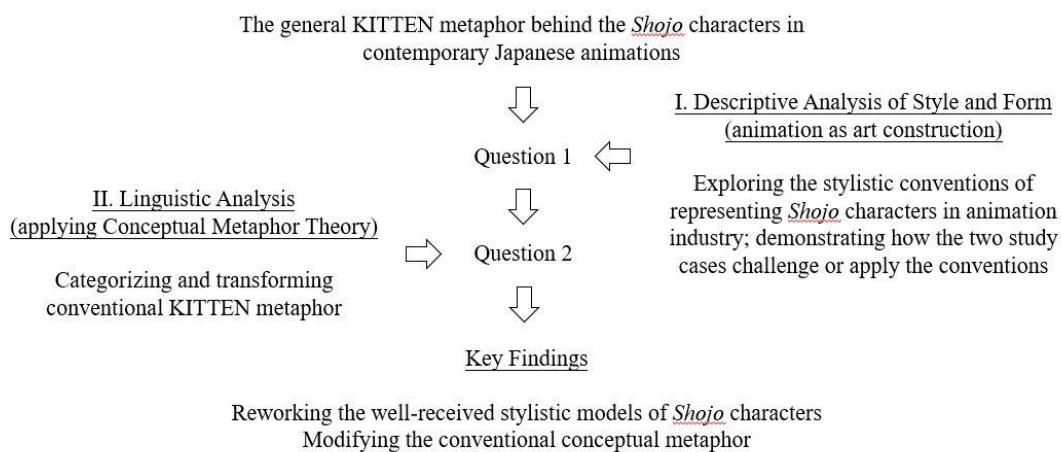


Figure 1. Research Framework

## Data analysis

### Descriptive analysis

As an iconic theme of contemporary Japanese animation, the *Shojo* character is a concept that is consistently modified and revised by the cultural and historical context (Swale, 2015). Overlapping with other subject matters, such as growing-up, family, and romance, the portrayal of *Shojo* characters is also majorly determined by the norms of a particular animation genre. In *Cheating Allowed*, the image of Yumeko is basically matched to the formulaic traits of *Shojo* characters in romantic and slice-of-life animations. Both her western school uniform and long straight hair respond to the expectation of her student identity and cues the spectators to habitually perceive this character by appropriating the knowledge of other animations. Since the release of the classic *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* in 2006, the deployment of these visual elements has been a set of “automatized” norms to underline the traits of innocence, youthfulness, and obedience of the *Shojo* characters in school-life stories.

Although the image of Yumeko is approaching a regular schoolgirl, this intimacy with the conventions is not stable throughout the entire work. In this fictional story, Yumeko’s school allows students to engage in legal gambling events after school. In the sequence of Yumeko’s first time joining the poker game, anime-makers deployed a close-up shot to display Yumeko’s facial expression (Figure 2). The flushing on Yumeko’s face and the posture of sucking fingers suggest a strong sexuality triggered by the excitement of gambling. It drastically deviates from the classic pieces in which the schoolgirls perfectly keep their chastity. Then, in the close-up shot of another gambling scene, Yumeko gives her expressive kitten-like posture and slowly crawls toward spectators (Figure 3). The red glare from her eyes reveals an intense aggressiveness to the ones who observe her (spectators). Throughout these close-ups, the image of Yumeko refuses to offer access to appreciate and acknowledge her. It is opposite to the conventional image of schoolgirls—they crave for somebody to understand the sensitiveness of adolescence. Therefore, these moments of deviancy make those traditional visual elements on Yumeko’s body become a playful parody of the images of obedient schoolgirls.

Different from Yumeko, the anime-makers applied a more direct violation of conventional *Shojo* characters in the image of Julyne in *JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure*. As the title implies, this is a fictional story about superpowers and battles. The 18-year-old *Shojo* Julyne is framed and sent to prison. With the help of her father, Julyne owns the capacity of operating magic and decides to revenge on her enemies. In the scenes of Julyne engaging in the magic battle, the anime-makers usually deploy a freeze-frame to stress the sense of strength. The function of this device is close to the slow-motion shot in filmmaking, which amplifies the process of movement/posture instead of the result of that (Ellis, 2010). Also, in these freeze-frames, the detailed features of Julyne’s face, especially the shadow, are often exaggeratedly represented (Figure 4). This style brings the image of Julyne a quality of classical Roman sculpture and neutralizes the vulnerability that a *Shojo* character habitually looks like (Robinson, 2017).

Finally, in addition to the challenge to the stylistic conventions, the images of Yumeko and Julyne also *de-familiarize* the approach that spectators habitually perceive a *Shojo* character. In other words, spectators must apply a fresh cognitive mechanism to understand and sympathize with them (Thompson, 1988).



**Figure 2.** A still from *Cheating Allowed*, episode 2



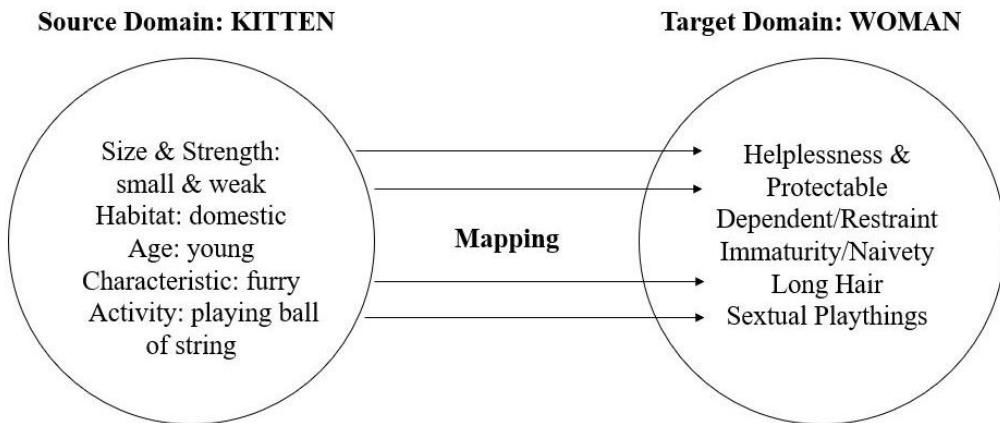
**Figure 3.** A still from *Cheating Allowed*, episode 3



**Figure 4.** A still from *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stone Ocean*, episode 2

### Linguistic analysis

The pervasive existence of *Shojo* characters as the kitten girls denote the conventional conceptual metaphor SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN ARE KITTENS (Kövecses 2010, p.153). The mappings between the WOMEN domain and the KITTEN domain are as follows (Figure 5) (Tipler and Ruscher, 2019):



**Figure 5.** Conceptual Mappings of SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN ARE KITTENS

The screenshot (Figure 6) shows the popular image of the female protagonist Yumeko. The source domain is the KITTEN domain which is presented through a typical and cute cat's position, using the front paws to interact with people, play with toys, or scratch an itch. The target domain is the *Shojo* character the upper body of whom is directly presented in the picture. By clenching both fists, imitating the front paws of the cat, the source and the target domain are integrated into a unified figure. Thus, this pictorial metaphor belongs to a hybrid metaphor. Kitten's being adorable, playful, and vulnerable is mapped onto Yumeko indicating her being a cute, dependent, and naïve girl and a sexually playful belonging.

The image of Yumeko displayed in Figure 3 reveals another situation. The KITTEN source domain is not presented this time. However, the eyes of Yumeko are replaced by cats' vertical pupils which could dilate or contract to adapt to different lighting conditions. This is also the cats' eyes when they are hunting. This is a contextual metaphor where the KITTEN source domain is denoted by some features of the WOMEN target domain. Usually, the KITTEN source domain in SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN ARE KITTENS does not contain elements of "cats' hunting eyes" or "cats' hunting position". By adding these elements into the source domain and then mapping them onto the *Shojo* target domain, the conventional conceptual metaphor is extended into a novel one showing the independence of women and women's sexual desire.



**Figure 6.** A still from *Cheating Allowed*, episode 3



**Figure 7.** A still from *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stone Ocean*, episode 1

Figure 7 is another screenshot from *JoJo*. The picture presents the female protagonist, Julyne. Her hair is styled into cats' ears and her facial expression is the same as cats meowing to be affectionate. Thus, this is a hybrid metaphor combining the KITTEN source domain with the WOMEN target domain. The mappings from the source to the target show Julyne acting coy to win her boyfriend's favor just like what a kitten would do to gain food from its owner.

In this respect, the right part of Figure 4 depicts Julyne in a different way. Her hair is still in the style of cats' ears indicating the KITTEN source domain and constituting a contextual metaphor. However, her facial expression is transferred from a cute and adorable one into one emphasizing the prominent facial contours which are not a typical cat's expression. Likewise, the subtle muscle definition on her body and standing in a fighting gesture does not belong to cats' features.

Features like "prominent facial contours", "subtle muscle lines", and "fighting gestures" are not content in the KITTEN source domain. The presence of these in the WOMEN target domain question the rationality of using the KITTEN source domain to depict the WOMEN target domain. The violation of conventional metaphor makes it a novel one emphasizing *Shojo* character being aggressive and carrying masculine features.

## Conclusion

In this research, we focused on the visual depiction of "the Other" (*Shojo* character) and explored gender and sexual representation in contemporary Japanese animation. By conducting interdisciplinary research, we found two violations of the conventional "kitten girls" conceptual metaphor. Separately, Yumeko, the protagonist in *Cheating Allowed*, expressed her sexual desire directly and exaggeratedly extending the KITTEN metaphor while Julyne, the lead female character in *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Stone Ocean*, presented a "de-gendering" body questioning the KITTEN metaphor. These findings also support the conventional conceptual metaphor SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN ARE KITTENS (Kövecses, 2010) and further explain how it is instantiated in a novel way. In animation cases, this shift in the conceptual metaphor system is accompanied by a set of explicit changes of the deployment of conventional visual motifs. These changes *de-familiarize* the "automatized" viewing habits of audiences and push them to perceive *Shojo* characters based on the fresh art experience.

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# Need for Security: the driving force behind the “missing men’s” autonomy and relatedness seeking behaviours

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## Abstract

Seeking to understand the reasons behind the reverse gender gap at tertiary level, an emerging trend worldwide, this paper draws on data from a larger qualitative study to provide a nuanced understanding of the “missing men” in the UAE while demonstrating the capacity of the theoretical framework of master narratives to integrate literature and theories from the diverse range of disciplines to which the findings pertained. Employing a social constructionist grounded theory design and a responsive interviewing technique, a master narrative framed in terms of autonomy and relatedness, imbued with patriarchy, was seen to be of particular importance in the research context. Adding to the existing body of knowledge on psychological needs, it is proposed that a need for security is the driving force behind these young men’s autonomy and relatedness seeking behaviours. Framing the model in terms of psychological needs encourages looking beneath the surface of the missing men’s educational attitudes and choices, opening up the discussion on masculinities and undressing patriarchy to provide deeper insight as to the underlying drivers, while allowing for similarities to be drawn between different environments despite variances in outward behaviour.

*Keywords: reverse gender gap; psychological needs; master narratives; higher education*

## Introduction

There has been significant progress in female participation in education worldwide. However, more recently a reverse gender divide has been emerging in several areas of the world including West Africa, North and Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, the UK, and the MENA region (Ridge et al., 2017; Ridge et al., 2019). In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), girls outperform boys in secondary school completion and attainment (Ridge et al., 2017), while the reverse gender gap is most apparent at tertiary level wherein Emirati women account for 70% of all university graduates (UAE Gender Balance Council, 2021). The lower academic attainment and persistence of male Emiratis at secondary school partly explains the reverse gender gap in favour of women as fewer young men are eligible to enrol in tertiary education. However, it offers no explanation for the high incidence of male “no-shows” in higher education each year, of which there are two categories. The first is new students who accept an offer to study at one of the federal institutes, but do not register and do not inform the institute that they wish to defer or will not attend. The second describes a student who registers but either does not attend or stops attending without notifying the institute; the period after which a student stops attending may be a few days or after having already completed several years of study. Drawing on data from a larger qualitative study, this paper examines the underlying drivers behind these “missing men’s” behaviour. More extensive findings can be found in Howling (2022).

## Research design

Employing a social constructionist grounded theory design (Charmaz, 2008) and Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) responsive interviewing technique, the research evolved into three distinct phases. In Stage 1 and Stage 3, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young male Emiratis who were classified as no-shows at a tertiary-level institute. Stage 2 of the research emerged as I felt that I did not have sufficient insider knowledge, or “special second record” (Hull, 1985), to situate the findings from Stage 1 within the larger sociocultural context; the overall favourable response given by participants in continuing their studies at tertiary level, albeit after finding work, contradicted with the low enrollment rates and high incidence of male no-shows in higher education institutes annually in the UAE. Thereby, I conducted focus groups and interviews with male and female Emiratis in their late twenties and thirties in order to gain their perspective and interpretation on the results, while gathering information on the broader sociocultural environment. In Stage 3, a further twenty-one interviews were conducted with Emirati male no-shows following new lines of enquiry that had arisen in Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the research. In all, 41 interviews and three focus groups were conducted with a total of 46 participants. Participants were informed of their participation rights in Arabic. To protect anonymity, all names were removed from the interview transcripts and, in the case of Stage 2, replaced with pseudonyms indicating the participants’ gender. Participants in Stage 1 and Stage 3

are referred to as “interviewee” with an alphanumerical code to distinguish them from participants in Stage 2. The numerical element of the code refers to Stage 1 or Stage 3 of the research.

The research questions which guided this study were:

- i. What are the reasons given by male Emiratis of university age in the case study for not continuing their studies at tertiary level?
- ii. What further understanding can other Emiratis in the case study provide as to the reasons young men do not continue their studies?
- iii. What theory can be generated from the RQ1 and RQ2 findings?
- iv. What are the implications of RQ3 for researching the phenomenon of the missing men in higher education in other contexts?

### **Theoretical framework: master narratives**

Choosing not to employ a theoretical perspective from the outset in an endeavour to increase the cultural relevancy of the grounded theory, a master narrative model based on the epistemological principles and conception of “self” proposed by Hammack and colleagues (Hammack, 2008; Hammack, 2010; Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015) and defined by McLean and Syed’s (2015) five principles emerged from the data as a useful framework to conceptualise the findings. As part of the objective of a master narrative model is to facilitate interdisciplinary discussion, it provided a cohesive framework to integrate literature from the range of disciplines to which the findings pertained such as cultural studies, psychology, family studies, masculinities, and the Development literature in the MENA region. Stemming from a social constructionist epistemology, a master narrative framework is compatible with a grounded theory approach. Partly derived from symbolic interactionism, the major theoretical perspective associated with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), it is also anchored on narrative identity theories, life course developmental theory, cultural psychology, Eriksonian identity theory, cultural-historical activity theory, social identity theory, and Foucault’s theory of discourse and subjectivity (Hammack & Toolis, 2015).

McLean and Syed (2015) outline three types of master narrative: biographical, sequential, and episodic. The first category, biographical, which has previously been called a cultural life script by other scholars, emerged as pertinent to this research. “Biographical master narratives concern the framework for how a life should unfold” (McLean et al., 2018, p. 633) and can be conceptualised as the “types of events that should occur in a life in a given culture (e.g., graduation from school, marriage), as well as the expected timing of events (e.g., marriage before childbearing)” (McLean et al., 2018, p. 634). Highlighting the impact on young men’s participation in higher education, the biographical narratives described by participants are outlined below.

### **Findings and discussion**

Recurring statements indicated the cultural expectation of young men to start taking responsibility for the family, work, and be married by their mid-twenties. Exemplified by the comments below, these three themes were dominant throughout much of the data and were almost ubiquitous, in line with the first of McLean and Syed’s (2015) five principles of master narratives.

Our culture is still, like, the male is the responsible person. (Hajar)

He's the provider... He's the man who is working and should provide for his kids and the wife. (Sara)

When our moustache and beard start coming, we start feeling that's enough, we have to take care of now for the family. (Abdulla)

[I stopped my studies] to earn money to get a car, to get married, and to get a house. (interviewee 1H)

### **Autonomy and relatedness**

Contending that “prevailing cultural norms and values” is synonymous with master narratives, this research lends support to Demuth and Keller’s (2011) thesis wherein they advocate that:

autobiographical narratives reflect prevailing cultural norms and values that can be understood in terms of the two basic human needs for autonomy and relatedness, and that people aim to construct self-narratives that are coherent with these cultural models. (p. 15)

Located at the foundational level of Maslow's (1943) model of human needs, marriage and family formation (reproduction) are said to be critical for full social inclusion in Middle Eastern societies. By needing to be financially independent to have a proposal accepted, marriage can be seen to epitomize both autonomy and relatedness.

### **Security**

As McLean and Syed (2015) and Hammack and colleagues' models highlight the manner in which master narratives are said to impact agency and constrain individuals, so male participants in Stage 2 indicated that with the responsibility of being the provider, men were not afforded the same security in the family as women. The three examples from separate interviews below highlight the importance of young men gaining employment and becoming financially secure in order to meet their responsibilities and advance their lives beyond adolescence:

The girls always feel that she is *part* of their family. She's part [of the family] to be [a] student. She's still young and she [can] still study. Boys, no. It's like he should prepare himself for the responsibilities. (Abdulla)

Without job, he will not get married. For sure he will not. No one will accept [him]. (Salem)

[The girls] have the security. Males, they don't have the security. If you don't have that amount of money, you will never get married. (Humaid)

These comments explain the prioritization of work over studying, and expose a need for security as the driving force behind these young men's autonomy and relatedness seeking behaviours. Thus, I expand on Demuth and Keller's (2011) thesis by proposing that patterns of interdependence are underlined by the need for security. In this research "security" is considered in terms of physical and social survival achieved through social cohesion (McLean, 2019), namely having the financial means to support the household and start their own family. Drawing parallels with Arthur et al.'s (2019) research on materialism amongst Emiratis, participants described sociocultural changes wherein status and character were increasingly judged by extrinsic means, such as salary being considered as the quintessential quality of a prospective groom. It is proffered that these outward measures have changed patterns of relatedness, increasing pressure on young men to confer their status and correspondingly establish their right to belongingness through ostentatious pecuniary displays such as buying expensive cars and hosting lavish weddings. Thus, paradoxically, while Emirati men are described as having more options such as the ability to travel alone and work in another emirate, to ensure on-time conformity to the biographical master narrative, they may have less choice to continue their studies.

### **Drawing comparisons with other contexts**

#### *"Laddishness" and Marriage: the same underlying motivations*

Initially much of the research on the (non)participation in education of young men in other regions may appear to be irrelevant to this research context. For example, "laddish" behaviours in U.K. universities which revolve around drunken, misogynistic behaviour are a world apart from local Emirati society in which alcohol is forbidden by Islam and local society is highly gender-segregated. Historically-systemic rejection of higher education by working-class young men in the UK and elsewhere appears to be immaterial to a young nation wherein compulsory education was only introduced 50 years ago and the young men in this study reported being in favour of continuing their studies after finding work. However, I contend that when considered in terms of master narratives framed by psychological needs, patterns can be recognised in the educational choices and behaviours of young men in these different contexts. For example, in their work on the enactment of laddish behaviour of young men when transitioning to higher education Warin and Dempster (2005) note that:

Underlying fears about being lonely and having no friends were made explicit by many respondents and hinted at by others. The performance of hegemonic forms of masculinity is, then, born of anxieties about fitting in. (2005, p. 896)

Although not employing the language of psychological needs, Warin and Dempster describe how a need for relatedness (fitting in) and security (anxieties) drive these young men's behaviour. Thus, although the outward behaviour and contexts differ significantly, the reason for young men prioritising work and marriage in the UAE and the underlying reason for laddish behaviours in transitioning to higher education in the UK

can be seen to be motivated by the same needs for relatedness and security; “the performance of masculinity arises from insecurities about social inclusion, about being lonely and powerless” (Warin & Dempster, 2005, p. 896).

Similar comparisons can be drawn in Jackson’s (2002; 2003) work on laddish behaviours at secondary school in the UK. Jackson concluded that “laddish behaviours may act to protect the self-worth and/or social worth of many boys” surmising that “laddishness may be prompted by both a fear of academic failure and a fear of the 'feminine'" (2003, p. 583). I maintain that the underlying motivation for needing to be seen as aligning with the hegemonic form of masculinity pervading the school may be the same as that in Warin and Dempster’s (2005) study. Specifically, the boys seek to protect their social-worth to promote social inclusivity and mitigate risks of exclusion. This viewpoint stems from an evolutionary perspective of identity theories in which co-authoring a life narrative facilitates socialisation into a group while increasing group cohesion and harmony through the conveyance of shared values, and expectations (McAdams, 2019; McLean, 2019). It is argued that as social cohesion became important for survival, stories told within the group legitimised convention and authority, while communicating the expectations of each group member, thereby identifying their place within the community (Hammack, 2008; McAdams, 2019; McLean, 2019). This perspective forms the basis of master narrative theory wherein co-constructed narratives provide templates for, or on a “malignant” level dictate, culturally-valued life stories, functioning to make the group cohere (McLean, 2019, p. 66). While originally this stemmed from a need for physical survival, in the present day it may be about social survival (McLean, 2019) motivated by a need for relatedness.

## Summary

Participants’ accounts depicted a biographical master narrative imbued with patriarchy in which finding employment to secure a marriage proposal and position themselves to support the family financially overrode the importance of continuing their studies at tertiary level. Adding to the existing body of knowledge on psychological needs and expanding on Demuth and Keller’s (2011) original thesis, I propose that a need for security is the driving force behind the young men’s autonomy and relatedness seeking behaviours. By considering master narratives through panhuman needs, I suggest that a deeper insight can be gained as to the educational attitudes and choices of young men, allowing similarities to be identified in different contexts despite distinct variances in outward behaviour.

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