

## Correlation between Airlines' use of foreign languages and their country of origin's acceptance of foreigners

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The Airline sector is probably one of the most international industries nowadays. Thus, one should expect that airline companies are also international orientated and show their open-mindedness through all the services they offer. Using the renowned cross-cultural Bennett scale to rate the degree of ethnorelativity, this empirical study aims at analysing the link between the use of foreign language in inflight magazines and the attitude towards foreigners in countries the airlines originates from. The authors discovered that there exists a strong correlation between the use of foreign language in inflight magazines offered to the passengers and the degree welcoming foreigners in the country of origine of the airline.

Categories and Subject Descriptors: Social and Human Sciences

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Intercultural Differences, Ethnorelativity, Cross-cultural Communication, Airline Industry

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The simingly ever growing number of pasengers travelling around the globe by plane, the increasing number of airlines or simply the multiplication of online travelers' blogs should question anyone as to whether the world is becoming more inclusive in its diversity, or at least, more tolerant towards foreigners. In parallel, news reports display troubling, sometimes shocking features of intolerance in general, witnessing an exclusive nationalism in many countries or regions around the world. In fact, a travellers experience differs greatly depending where you land.

The authors, both working in the international field of their Universities and frequent travelers around the world with different airlines, realized that some services international airlines offer cannot be seen as a handsome gesture towards foreigners. For example: If you travel by plane, it is always nice to gain some information about the country of your destination in the in-flight magazine. If the in-flight magazine is only printed in the language of the country the airline is origine and you cannot read this language, the in-flight magazine is useless. The fact

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that most of the airlines in the world are state owned can lead to the conclusion that some countries are more than others interested in been seen as friendly towards foreigners or different cultures.

Having this in mind, the authors collected data about the percentage of English or non-native language featured in in-flight magazines of international airlines. They connected the figures to the Bennett scale, also called the DMIS (for Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) and then compared the results with the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report presented at the World Economic Forum 2013 (WEF, 2013) in Davos.

The aim of this paper is to verify if the ethnorelativity concept can be verified in the airline industry, using empirical research correlated to academic findings.

The authors have chosen the Bennett scale because in comparison to other authors like Pierre Bourdieu or Mitchel R. Hammer, who invented the IDI (Intercultural Development Inventory), Milton Bennetts concept is more detailed dealing with intercultural sensitivity (BENNETT, 1986) than Bourdieu's or Hammer's, whose models are simpler or mostly closer connected to single persons (HAMMER, BENNETT, WISEMAN 2003).

A great number of models exist in the field of cross-cultural communication. Academic citations show that Hofstede's is the most cited author. Trompenaars' model and the GLOBE project are also frequently quoted. Among practitioners, no survey exist about the professionals' preferences, however, it is likely that the same models are used, besides proprietary ones that require royalties payments (DUMETZ, 2014).

All those models, however, are designed and used to compare cultures among themselves, using a series of behavioral vectors also called cultural dimensions. Such models allow to creating cultural profiles of national cultures (or individuals and even companies) that resemble personality types. While very useful in other cases, only the Bennett scale focuses exclusively with the degree of acceptance to other cultures, a concept called ethnorelativity.

In this article, the authors did not seek to compare airlines using cultural dimensions but to assess their level of ethnorelativity, and then to correlate the results with another existing survey that analyse the level of acceptance of foreigners of countries, a concept close to ethnorelativity.

## 2 MILTON BENNETT'S CONCEPT OF ETHNORELATIVITY

Milton Bennett (BENNETT, 1998) developed a cross-cultural model that describes different ways how people react to cultural differences. The model is organized in six stages. The first three stages are describing an ethnocentric behavior starting at a level of denying other cultures and seeing ones own culture as the only existing one. Moving towards up the scale to a more and more ethnorelative attitude, the individual is recognising its own culture in the context of other cultures and tends to adapt to them.

1. Denial: The individual does not recognize the existence of cultural differences
2. Defense: The individual does recognizes some differences exist, but they are often seen as negative

3. Minimization: The individual is unaware of the projection of its own cultural values; those values are mostly seen as superior
4. Acceptance: The individual shifts perspectives in order to understand that a „ordinary“ behavior can have different meanings in different cultures
5. Adaptation: The individual can evaluate the other’s behaviour from their frame of reference and can adapt its behaviour to fit the norms of the other culture
6. Integration: The individual easily shifts its frame of reference to fully adapt to the other culture.



Figure 1: The Milton Bennett scale

The Bennett scale is a convenient model to rate the degree of ethnorelativity from low (the individual display ethnocentric behaviours) to high (the individual display full integration to another culture) (BENNETT, 2011).

The DMIS is a combination of running intercultural workshops and doing consciousness studies. This was an early attempt to define intercultural competence. He'd define the end-state as integration – the ability to shift from one state to another – whether it be bicultural or multicultural, what he now calls an expanded repertoire of worldview.

Some of his early studies at Portland were around cults: a little model of an ethnocentric culture. The cult-people think their view of reality is completely and uniquely central to reality. It's this experience of the own culture as being central and it moves through this forming-feeling process that he names stages. The DMIS is based on subjective organization.

### 3 THE APPLICATION TO THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY

The airline industry is a natural choice to conduct this analysis due to its role and implication in the effects of globalization. Indeed, the airline industry participated in the development of globalization helping people travel faster and at a lower cost than before. In parallel, the industry clearly benefited of the globalization, as showed by the significant increase of airline companies around the world, now several thousands, and the ever growing number of passengers over the years reaching 2,8 billion passengers carried by airlines in 2011 with a forecasted 5,3% growth per annum between 2012 and 2016 according to IATA (IATA press 2013).

The great number of airlines in the world in general and in Europe in particular made possible the collect of data in sufficient number (30 airlines surveyed) to make adequate analysis.

The authors have gathered a number of in-flight magazines presented by airlines to their passengers (Table 1). All the magazines were collected or are intended for international flights,

ensuring the intercultural aspect of the flying experience. Because English has become the lingua franca of the travel industry, selected airlines were exclusively from non-English speaking countries, hence allowing the authors to focus on the linguistic aspect of the ethno-relativity.

	Magazine/ airline	Date	Country of origin	Language(s) used	Part of foreign language	Level of ethnorelativity/ remarks
1	Rossiya	Feb. 2014	Russia	Russian and English	3 pages/173	Low
2	Czech Airlines	3-4/2014	Czech Republic	Czech, English and Russian	1/3, 1/3, 1/3	Middle/High
3	Transaero	May 2013	Russia	Russian	None	Low
4	Aeroflot	July 2013	Russia	Russian and English	20 pages /300	Low
5	Air France	May 2013	France	French and English	50/50	Middle
6	Lufthansa	June 2013	Germany	German and English	50/50	Middle
7	Alitalia	June 2013	Italy	Italian and English	50/50	Middle
8	Aeroflot Premium	July 2013	Russia	Russian and English	80/250	Low
9	Turkish Airlines	Aug. 2013	Turkey	Turkish and English	50/50	Middle
10	SAS	July 2013	Denmark/Norway/Sweden	English	100%	High
11	KLM	May 2014	Netherlands	English	100%	High
12	S7	March 2013	Russia	Russian and English	2 pages/80	Low
13	Bulgaria	Aug. 2013	Bulgaria	Bulgarian and English	50/50	Middle
14	Emirates	Sept. 2013	UAE	English	100%	High
15	Aegean	April 2014	Greece	Greek and English	50/50	Middle
16	Tarom	April 2014	Romania	Romanian and English	50/50	Middle
17	AeroSvit	May 2014	Ukraine	Ukrainian and English	Roughly 30%	Low to Middle
18	Finnair	May 2014	Finland	English	100%	High
19	Malev	July 2011	Hungary	Hungarian and English	50/50	Middle
20	Brussels	May 2014	Belgium	English, French and Dutch	80/10/10	High
21	Austrian	Feb. 2014	Austrian	German and English	50/50	Middle
22	Aerpostal	April 2014	Venezuela	Spanish	None	Low
23	Moldova	June 2013	Moldova	Moldovan, Russian and English	1/3, 1/3, 1/3	Middle/high
24	Air Algérie	Feb. 2013	Algeria	French	None	Low
25	IranAir	May 2014	Iran	Persian	None	Low
26	China-Southern	May 2014	China	Chinese and English	50/50	Middle
27	ChinaEastern	May 2014	China	Chinese and English	50/50	Middle
28	Air China	May 2014	China	Chinese and English	50/50	Middle
29	Hainan Airlines	May 2014	China	Chinese	None	Low
30	TAM	2014	Brazil	Portugese/English and Portugese/ Spanish	50/50 and 50/50	Middle

Table 1: Surveyed airlines and data

### Hypothesis

Using this primary data, two hypotheses may be formulated to verify the correlation between Airlines' ethno-relativity and their country of origin's acceptance of foreigners

H1: Airlines wishing to show their open-mindedness to the world, or, at least a tolerance towards non-native passengers, should be providing information in a foreign language.

H2: Airlines originating from ethnocentric cultures should not provide magazines displaying foreign language text.

#### 4 COMPARING THE RESULTS WITH CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

The fact that most of the large airlines are state owned leads to the assumption that there might be a correlation between the ethnorelativity of the country and the cultural artefacts, like the in-flight magazines, offered to their passengers.

Unfortunately there is no up-to-date source of an ethnorelativity score of each country. Therefore the authors decided to use the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013, which was presented on the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2013) in Davos 2013.

The ranking on pillar 12, figure 12.02 (WEF, 2013, 455) about the attitude of the population toward foreign visitors moves into the same direction and shows, how foreign visitors are welcome in the surveyed countries.

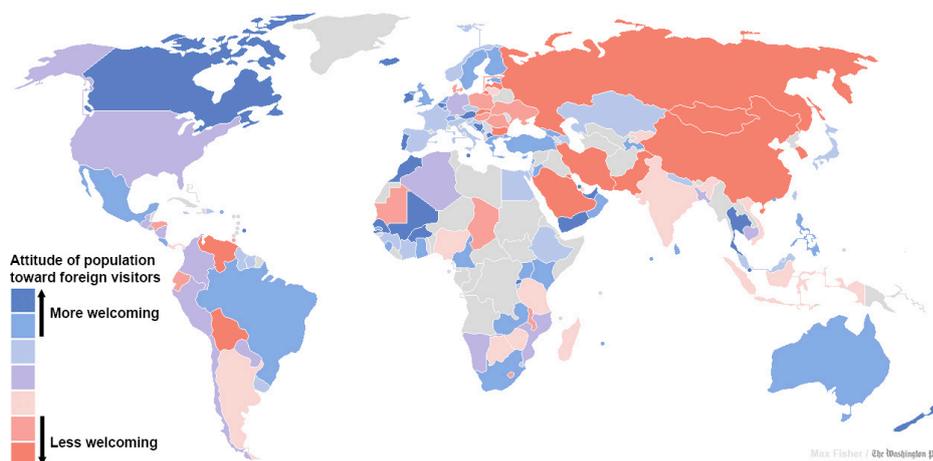


Figure 2: Map by Max Fisher, from *The Washington Post*<sup>1</sup>

Max Fisher, from *The Washington Post*, applied the WEF data, gathered between late 2011 to late 2012, from 140 countries into a map showed in Fig.2 (FISCHER 2013).

According to the data the red countries are less welcoming towards foreign visitors, and, the blue countries are more welcoming towards them.

The top three most welcoming countries for foreigners are, in order: Iceland, New Zealand and Morocco. Other high-ranking countries are Ireland, Canada, Austria and a few tourist havens like Thailand or United Arab Emirates. Those data seem to correlate in a way with the gathered data of the airline magazines.

The three countries least welcoming to foreigners are, in order: Bolivia, Venezuela and Russia. Other poorly ranked countries are located in the greater Middle East like Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia but also China and South Korea.

This low ranking might have different reasons. The troubles in the Middle East states might had an influence on the votes. Another reason for the low ranking could be an existing or growing nationalism in the mentioned countries that could leads towards behavior of exclusion

(as opposed to inclusion) of the “others”. If we look at Russia for example, the country always displayed strong patriotic feelings, but in the last few years the number of popular events of nationalist inspiration has become more public. Topping the table, Iceland is known to be a liberal country, with various protections against discriminations of all kind.

## 5 FINDINGS

In order to calculate a possible correlation, the authors have set an ethnorelativity score from 0 (low ethnorelativity) to 1 (high ethnorelativity). The WEF ranking was transformed as a percentage ( $x/14$ ). The ranking was then inverted in order to have nations open to foreigners with a high score and nations not open to foreigners a low score.

	Country of origin (Airline)	Ethnorelativity	Ethnorating	WEF ranking /140	WEF /100	Neg WEF /100
1	Russia	Low	0	138	98,57	1,43
2	Czech Republic	Middle/High	0,8	66	47,14	52,86
3	Russia	Low	0	138	98,57	1,43
4	Russia	Low	0	138	98,57	1,43
5	France	Middle	0,5	80	57,14	42,86
6	Germany	Middle	0,5	83	59,29	40,71
7	Italy	Middle	0,5	79	56,43	43,57
8	Russia	Low	0	138	98,57	1,43
9	Turkey	Middle	0,5	53	37,86	62,14
10	Denmark/Norway/Sweden	High	1	66	47,14	52,86
11	Netherlands	High	1	52	37,14	62,86
12	Russia	Low	0	138	98,57	1,43
13	Bulgaria	Middle	0,5	132	94,29	5,71
14	UAE	High	1	15	10,71	89,29
15	Greece	Middle	0,5	37	26,43	73,57
16	Romania	Middle	0,5	122	87,14	12,86
17	Ukraine	Low to Middle	0,3	127	90,71	9,29
18	Finland	High	1	31	22,14	77,86
19	Hungary	Middle	0,5	116	82,86	17,14
20	Belgium	Middle to High	0,8	19	13,57	86,43
21	Austria	Middle	0,5	5	3,57	96,43
22	Venezuela	Low	0	139	99,29	0,71
23	Moldova	Middle to High	0,8	93	66,43	33,57
24	Algeria	Low	0	94	67,14	32,86
25	Iran	Low	0	135	96,43	3,57
26	China	Middle	0	130	92,86	7,14
27	China	Middle	0,5	130	92,86	7,14
28	China	Middle	0,5	130	92,86	7,14
29	China	Low	0	130	92,86	7,14
30	Brazil	Middle	0,5	43	30,71	69,29

Table 2: Correlation between ethnorating and WEF ranking

The correlation coefficient is 0,73 between the use of language in inflight magazines and the WEF ranking surveying the attitude of nationals towards foreigners.

$$\text{Correlation Coefficient (X, Y)} = \frac{\sum(x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum(x - \bar{x})^2 \sum(y - \bar{y})^2}}$$

The relatively high correlation between foreigners feeling unfriendly treated and use of foreign languages in national airline inflight magazines is remarkable. Reasons for that phenomenon could be various, ranging from politics, ethics or the society's open-mindedness in general.

While outside the scope of this article, it is interesting to notice the apparent link towards the ethno-relativity of the airlines's nations with local treatment of homosexuality. The ILGA Report on State-Sponsored Homophobia (ILGA, 2013) analyses the legal answers to homosexuality (positive or negative) that shows the level of acceptance of gays in a given society.

While Iceland, New Zealand and Morocco top the WTE list, Ireland, Canada, Austria can also be counted among the most welcoming countries for foreigners. All of them, except Morocco (a touristic destination where the authorities turn a blind eye on homosexuality) score high on the gay-right report.

At the bottom of the WTE list, Bolivia, Venezuela and Russia; but also Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia or China are least welcoming towards foreigners. Russia isn't too welcoming or open towards gays. Bolivia, Venezuela are not very open to others, but neutral towards gays. Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia are all three not open towards foreigners and not tolerant towards gays.

## 6 CONCLUSION AND FURTHER DEVELOPEMENTS

Both hypothesis are validated:

H1: Airlines wishing to show their open-mindedness to the world, or, at least a tolerance towards non-native passengers, tend to provide an inflight magazine in a foreign language.

H2: Airlines originating from ethnocentric cultures tend not to provide an inflight magazine in a foreign language.

As a result, the ethno-relativity theory, based on cultural artefacts such as airline magazines, delivers significant insight to analyse the degree of welcoming of foreigners in a country. This simple example shows the validity of the practical application of cross-cultural management models and theory.

Therefore, while the focus of this article is the correlation between the airline's magazine use of languages and how much the airline's country of origin is open to foreigners, it appears the ethno-relativity ranking created for this research (table 2) could be also used to lay the foundation for a value-based cultural dimension ranking of countries. The behavioural value would be intolerance towards foreigners.

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