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IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION

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Hofstede's cultural dimensions: Italian national identity in ELF usage

Costanza Cucchi

Abstract

Originally devised to account for national differences in work-related values, Hofstede's model (2003) offers a convenient way to grasp cultural differences related to national identity on the basis of five dimensions. Recently the model has been applied by various scholars to the study of communicative and linguistic differences linked to cultural differences both across languages and in the study of English as a lingua franca within such diverse genres as calls for papers, business letters, e-mails, advertisements, commercials, websites, parliamentary speeches and doctor-patient consultations.

After examining the correlations between Hofstede's dimensions and language in previous literature, the present paper applies Hofstede's model to the comparison of native English and English as a lingua franca as used by Italians, an area as yet unexplored in the literature, with particular regard to two comparable websites of potato crisp manufacturers, Walkers and San Carlo. The results of the present study confirm the relevance of power distance and uncertainty avoidance, already shown in a cross-linguistic perspective (Cucchi 2010; Katan 2006), to the study of ELF usage by Italians in websites, and indicate the importance of individualism/collectivism. The study therefore shows that Hofstede's model is a valid approach to predicting and explaining linguistic differences on the basis of national identity.

1. Introduction

Starting from the premise that “nations [...] are the source of a considerable amount of common mental programming of their citizens” (Hofstede 2003: 12), Hofstede attributed a score to over fifty countries along five dimensions representing the problems faced by people of all nationalities - individualism/collectivism (IDV/COL), power distance (PD), uncertainty avoidance (UA), masculinity/femininity (MAS/FEM), long-term/short-term orientation (LTO/STO). The resulting five-dimension model provides a convenient way to grasp cultural differences on the basis of national identities, thus making comparison among the countries possible.²⁰

Although the link between the cultural dimensions and language is not a primary concern of his work, on various occasions Hofstede (2001; 2003) mentions communicative styles and language choices. Recently Hofstede’s dimensions have been utilized to formulate hypotheses on and to account for specific communicative and linguistic choices across countries and languages (Cucchi 2010; Dekker, Rutte, Van den Berg 2008; Katan 2004, 2006; Koeman 2007; Meeuwesen, van den Brink-Muinen and Hofstede 2009; Smith, Dugan, Peterson and Leung 1998; Vishwanath 2003; Wolfe 2008; Zhao, Massey, Murphy and Fang 2003). The model has been used, although less frequently, to compare native and non-native English (Bjorge 2007; Clyne 1994; Hatipoğlu 2006; Kang and Mastin 2008).

Since only a few studies are concerned specifically with Italian (Cucchi 2010; Katan 2006) and none, to the best of my knowledge, with English mediated from Italian, the present paper aims to test the predictive and explanatory power of Hofstede’s dimensions in this particular case, through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the English version of the website of *San Carlo*, an Italian potato crisp manufacturer, and a comparable website of an English company, *Walkers*. The present analysis was inspired by Turnbull (2008), who

²⁰ Scores for each country along the five dimensions are available at <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>, a website developed by *Itim International*, a consulting organization utilizing Hofstede's concepts. The link “Compare your home culture with your host culture” enables users to compare the scores of any two countries.

compares British websites to the English versions of Italian websites²¹. Although no reference was made by the author to Hofstede's dimensions for the interpretation of her findings, the cultural dimensions seem to help contextualize them within a broader cultural framework.

Section 2 presents a critical review of the literature with the aim of examining which features were associated to Hofstede's dimensions and of verifying whether the dimensions proved to be a successful predictive and explanatory device of communicative and linguistic choices. Long-term/short-term orientation is not discussed in the present study since this dimension has not as yet been investigated in relation to language to my knowledge. Dekker, Rutte, Van den Berg (2008: 444) report, for example, that "this dimension is difficult to apply and understand". In section 3 Hofstede's model is applied to the analysis of *San Carlo* and *Walkers* websites. Section 4 comments on the results and indicates areas for future research.

2. Cultural dimensions and language

In this section past studies relating Hofstede's model to communicative and linguistic choices are reviewed. The purpose of such a review is, on the one hand, to verify whether the cultural dimensions have proved effective in predicting or explaining specific communicative and linguistic choices on the basis of nationality. On the other hand, the examination of past literature will suggest hypotheses to be tested on the two websites which are the object of the present study.

2.1 Individualism / Collectivism (IDV/COL)

As indicated by Hofstede (2003: 51) "[i]ndividualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose", while "[c]ollectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups". Generally,

²¹ Turnbull (2008) offers an extensive analysis of *Glenmorangie*, the website of a Scottish whisky producer, and *Zonin*, an Italian wine producer. A few examples are taken from other British companies, such as *Twinnings* and *Walkers*, which has been chosen for analysis in the present paper.

“there is a strong relationship between a country’s national wealth and the degree of individualism in its culture” (Hofstede 1991:53), the most individualist country being the United States. Hofstede himself (2001:237) points out, on the basis of Kashima and Kashima (1998), that countries where the language allows first person pronouns or second person pronouns to be omitted generally score lower on IDV compared to countries where omission of these pronouns is not possible. This finding applies, for example, to Italy and Great Britain: Italy, where sentences like *vado e a che ora arrivi?* are normal, scores lower on IDV compared to Great Britain, where it is necessary to state the subject (*I’ll go; What time are you coming?*). Hofstede (2003:60; 2001:212) also suggests the existence of a link between IDV/COL and a preference for low and high context communication respectively.

IDV scores were found to be reliable predictors of the content, of the people taking part and of the form of communicative events. In doctor-patient communication, more exchange of psychosocial information – as opposed to biomedical information – was observed in high IDV countries (Meeuwesen et al. 2009). In addition, in these countries physicians gave more backchanneling (‘hm’) and more information, but asked fewer questions (Meeuwesen et al. 2009: 63). In virtual teams working via chat, e-mail, audio and video conference, members of high IDV countries held individuals, rather than groups, responsible for the success of the communication (Dekker et al. 2008). In addition, more direct communication – i.e. more lyrics about the product or brand, more references and repetitions of the brand, and more slogans – was reported in the commercials of high IDV countries (Koeman 2007). In collectivist countries, instead, less direct communication was observed: in organizations disagreement was reported to be settled more on the basis of rules and regulations, considered as impersonal sources, thus avoiding direct confrontation (Smith et al. 1998).

In cross-linguistic studies IDV/COL has proved effective in predicting the occurrence of specific linguistic features. Zhao et al. (2003: 78) reported that the presence of “such personalising words as ‘I’, ‘my’, ‘you’ and ‘your’” was much more frequent in homepages of American websites than in Chinese websites, in line with U.S.’s higher IDV (91) compared to China (20). Wolfe (2008) found that American sales/product promotion letters contained more references to the self as a single individual (‘I’, ‘my’, ‘me’) than references to the self as a member

of the company (e.g. name of the company, ‘our company’) compared to letters written in Russian (Russia’s IDV=39).

While in the studies mentioned so far hypotheses were made on the basis of Hofstede’s dimensions, other studies referred to them in the interpretation of their findings. Hatipoğlu (2006: 36) claimed that the higher presence of expressions such as *Dear colleague*, *Dear Linguists*, *Dear participants* in conference calls for papers written in English by Turkish writers compared to calls for paper by native English was possibly due to Turkey’s lower IDV (37) compared to Great Britain’s (IDV = 89), reflected in the need of Turkish writers “to show to their interlocutors that writers and readers belong to the same group” (Hatipoğlu 2006: 35). Kang and Mastin (2008) found that tourism public relations websites in English of high IDV countries had more animated quizzes/games and humorous videos.

2.2 Power Distance (PD)

PD is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede 2003: 28). Countries where Roman languages are spoken score medium to high on the PD scale, while countries where a Germanic language is spoken score low (Hofstede 2003:42). In low PD countries children may contradict their parents, at school students feel free to disagree with their teachers, to intervene in the lessons and ask questions (Hofstede 2003: 32-34; 2001: 100-101). In the workplace, “[s]ubordinates expect to be consulted before a decision is made which affects their work” (Hofstede 2003: 34).

Low PD has proved to be a generally successful predictor of more interacting roles and more symmetrical relationships among the participants in the speech event. Members of teams working via chat, e-mail, audio and video conference from low PD countries considered it important to include and invite team members to give their contribution (Dekker et al. 2008). In high PD countries, more fixed roles in doctor-patient interaction were observed (Meeuwesen et al. 2009). In sales/product promotion letters written in American English (U.S.’s PD = 40) there were more attempts to “continue the conversation” by means of expressions such as ‘I enjoyed our visit’, ‘from our conversation’, ‘as promised’ compared to letters written in Russian

(Russia's PD = 93), where generic titles like 'Colleague' or 'Principal' were avoided, since they might challenge the power status (Wolfe 2008).

As suggested by Katan (2004: 274), low PD has proved a reliable predictor of a low level of formality. In the e-mails to their professors written in English as a lingua franca, it was found that low PD students were more likely to use informal greetings and closings (Bjørge 2007). In EU parliamentary discourse more occurrences of the English informal expressions 'et cetera' and 'and so on' (U.K.'s PD = 35) were observed compared to their Italian equivalents (Italy's PD = 50) (Cucchi 2010). In tourism public relations websites in English, low PD countries showed a preference for casual narratives, thus developing more personal relationships with visitors, while high PD countries favoured more authoritative narratives (Kang and Mastin 2008: 55).

2.3 Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)

Hofstede (2003: 113) defines UA as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations". Examples of high UA countries are Latin American, Latin European and Mediterranean countries, while Anglo and Nordic countries score low (Hofstede 2003: 114). High UA implies a greater need for predictability and safety, for rules and regulations, for precision and formalization (Hofstede 2003: 113, 122) and it seems connected to difficult language, in that "some of the great gurus from [...] high UA countries write such difficult prose that one needs commentaries by more ordinary creatures explaining what the guru really meant" (Hofstede 2003: 119-120). Like high PD, therefore, high UA seems to be associated with a high level of formality.

Regarding the need for predictability and safety, high UA was indicated as an explanation for longer turns and the higher frequency of explanations, apologies, confirmations, repetitions and reformulations in workplace discourse (Clyne 1994). In Italian advertisements for private pensions, Italy's higher UA (75) was considered as a possible reason why the word 'sicurezza' was preferred to 'independence', favoured in British ads (Great Britain's UA = 35) (Katan 2006). High UA proved also to be an accurate predictor of the greater amount of details perceived as desirable in on-line eBay auctions (Vishwanath 2003) and in EU parliamentary discourse (Cucchi 2010) and was considered an accurate

explanation for the fact that the Italian equivalents of ‘No smoking’ or ‘Thank you for not smoking’ notices are “more detailed and legally binding” than British ones (Katan 2004: 242).

2.4 Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS/FEM)

In masculine societies “men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success whereas women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life”, while in feminine societies “social gender roles overlap (i.e. both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life)” (Hofstede 2003: 83). Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark are the most feminine countries, while Japan, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and West-Germany are the most masculine ones. As claimed by Hofstede (2003: 79; 2001: 315), the high masculinity score of the U.S. (MAS = 62) may explain why “[American] CVs are written in superlatives, mentioning every degree, grade, award, and membership to demonstrate their outstanding qualities”, while the Dutch (Netherlands’ MAS=14), usually “write modest and usually short CVs”.

Few studies have referred to MAS/FEM to predict or explain language choices. Clyne (1994: 186) observed that this dimension “was not very useful” for the interpretation of his data. Similarly, Kang and Mastin (2008:55) maintained that MAS/FEM “demonstrated comparatively lower power in explaining difference in website items”. When predictions or explanations about linguistic choices on the basis of MAS/FEM are formulated, the findings seem contradictory. Meeuwesen et al. (2009) found, contrary to their expectations, that in medical communication:

[t]he more masculine a country was, the more social talk, backchannelling and facilitation [paraphrasing and clarification] the patients gave. However, the more feminine a country was, the more information patients gave, and the more biomedical talk (Meeuwesen et al. 2009: 63).

On the other hand, Hatipoğlu (2006), who found that the great majority of English calls for papers did not contain any salutations and closings, claims that this could be associated to a ‘report’ view of

language, i.e. language being viewed mainly as a tool for exchanging information, in line with Britain's higher MAS (66) compared to Turkey (45), where a 'rapport' view of language was prominent.

2.5 Correlation among the cultural dimensions

As highlighted by Hofstede (2001: 60), the dimensions are independent and "their country scores should not be systematically correlated". Yet, across the wealthier countries, UA is significantly correlated with IDV, PD and MAS, therefore functioning "as a kind of summary index" (*ibidem*). Although authors have generally related specific linguistic communicative and linguistic features to single dimensions, the correlations between the dimensions are pointed out in some of the studies reviewed. For example, Vishwanath (2003: 585) treats UA as a summary index, as indicated by Hofstede, and Smith et al. (1998: 352) highlight "a strongly significant tendency for individualist countries to score low upon [...] power distance", while "[m]ost collectivist countries also scored high on power distance". With regard to EU countries, Meeuwesen et al. (2009: 59) observe that in many of them "a larger power distance goes hand in hand with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance [and] with more collectivism".

Concerning Italy and Great Britain, Katan (2006: 68) points out that Italy is indicated by Hofstede as an example of the dimension mix "strong UA, high PD", represented by the metaphor "pyramid of people", as opposed to Great Britain, which exemplifies the dimension mix "weak UA, low PD", condensed in the metaphor "village market". In the author's words, "[t]he pyramid of people clearly relates to the chain of command and solid certainty in the face of changing situations, whereas the village market is a metaphor for the negotiated, consultative ad-hoc form of organizing, which depends very much on the particular situation" (Katan 2006: 68). Cucchi (2010) observes that the predictions on language usage made on the basis of Italy's and Great Britain scores on PD and UA are the same, in line with the fact that UA and PD are in some way related, since "differences among countries on uncertainty avoidance were originally discovered as a by-product of power distance" (Hofstede 2003: 111).

3. Cultural dimensions in the *San Carlo* and *Walkers* websites

Since Hofstede's model has proved to possess predictive and explanatory power with regard to communicative and linguistic choices on the basis of nationality, in the present section it is applied to the websites of two companies, the British company *Walkers* and the Italian *San Carlo*, of which the English version is examined. The study aims to verify whether differences between the two websites could be explained on the basis of nationality and, more generally, whether Hofstede's model could successfully be applied to English used as a lingua franca by Italians. MAS/FEM is not considered for two reasons. Firstly, Italy and Great Britain are close on this dimension (70 vs 66) and, secondly, the review in the previous section has not indicated the existence of any clear links between this dimension and language.

Following Turnbull (2008), who studied websites of food and drink companies, the two websites analyzed in the present study belong to local companies of the food sector. National identity is in fact assumed to be more manifest in food and drink, "which by its very nature is culture-specific" (Turnbull 2008: 18), and consequently in the texts related to them. In addition, two local companies were preferred to multinationals selling national brands, in that in this latter case "their national identity may have been 'diluted' in some way" (ibidem). Lastly and more significantly, it is hypothesized that the website texts of local companies retain more of the discursive style typical of the nation.

While it is reasonably assumed that the texts in the *Walkers* website are written by native speakers of English, the English version of *San Carlo* may be qualified as a translation from Italian, with some adaptation, as can be seen from a comparison between the excerpts in example (1), taken from the "history" section, in the original Italian and in the corresponding English version:

- (1) Siamo nel 1936 e Francesco Vitaloni apre a Milano, in via Lecco 18 (angolo via Casati), un negozio di rosticceria che, in onore della vicina chiesetta, viene intitolata [sic] a San Carlo. Vi si frigge un po' di tutto, dal pollo al vitello, dal pesce alla verdura. Ma, in special modo, la "Rosticceria San Carlo" si distingue ben presto per una specialità a quei tempi rivoluzionaria, "le patatine croccanti" che il Sig. Francesco, coadiuvato dalla moglie Angela e dal figlio Alberto, fa distribuire ogni giorno alle panetterie e ai bar del circondario. La produzione è

inizialmente limitata, venti chili di patatine al giorno, ma è subito successo: tutti le vogliono. Saranno destinate a fare molta strada.²²

In 1936, Francesco Vitaloni opened a *rosticceria* (deli selling roast meats) at 18, via Lecco (on the corner with via Casati). He named his deli in honour of the nearby church, thereby founding San Carlo. On offer there was little of everything: from chicken and veal, to fish and vegetables, but the rosticceria San Carlo had a unique speciality, revolutionary for the times; each day Francesco, assisted by his wife Angela and son Alberto would distribute potato chips to bakeries and bars in the area. Initially, production was limited to around 20 kg of potatoes per day, but it became an instant success, and soon everybody wanted them. They were destined to make some big progress.²³

Following Toury's (1995) descriptivist approach to translation, also adopted by Garzone (2009), who analyses the English versions of the websites of the Italian and the Spanish tourism boards, the English version of *S. Carlo*, though mediated from Italian, is taken as an autonomous text, independently of its Italian original. In addition, the English version mediated from Italian is considered as a text in English as a *lingua franca* in that English is used in this case "not only to address native speakers e.g. Britons or Americans, but principally to communicate with an international audience" (Garzone 2009: 34).

A mainly qualitative analysis was conducted on the English version of the *San Carlo* website, available at <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/>, and on *Walkers*, at <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/>. An attempt was made to save these sites with htrack-3.43-7.exe, a freeware offline browser utility which downloads World Wide websites from the Internet to a local directory. However, while the *San Carlo* website was downloaded successfully, the programme could not save the *Walkers* one. Therefore, the accessible version of the site, a graphically simplified version available at <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessFlavours/index.html>, was saved in txt format for quantitative comparison with the *San Carlo* website, which was subsequently carried out using Wordsmith Tools 4. Regarding the products, only the texts about crisps were selected from <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/> and included in the corpus, discarding the

²² <http://www.sancarlo.it/it/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>

²³ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>

texts in the sections ‘snacks’, ‘aperitif’, ‘bread’ and ‘cakes/pastries’²⁴ in order to make the corpus more comparable to <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/>, where only crisps are dealt with. The difference in the range of products does not affect the content of the other sections, which in both websites are dedicated to crisps. Due to the way the website is constructed, *San Carlo*’s “history”²⁵ section could not be included in the corpus and was therefore examined only qualitatively.

3.1 Individualism/collectivism (IDV/COL)

Since Italy scores lower on IDV (76) compared to Britain (89), less emphasis on single individuals is expected in the *San Carlo* website. In line with this hypothesis, Alberto, the company’s owner, his father Francesco, the founder of the company, and his wife Angela are only mentioned in the section about the history of the company. *Walkers*’ owner, Gary, is often portrayed in photographs, has a section in his name – “Gary’s Great Trips”²⁶ – and even talks to the visitors in the section “Do us a flavour”²⁷, where one can get personal descriptions of the six people who invented *Walkers*’ new flavours. This is illustrated in example (2):

(2) Catherine dreams of chillies lounging on beds of chocolate. Psychologists probably find it signifies something worrying. We just think she's creative²⁸.

On the basis of Zhao et al. (2003) and Wolfe (2008), a less personalized style is expected in *San Carlo* compared to *Walkers*, which was confirmed by the fewer occurrences of first and second person pronouns and adjectives. This result, obtained using Wordsmith Tools 4, is illustrated in Table 1.

²⁴ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/prodotti.asp?ArticleId=3>

²⁵ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>

²⁶ <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/garysgreattrips/>

²⁷ <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high>

²⁸ <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high#/flavours/section=breakfast&view=facts>

1 st and 2 nd person pronouns and adjectives	Total number of occurrences in <i>San Carlo</i> (6.868 tokens)	Normaliz ed data per 100 tokens in <i>San Carlo</i>	Total number of occurrences in <i>Walkers</i> (7.869 tokens)	Normaliz ed data per 100 tokens in <i>Walkers</i>
I	0	0	41	0,52
Me	0	0	0	0
My	0	0	14	0,18
You	10	0,15	145	1,84
Your	3	0,04	75	0,95
We	8	0,12	47	0,60
Us	1	0,01	34 ²⁹	0,43
Our	5	0,07	39	0,49
Total	27	0,39	395	5,01

Table 1. 1st and 2nd personal pronouns and adjectives in *San Carlo* and *Walkers*.

The absence of a FAQs section³⁰ in *San Carlo* explains the absence of 'I' 'my' 'you', which in *Walkers* appear in sentences like:

(3) Can I change my vote once I have submitted it?

Er No. Just like a proper election, once **you** have submitted a vote, **you** can't change that vote.³¹

However, there is no apparent reason in the website content which may explain the higher frequency of 'we', 'us' and 'our', which are always used in *Walkers* to refer to the company, as in:

(4) We're proud to have the Carbon Reduction label on our packs to show how far **we've** come and how committed **we** are to keeping up the good work.³²

²⁹ 21 occurrences of 'us' are in the name of the competition "Do us a Flavour".

³⁰ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessFlavours/faqs.html>

³¹ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessFlavours/faqs.html>

³² www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessWalkers/nationsFavourite.html

In line with Kang and Mastin's (2008) findings that websites of nations high on IDV contain more fun elements, *Walkers* has sections offering games and quizzes, called "Fun Stuff"³³, "Flavour Fun"³⁴ and "Fun Area"³⁵, which have no equivalent in *San Carlo*. Personalization and humor are linked in "Spudyourself"³⁶, where Gary, turned into a potato, explains how visitors can upload their photos, thus becoming potatoes, and send their friends personalized vocal messages through the website facilities.

3.2 Power Distance (PD)

Since Italy's PD score (50) is much higher than Britain's (35), less flexible role relationships are expected in *San Carlo*. This is apparent only once, when the company's founder is referred to as *signor*:

(5) It was in the 1940 that *signor* Vitaloni transferred all the activities to Greco, a location more suitable for building a continually growing activity.³⁷

However, the setting up of more rigid role relationships is clear when *San Carlo* is contrasted with *Walkers*, where visitors can fling edible things at "our friend"³⁸ Gary in the game "Fling the Flavour", and Gary is turned into a cleaner, sweeping the floor after the "Do us a flavour" competition, while telling the visitors about the results. Visitors are given a "chance to create and decide the next great flavours for the public to try"³⁹, thus performing tasks usually carried out by specialized staff.

Possibly due to Britain's low PD, the inventor of the flavour Onion Bhaji, is even jokingly compared to the romantic poet Wordsworth:

³³ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/>

³⁴ <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high#/flavours/section=breakfast&view=facts>

³⁵ <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/garysgreattrips/#funArea>

³⁶ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/funstuff/spudyourself.html>

³⁷ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>

³⁸ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/fun-stuff/flip-a-flavour>

³⁹ <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high#/howitworks/>

(4) Carole loves onion bhajis so much she even wrote a poem about them as her inspiration. Well, **it's no sillier than writing about daffodils...** And so much tastier!⁴⁰

This shows a tendency to egalitarianism even clearer in *Walkers'* section "Working with farmers" (example 6), celebrating the farmers' work, which has no equivalent in *San Carlo*:

(5) 'There's nothing quite like the sights, the sounds (and the smells!) of the British countryside. **But who is it that keeps this land so green and pleasant? Our farmers.** They're the **unsung heroes who are up at dawn every day, braving everything the British weather can throw at them** to produce top quality food.⁴¹

In addition to the content features illustrated so far, the preference for less symmetrical role relationships in *San Carlo* possibly due to Italy's high PD may also explain the reduced personalization and the lack of humor in *San Carlo*. Such a tendency, however, which reflects a general trend found typical of Italian websites (Turnbull 2008: 20), may also be attributed to Italy's lower IDV as shown in the previous section.

In line with Kang and Mastin's (2008) findings, *San Carlo* features authoritative narratives, which may reflect Italy's high PD. For example, in the "History" section – a title suggesting an objective report – the whole history of the company is covered, divided into five parts: 1936, '40, '50/'80, '90, from 2000 up to now. In the section about the '50/'80 the authoritative tone is given by the presence of references to *San Carlo* in the third person – 'the company' and 'the firm' - of dates and of semi-technical lexis ('turnover', 'distribution'):

(6) In the '50s son Alberto took up the reins of the company. In this **30** years period, from the **50s** to the **80s**, **the company** saw a steady growth in **turnover**, thanks to the widening geographical **distribution** and the expanding range of products, not just crisps but also savoury snacks, cakes and sweets. From **1970**, **the firm**

⁴⁰ <http://www.walkers-crisps.co.uk/flavours/default.aspx?ver=high#/flavours/section=onion&view=facts>

⁴¹ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/nations-favourite/working-with-farmers>

adopted the official name of *San Carlo Gruppo Alimentare* and the head office relocated to via Turati.⁴²

The corresponding *Walkers'* section has a more subjective title, "Our story" and offers a much more casual narrative, which starts out like a children's story and ends with a saying. The narrative features informal words such as the discourse marker *well*, the vague noun *things* and the vague quantifier *loads of*, as well as repetitions, exclamation marks and suspension marks, which are characteristic of an informal, relaxed style:

(7) **Long, long** ago (**well**, the 1880's) in a Midlands town **not so far away** (Leicester!), a butcher named Henry Walker opened a new butcher's shop and for a while **things** went well...

But by 1945 meat was so scarce that Henry branched out and began cooking slices of potato. They sold well and in 1954 the first flavoured crisps were created, Cheese and Onion was born! Henry Walker became Walkers and by the 1980's, we had **loads of** great flavours and chose Leicester's favourite son Gary Lineker to help sell our tasty wares to the world...

And the rest, as they say, **is history**.⁴³

3.3 Uncertainty Avoidance

As shown in the previous sections, both Italy's lower IDV compared to Great Britain's and its high PD may explain *San Carlo's* less personalized style compared to *Walkers*. However, this could also be interpreted as reduced attention to rapport building, which may be related to Italy's higher UA (75) compared to Britain (UA = 35), in line with Meeuwesen et al. (2009). As for the tendency to authoritativeness in *San Carlo*, reflecting the need of Italian companies to "establish their position as experts" found by Turnbull (2008: 20) to be typical of Italian companies, it could be associated both to Italy's high PD, as shown in the previous section, or to Italy's high UA.

Attempts to achieve exhaustiveness and precision, as is expected by experts, are evident in *San Carlo's* section "Nutritional information", which amounts to 5.551 words and comprises the subsections

⁴² <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing1.asp?ArticleId=9>.

⁴³ http://www.walkers.co.uk/?page=nutritional_info.

“Ingredients”, “Quality”, “Nutritional information” and “How to read the label”. The section “Ingredients”, for example, reports botanical facts about potatoes and contains a very detailed “history of the potato”, subdivided into “the origin”, “the arrival in Europe” and “evolution”. The lexis is very technical, some terms are in languages which may be unknown to visitors, and long lists are provided:

(8) The potato, whose scientific name is **Solanum tuberosum**, is a **herbaceous** plant belonging to the **Solanaceae** family, whose distinguishing characteristic is a **starchy tuber**.⁴⁴

There are 150 varieties used in industrial processing and usually those that store better during the winter are favoured, the following are among the more well-known: **Bintje, Hertha, Desiree, Caspar, Erntestolz, Ukama, Marijke, Aminca, Premiere, Prima, Avanti, Spunta, Costante, Manna**.⁴⁵

Tables show the types of vitamins⁴⁶, minerals⁴⁷ and antioxidants⁴⁸ found in *San Carlo*’s products, even a source is quoted, as one would do in an academic article. *Walkers*’ section “Nutritional info”, instead, is very synthetic: it offers a table⁴⁹ indicating the nutrition information contained in *Walkers*’ products. Similarly, *Walkers*’ accessible version is far shorter compared to *San Carlo*, amounting to just 254 words. Only two features of the crisps are mentioned, lower fat and lower salt content. The purpose of the section, therefore, does not seem that of being exhaustive: rather, the company aims to reassure consumers:

(9) It’s amazing **how little salt it takes** to make something taste great. That’s why **we’ve been able to reduce the amount of salt** in our crisps, without reducing the irresistibility.⁵⁰

In line with Italy’s high PD, emphasis on the company expertise in *San Carlo* leads to highlighting complexity and conformity to rules and

⁴⁴ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=29>

⁴⁵ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=28>

⁴⁶ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=68>

⁴⁷ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=69>

⁴⁸ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=70>

⁴⁹ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/nutritional-info>

⁵⁰ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessWalkers/nutritionalInfo.html>

regulations, as shown in example (10), taken from the beginning of *San Carlo*'s section "Manufacturing process":

(10) When the truck arrives at the factory **tests are carried out** on samples of potatoes before unloading **in order to verify that they correspond to the established required criteria** and only after that, are they accepted for production.

Before the potatoes are stored, earth and stones are cleaned off and the spotted ones **below the required standards** are discarded. At this stage, those considered suitable for processing are collected and stored in wooden boxes.

The storage stage is very critical, so the **closest attention is paid in every minute detail**: lighting, ventilation, humidity, and temperature.⁵¹

On the contrary, in *Walkers*' section "From field to crisp" the emphasis is on simplicity and naturalness:

(11) Ever wondered, while tucking into a bag of Walkers, how our crisps are made? Well, **we'd love to be able to pretend that it's a terribly complicated process like rocket science**, so that you'd be really impressed with how clever we are... But the fact is that **making our crisps is fairly simple**.

1. Plant a potato seed and pray for some good old British weather!
2. Pick, and double check it's a top quality spud
3. Wash, peel and slice it
4. Cook in SUNSEED® Oil – naturally lower in saturates
5. Season with a sprinkle of magic!

And that's it. From farmer's field to your taste buds **in five simple steps! We said it wasn't rocket science...**⁵²

In order to further explore the importance of complexity and simplicity in *San Carlo* and *Walkers*, a search of the words 'complexity', 'complex', 'complicated', 'difficult' and 'easy', 'easily', 'simple', 'simplicity', 'simply' was carried out with Wordsmith Tools 4.0. Only this latter search yielded significant results, showing that, in line with Britain's

⁵¹ <http://www.sancarlo.it/en/publishing2.asp?ArticleId=17>

⁵² http://www.walkers.co.uk/?page=nutritional_info.

low PD, simplicity is a valued quality at *Walkers* and characterizes both the products and the competition “Do us a flavour”, as shown in table 2 and in example (12).

Words indicating simplicity	<i>San Carlo</i> (6.868 tokens)	<i>San Carlo</i> Normalized data	<i>Walkers</i> (7.869 tokens)	<i>Walkers</i> Normalized data
Easy	1	0,01	3	0,04
Easily	1	0,01	0	0
Simple	1 (simplest)	0,01	6	0,08
Simplicity	0	0	2	0,03
Simply	1	0,01	4	0,05
Total	4	0,04	15	0,20

Table 2. Words indicating simplicity in *San Carlo* and *Walkers*.

(12) Bags of taste – that’s what our crisps are all about. They’re a **simple** combination of great British potatoes and fantastic flavours.⁵³

The key to the success of our Ready Salted crisps is their classic **simplicity**.⁵⁴

Simply Salted. A lighter way to enjoy the classic **simplicity** of tasty potatoes [...].⁵⁵

Cheese & Onion. [...] They say that it’s the **simple** things in life that are the most satisfying and these might just prove that point!⁵⁶

You will **simply** need to include the exact spelling of the keyword for the flavour you wish to vote for. **Easy**.⁵⁷

⁵³ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/our-range/walkers-crisps>

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/our-range/walkers-lights>

⁵⁶ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/#/our-range/walkers-max>

⁵⁷ <http://www.walkers.co.uk/access/accessFlavours/faqs.html>

if you have a facebook profile, **simply** visit the 'Do us a flavour' fan page www.facebook.com/flavourelection, add the voting application and vote for your favourite flavour.⁵⁸

The flavour with the most votes from the public will win. **Simple!**⁵⁹

The six finalists were judged by a team against the following criteria: [...] **simple**, straightforward and fun [...].⁶⁰

4. Conclusion

The studies discussed in section 2 and the comparison of *San Carlo* and *Walkers*' websites in section 3 confirm, in the specific case of Hofstede's dimensions, that "the dimensions of cultural variability [...] can be used to explain and predict systematic similarities and differences in communication across cultures" (Gudykunst and Matsumoto 1996: 19-20). While most of the studies examined in section 2 have used Hofstede's dimensions to compare native languages across cultures, other studies and the analysis in section 3 have shown that it is possible to utilize Hofstede's dimensions to study English as a lingua franca, which may as such reflect specific national discourse styles. Although differences in comparable websites like *San Carlo* and *Walkers* could be related to corporate culture rather than to national culture, the present analysis confirms Turnbull's (2008) results, which indicate different discourse styles in British English websites as opposed to websites where ELF is used by Italians, and shows that discourse choices may be explained on the basis of national identity. In particular, IDV/COL, PD and UA, already used in the literature for predicting and interpreting linguistic differences on the basis of cultural differences, have proved effective also in the comparison of English used by Italians as a lingua franca and British English.

A relevant finding of the present study is that the same communicative and linguistic features may be related to different

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

dimensions. In the case of Italy, lack of humor may be due both to lower IDV compared to Great Britain and to high PD. Similarly, lower personalization may be attributed to lower IDV, to high PD and to high UA. Finally, reduced role flexibility, more formal language and expert attitude may be put down to high PD as well as to high UA. The fact that it is not easy to establish a correlation between linguistic choices and single cultural dimensions is probably due to the correlation among the dimensions themselves, which in the case of Italy and Great Britain reflect what typically happens in many EU countries, where “a larger power distance goes hand in hand with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance [and] with more collectivism” (Meeuwesen et al. 2009: 59). This set of dimensions enable one to make similar predictions about the way language is used, thus proving the strong interrelatedness of language and culture. In order to confirm the present findings, research should be extended to ELF used in other European countries.

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