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Comparing drinking toasts – Comparing contexts

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Spending on feasting and wine is better than hoarding our substance: That which we give makes us richer; that which is hoarded is lost. Shota Rustaveli: "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" (1172–1216)



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In this article I discuss drinking toasts given in cultures that attach great importance to this genre in everyday life (Georgia, Russia, Sweden) and toasts given by guests from countries where the genre is less important (Germany, the Netherlands). I show that Georgian toasts entail the most elaborate and a very

even though there are many similarities. Beyond a formula such as “cheers” and clinking glasses toasts in all three countries communicate moral values and underline national particularities (“do culture” in an ethnomethodological sense) and combine poetics with conversation (see Knoblauch & Kotthoff 2001; Norrick 2002). When performing toasts in these countries, foreign visitors often deviate from local cultural norms, but this is not problematic, provided they comply with the minimal genre standards (such as expressing the central formula of the *na zdarovie*-type at the end) and with those of ‘positive politeness’ in Goffman’s sense (1967).

1. Comparative ethnopragmatics and local constructions of ‘us’ and ‘them’

Differing pragmatics within and between cultures have been compared from several perspectives. In House’s (1986:281) words:

Cross-cultural pragmatics is a field of inquiry which compares the ways in which two or more languages are used in communication. Cross-cultural pragmatics is an important new branch of contrastive linguistic studies because in any two languages different features of the social context may be found to be relevant in deciding what can be expressed and how it is conventionally expressed.

For a long time, studies of pragmatics with a comparative focus typically concentrated on how specific communicative functions are realized in different languages (Barron 2001:23). For Barron a typical approach was to study the strategies employed in realizing a ‘request’ speech act in two different languages. While some scholars of contrastive pragmatics still do questionnaire studies of speech acts in different languages, such as studying how compliments or complaints are made (Farnia et al. 2010), others take broader discourse contexts into consideration and emphasize the necessity of extending their analysis beyond the specific speech act (Brehmer 2009). In his study of how gratitude is expressed in Russian (in comparison to German), Brehmer employs several complementary data sets, namely small corpus of everyday spoken language, a questionnaire study and data from V corpora.

Others go even further in approaching the study of language and culture and call this ‘ethnopragsmatics’ (Duranti 2007). They aim to reconstruct human action as comprised of both an *affective* (to be with) and a *moral* (to be for) component (Duranti 2007:86). Duranti’s notion of (speech) action takes into account the historical and social context from an anthropological perspective. Using examples from the Samoan language, he shows that certain speech acts have a specific indexical value because they are associated with specific social actors who define their identity in terms of the community. He calls this ‘performative agency’ (see the

review by Vergaro 2010). ‘Ethnopragsmatics’ thus focuses much more strongly on interpreting talk within its natural surroundings. Pragmatics, as a usage-based perspective on language and interaction in context, not only explores speech activities, but also studies face work and identity management in larger communicative complexes and generally explores the discourse strategies of speaking and writing in natural contexts (Pütz & Neff-van Aertselaer 2008).

Here I will explore the speech genre of *toasting*, focusing on ‘performative agency’ and combining ideas from studies of intercultural communication, anthropological linguistics, conversation analysis, and gender and ritual studies (as in Kotthoff 2007). The frame of meals shared with guests varies greatly from culture to culture, and in each culture activates different knowledge schemata. I will examine specific aspects of conversation, keeping in mind what Hörning (2004) calls the ‘double character of culture’: it consists, on the one side, of symbols, rituals and texts and, on the other, of practices and interpretations. In Duranti’s sense (2007), we are doing interaction analysis as part of cultural semiotics. Toasts can be speech acts, as is the case if someone at a social gathering raises a glass and proposes: “I would like to drink to our little gathering. I hope we will all have an enjoyable evening.” But even in such a simple case more is demanded than speech alone.

There are also certain ‘felicity conditions’ in toasting (Austin 1962): One basic condition is that the toast should express a wish regarded favorably by everyone in the group. The imperative of clinking glasses before drinking an alcoholic beverage already reaches beyond the speech act into other domains of cultural semiotics. In many ways, toasts represent an ideal case or prototype of a communicative genre (Günthner 2007), showing how formal generic classifications and variations work in this case, and how the genre can be related to action. The act of drinking in toasts serves, e.g. as a way of honoring a person, a deed, a project, etc. Toasts are proposed in specific contexts (dining and/or drinking with guests or friends) and help to shape the degree of formality of these contexts. In the English-speaking world, toasters end a toast with a set phrase such as ‘cheers’, raise their glasses to each other, and after this gesture engage in the nonverbal activity of drinking together. We even find these basic features of toasting rituals in cultures where toasting is rare.

Eating and drinking are seldom just physical acts of consumption, but are rather culturally overlaid. Collectively relaxing with alcohol tends to give interaction an informal character, while toasting reformalizes it and transforms social drinking into ‘constructive drinking’ (Douglas 1984). Erdheim (2010) regards the enjoyment of alcohol as a means of transcending boundaries, particularly when alcohol is consumed ritually. Gough and Edwards (1998) point out that alcohol consumption has traditionally been used to affirm masculinity. In the past, women in many cultures and societies were even forbidden to drink and

were expected to consume alcohol without losing self-control (Kotthoff 1995). This body politics already indicates the social indexicality of activities whose reconstruction we, along with Duranti (2007), consider to be quite complex. Drinking talk is gendered in all the societies that have been studied up until now (see Eichwede 2006 on Russia). Frake (1972: 90) writes that for the Subanon culture in Mindanao an adult male's social role depends to a considerable extent on his performance during social drinking. Kotthoff (1991, 1995), Tezelishvili (2003) and Mühlfried (2006) also describe similar relevance structures for Georgian social drinking talk. Today, changes in the gender politics of alcohol consumption and drinking talk can be observed in all the cultures discussed here: Georgia, Russia, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany. Toasting and alcohol consumption are still largely gendered in Georgia. Women sometimes offer toasts at banquets if their social position demands it, but usually they don't toast in all-female gatherings.

Everywhere in the world toasting is practiced as a way of supporting 'positive face needs' in the sense of Brown and Levinson (1987) (e.g. thanking, congratulating, praising, complimenting). I will point out certain Georgian particularities of the genre (such as a pathetic toasting style that sometimes evokes a religious frame at the dinner table) and compare them with particular characteristics of Russian and Swedish toasts. An analysis of toasts offered by Dutch and German guests shows that they employ a non-native pragmatics and genre style. Since very few empirical studies have previously been made of this communicative genre in Russia and Sweden, the basis for comparison is limited. Thus in my comments on Russian and Swedish toasts, I must necessarily exercise great reserve, but observations in all three countries allow me to say that the toasts span a great stylistic range: There are short and long toasts, explicit or implicit ones, light-hearted and serious ones (to mention just a few contrasts). Very often, national traditions are explicitly mentioned. Toasts are used to "do culture" (Kotthoff 2004) in the sense of expressing national customs and standards. Russia and Sweden are countries with elaborate toasting customs, while the Netherlands and Germany are not. Research has also been done on the rich *zdravica* tradition in the Balkan countries (Petrovic 2006). While Ireland and Scotland also have well-known toasting traditions, I have not found any studies on them. All the travel guides to Georgia and many films portray the particularities of the Georgian banquet.¹ However, only insiders can interpret the nuances of a Georgian toasting performance in all its socially expressive dimensions.

In other former Soviet republics besides Georgia, the toasting ritual also plays an important role, and there are numerous books offering original toasting formulations (Legkov 1990; Ivelashvili 1995; Petrovic 2006). See below an example, found at (<http://www.suite101.com/content/na-zdorovie-the-truth-about-russian-toasts-and-drinking-customs-a313468>):

No drink without a toast in Russia

Russian traditions demand that every drink is accompanied by a toast. In the Soviet times, this habit was influenced even further by the Caucasian custom where toasting makes up an important part of oral culture. As Caucasian wines, especially Georgian ones, were considered the best in the iron-curtain Russia, the Georgian tradition of flowery parable-like toasts made its way into the country. You can see some typical samples of Georgian toasts here. Usually, they are addressed by the *tamada* (tah-mah-DAH) – a Georgian toastmaster. Russian parties, too, usually have a tamada – either a hired one or just one of the revelers – whose responsibility is to make sure the guests have fun: a tamada organizes dances and party games, acts as a party cheerleader, and offers toasts. Russian toasts are usually less ornate and more to the point. But, as the Russians say, "Only alcoholics don't toast their drinks."

Russian toasts never come as close to the genre of prayer as is sometimes the case in Georgia, where guests often respond to a toast with 'amen' (Kotthoff 1999 and below). As an oral genre, the art of toasting must be learned through practice (Nodia 2000), even though there are books and web pages that offer advice on what topics to mention and the most suitable formulas, what they mean and what a proper toast should sound like in countries such as Russia, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland or Sweden. If a culture has identified a certain genre as typical of its tradition, then it can be used to "do culture" and its members will accept an outsider's deviant participation if he or she complies with certain basic genre and politeness standards. Humor can be a central procedure in this conversational genre, both for natives and non-natives, who use it to cope with their knowledge deficits concerning the cultural standards of the genre. I will discuss the implications of this thesis below.

In Sweden, toasting with alcoholic beverages is obligatory at a table with guests, but it can be limited to the gesture of raising one's glass to someone else (Röcklinsberg 2009). One fundamental question for all comparative research that tries to avoid reproducing stereotypes is how to define and identify the cultural groups to be compared. Their membership categorizations – be they national and ethnic identity, gender, age or profession – have lost their quasi-'natural' quality. Concepts from sociology, anthropology, linguistics and social psychology portray group culture as a construction of 'us and others' (Hausendorf 2000; Spreckels & Kotthoff 2007). Recently, many scholars (see Corder & Meyerhoff 2007 for a summary) have started to see cultural groups as communities of practice. Drawing

1. Especially entertaining is: *Kidnapping Caucasian Style* (1967) by Leonid Gaidai, in which a Russian ethnologist travels around Georgia to study toasts.

especially on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), communities of practice can be regarded as constituting cultural groups because they have their own sets of practices and shared interpretive repertoires. In a way that is typical for our constructionist approach, I will provide fine-grained interactional analyses in order to understand how social relationships are created and how a speaker's knowledge or ignorance of the shared repertoire and locally shared history of the community of practice influence ongoing social processes.

The space in which customary practices go unchallenged can range from a clearly defined 'community of practice' to diffuse communities with comparable consumption habits, lifestyles, attitudes and political systems. In many contexts, categorization may work with flexible demarcation lines, such as the East-West divide. Former Soviet bloc countries share historical practices in areas such as business and politics. Some sociolinguistic studies in intercultural communication (Leontiy 2009) point to communicative style features that reflect societal conditions. Differences in communicative styles can reflect various conditions such as societal backgrounds, knowledge asymmetries, differing language usage, opposing interests or value systems. Most analyses in intercultural communication research have tried to explain how different communicative styles lead to misunderstandings. However, in the last ten years, research has begun to go beyond analyses of misunderstandings in intercultural discourse (Bühlig & ten Thije 2006). Comparisons of toasts offered by members of 'toasting cultures' with those by novices³ unfamiliar with the culture's genre nearly always find significant differences. The latter offer much less elaborate toasts and draw on a more limited stylistic spectrum. But not all deviant speech behavior by outsiders is likely to be a source of cross-cultural irritation (let alone conflict); for in an activity as highly ritualized as toasting it may be perfectly acceptable for an outsider to deviate in certain regards from the conventional practices of insiders. I will later discuss how the toast genre indexes membership in a certain culture, stances to cultural standards, and/or being an outsider in an ethnomethodological sense. Local constructions of 'us' and 'them' through toast performance may be as acceptable to everyone in a group as are variations in the communication of in-group membership.

Speaking of "doing culture" we try to handle how degrees of salient cultural-ity are communicated. Culturality is, on the one side, always given, but, on the other side, the particular relevance of culture or respectively cultural differences can be brought into the foreground of interaction (Kotthoff 2004; Günthner forthcoming). "Doing x" means in Garfinkel's tradition to place a procedure in the foreground of attention.

In Russia, Georgia and Sweden toasting practices range across a broad stylistic spectrum, from very formal drinking toasts that lend a formal character to an occasion to very informal ones. Particular styles index culturality with its preference for degrees of (in)formality. We use all available forms of expression to negotiate degrees of formality or informality (Irvine 1979). In most situations, this is in fact negotiable – and not pre-set as in the institutional discourse of, for example, a law court. Foreigners use a special stylistic spectrum, for example, they are likely to toast in an informal style that is easier to manage and at the same time echoes tendencies of their own culture.³ Linke (2000) describes for Western countries a communicative tendency to deformatize situations.

2. Rituals of positive politeness

Toasting is definitely an interaction ritual of positive politeness in Erving Goffman's sense. Goffman (1967) distinguishes between positive and negative face work (drawing on Durkheim's theory of positive and negative rituals), i.e. supportive and protective distancing activities. Politeness has to do with saving, protecting and maintaining one's own face and that of others.

Stylistic delivery plays a greater role in this case. Collins (2004: xi) suggests that we can see how variations in the intensity of rituals lead to variations in social membership patterns, "not on the global level of 'society' but as local memberships, sometimes ephemeral, stratified and conflictual." Hence, the style of a ritual performance indexicalizes the social meaning of an event and invites inferencing (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 2007).

The so-called 'positive face' is the one that a person (and his or her social network) receives and gives to others in terms of affirmation, appreciation, sympathy and expressions of affection. Included in positive face is a recognition of everything that makes up our personality (integrating the social network to culturally different degrees). Of course, negative face is also given a balanced treatment in toasting, because the toastmaster normally respects social distance. He or she does not publicize a toast subject's very private or critical domains. Because shared objects of reverence and praise are constituted by toasts, the positive dimension is in the foreground of interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) include among the communicative activities of positive politeness, e.g. compliments, affirmations of commonality, expressions of interest, personal inquiries, giving thanks

3. See Linke 2000 on the cultural communicative tendency to deformatization in the German drinking world.

3. To be exact, they are not novices but just not regular performers.

and greeting others. Speakers display great emotional and rhetorical engagement in regard to the primary addressees of toasts and pay homage to them and their positive characteristics or aspirations. This engagement is accepted as shared by all the toasters and is later affirmed by clinking glasses and simultaneously drinking. Toasts are typical 'phatic communication' activities (Malinowski 1922). Their information value is usually less relevant than the demonstration of mutual esteem. Nonetheless, a toast performed before an audience publicizes moments from the toast subject's life and affirms shared values (Kotthoff 1999).

A toast performer does more than just honoring other persons and engaging in face politics for their sake. With a well-formulated toast, he can also maximize the other's esteem and authority in the group. Georgian men (and in certain cases also women) can use toasting to negotiate hierarchy and values and to present themselves as 'good Georgians' (in principle, but to a lesser degree, this also holds true in Russia and Sweden).

3. Georgian toasts

Greeting can be regarded as an example of a simple interaction ritual, but in many societies, toasting takes the form of a more complex interaction ritual. Like other communicative genres, toasts have a specific social distribution, value loading, and typical performance style (Holiski 1989; Kotthoff 1999).

When sitting down to share food and drink at a Georgian table, guests from most Western countries seldom realize that they are about to take part in a practice dramatically different from comparable ones in their native country (Kotthoff 1991; Chatwin 1997). They soon find themselves participating in a ritual, the ancient *supra* or table ceremony, that has little in common with the informal conversation between courses and beverages expected by most of them. At a Georgian table with guests, a master of ceremonies (*tamada*) is chosen, or the host undertakes to play this role. Performing the *supra* is an obligatory act of honoring a guest. But even within intimate groups like families and among neighbors there are many occasions for ceremonial meals and banquets, e.g. marriages, birthdays, examinations, births, returning from a trip, funerals and anniversaries – even events such as everyday visits by neighbors. Depending on the occasion, 'happy' banquets (*lxinis supra*) are distinguished from 'sad' ones (*čiris supra*), distinctions that are also enacted through the choice of foods and the topics of toasts (Holisky 1989). But even an ordinary evening spent with friends is formalized insofar as a communicative genre comes into play and sets the frame for the evening's interaction – this is the toasting genre of *sadiregrželo*. This word is made up of the components *dre*, meaning day, and *gržel*, meaning long. We find a derivation

with the circumfixe *sa-...-o*, meaning 'that which is connected to a long life'. The substantive is derived from the causative verb *dirgržleba* (to wish someone a long life). According to Boeder (2009), we already find the concept in the Middle Ages in the writings of the Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli.

Toasts, the *sadiregržlebi*, are generally offered by a *tamada*, assigned this task beforehand or especially chosen by the group to play this role. Often it is the host himself or a friend of the family who serves as the *tamada*. The *tamada* ensures that each draught of wine constitutes a gesture of honoring someone. Simply drinking without performing this ritual is regarded as impolite (in a sense that is more extreme and more context-overarching than in Russia and Sweden). During a typical evening shared by friends in Georgia, the following topics should be addressed in a toast (not necessarily in this order):⁴ the *tamada* and his family, guests, their countries, the health and well-being of their families, deceased relatives or friends, parents, existing and still unborn children, world peace, the homelands of all present, the women at the table, the mothers of all those present, love, the health of the host household, the host and hostess. The toasts employ a variable set of canonical themes, but the canon is adapted to the situation. In this way, the conversation is formalized to a high degree and is fitted into a specific temporal structure. The formula for clinking glasses is *gaumaržos* (literally: he/she/it should be victorious). When drinking to a certain person it can be *gagimaržos* (you should be victorious). Goldstein (1999: 27) points to some further generic particularities:

Often the tamada's words are seconded by others in the gathering, who rise to say a few words about a parent or a friend. If the tamada knows that one of the guests has something particularly appropriate or moving to say, he may offer that person *alaverdi*, permission to pronounce the next toast. Here the tamada's sensitivity is especially important as he surveys those gathered around the table, making sure that everyone is included and given an opportunity to speak.

3.1 Drinking to wish God's grace

Between 1988 and 2006, I spent some 27 months in Georgia and collected about 40 hours of audio recordings of toasts, offered mainly in Georgian, but also in German and Russian.

Let us examine a toast made by a man (Cotne) from the capital city of Tbilisi, who, with four others from Tbilisi (his daughter, our colleague Elsa, myself), was

4. Kiknadze (2004) writes that the second toast should be to the hostess. In any case, this is very important. In Georgia there are many regional specificities centering on toasting and table customs (Böder 2009).

making a visit to the countryside in the Pshavi region. Cotne drinks to the neighbors and to the extended families of the Pshavs who are present (the farmer Vaxtang, the farmer Niko, a Georgian writer and another farmer). He invokes religious formulas in line 43 ('I bless you all') and in line 44 ('and may God give his grace to everyone'), which is typical. The start of the toast is clearly marked by a formal and ceremonial manner of speaking. The city-dweller, Cotne, begins his toast with an introduction that already suggests a prayer: "praised be" (*adidos*). Indeed, in Georgia toasting is a genre that borders closely on prayer:

- (1) Toast I
- 27 C: ადიდოს იმთი სახელი,
adidos imati saxeli,
praised be the names of those
28 რომელზეც თქვენი ხელიდან ჰქვას ითხოვს,
romelnic tkveni xelidan čikas itxovs,
who await from your hands a glass,
29 და თქვენი ქიდან სახელის
da tkveni enidan saxelis
and from your tongues mention
30 გვგონებს და სათქმელის თქმას.
gagonebas da satkmelis tkmas.
of their own names.

He makes much use of metonymy, as in line 27 ("praised be the names of those" for 'praised be those'), line 28 ("from your hands" for "from you"), and line 29 ("from your tongues" for "from you"). Metonymy endows the discourse with pathos by elevating the particularity of its contents. Further, we often find rhetorical three-part lists:

- 31 V: gaumaržos (parallel speech))
32 იმთ სახელსა და იმთ კაცობს
imat saxelsa da imat kacobas
to the names and to the humanity,
33 და იმთ ვაჟკაცობას
da imat važkacobas
and to the manliness
34 და იმთ ქალობას,
da imat kalobas,
and to the femininity of those,
35 ვინც გვერდით დგებიან
vinc gverdit dagidian,
that accompany you,
36 ავლად-ჩავლილნი მრუდე თვალს არ გამოგაყოფენ,
avlii-čavliilni mrude tvals ar gamogaqoleben,
and cast no disparaging looks at you,

- 37 თქვენ პატივსაცემი და ისინიც პატივსაცემი
tkvenpaťivsa scent da isinic paťivsa gcemen.
whom you honor and by whom you are honored.
38 ღმერთმა გავმარჯოს სუველს,
řmertma gaumaržos suqvelas,
God shall give His grace to all.

Above, we find two such multi-part rhetorical lists (32, 33, 34 and 35, 36, 37). We encounter important cultural concepts like that of the family name (*saxeli*), *važkacoba*, which could be translated as 'proper manliness' (line 33), and *kaloba* (34), 'proper femininity' (see Kotthoff 1991 and 1995 for a discussion of the gender politics of Georgian toasts), as well as the term for honor and deference (*paťivi*). Additional meanings, which need not be made explicit, are associated with these terms; they are invoked by virtue of the participants' shared understanding.

- 39 მე ამით დავლოცავ აქ თქვენ სამეზობლობის,
me amit davlocav ak tkven samezoblobos,
hereby I drink to your neighbors,
40 სავარეულოსსა
savareulosas. ((raises a glass))
to your extended families.
41 N: სავსეულის, (glasses clink))
sapšavlos,
to the pšavs.
42 C: სავსეულის
sapšavlos.
to the pšavs.
43 დავლოცავთ სუველს,
dagillocavt suqvelas,
I bless all,
44 და ღმერთმა გავმარჯოს სუველს,
dařmertma gaumaržos suqvelas,
and may God give his grace to everyone
((holds the glass))
45 ჩვენ მასხინდლებს
čven maspinglebs
to our hosts.
46 E: ამინ.ამინ.ამინ.
amin, amin, amin.
amen, amen, amen.
47 V: gaumaržos.
48 ((everyone drinks))

Several times, religious formulas are employed, as in (38, 43, 44). The toast is thereby transformed into a blessing of the host and his family and region. Hence,

it is not surprising that Elsa responds to the toast with a religious formula (46). Normally a round of toasting ends when an important person (here the host, Vaxtang), by saying *gaumarjos* (47), invites all the participants to repeat the wish and to drink.

3.2 Communicating honor and artistry

Great importance is assigned to formal and pathos-laden communication and to addressing those present as representatives of larger entities, such as their clans, regions, extended families or the institutions to which they may belong. This is a stylistic and ritualistic difference from the corresponding toasting genres in most countries of Western Europe or North America. In Georgia, people regard the pathos-laden form of toasting as normal and do not find it bombastic or pompous.

Pathos can be seen as 'keying' in the sense of Hymes (1974). Keyings form an important subgroup of contextualizations that has not been studied very much. Contextualization influences both the meaning and pragmatic function of an utterance and modulates the truth conditions of a discourse – its relation to reality. In humor or in eccentric speech, for example, truth conditions are relaxed (Kallmeyer 1979; Norrick 1993). This happens in pathos as well, but in a different direction (Kotthoff 2007). In joking, one can play with incongruent double framings, while in pathos the double framing is congruent: value systems (e.g. a current concrete frame and a general or transcendent one) are brought into alignment.

While raising and clinking glasses is part of the genre everywhere in the world, in Georgian toasts an emotional and sometimes even religious vocabulary plays an important role, as we have seen. Additionally, speakers use metaphors, metonymy, and threefold lists of parallel structures to achieve aesthetic and emotive effects. Important textual characteristics include a marked framing of the toast, more or less pronounced prosodic and syntactic line structuring, repetitive use of formulas, as well as a special picturesque and exclusive vocabulary distinct from that of everyday speech. These are used to praise the qualities of the toasted individuals.

In toasts, the speaker often draws public attention to the social qualities of specific persons. Georgian guests and their hosts expect a positive mention of their families or native regions as a sign of politeness, as well as expressions of respect for deceased members of their families. Similar to what Sifianou (1992) writes about Greek politeness standards, and Matsumoto (1988) about Japanese ones, a person is positioned in relationship to his/her social group and the duties entailed by membership.

Interdependency and reciprocity are the central ideas in the Georgian concept of *paivi* (honor and deference), which entails honoring others. In Georgia, an

individual's honor unavoidably extends to that of his family and village (as in many Asian and southern European cultures). Persons who honor others too little put their own honor in jeopardy. In that sense, Georgian culture resembles the many cultures characterized as sociocentric (see Foley 1997 for an overview).

During all the years of political struggle, speakers integrated toasts to Georgian independence into shared meals, transforming the dinner table into a political symposium. Toasters often integrate current events into a chain of toasts. If a table member's relative is in the hospital, someone will definitely make a toast to this person. Everyone at the table toasts each of the important persons.

Apart from the many available formulas, a *tamad* can structure topics him- or herself (discussed in Kotthoff 1995 and 1999; Chatwin 1997; Tezelishvili 2003; Mühlfried 2006). He can integrate stories and jokes into toasts, bring together topics or subdivide them into several toasts and employ various different toast strategies. He can, for example, also drink to acquired professional status or to specific political interests and thereby endow them with added weight. Furthermore, the *tamad* is a person who himself has symbolic capital, which he can increase through his performance (Mühlfried 2006: 94).

As Bohle and König (2001: 14) emphasize, "social order arises in and through the actions and perceptual routines of societal members," which is to be understood in Goffman's sense of everyday social life as a stage on which subjects perform themselves and their relations. Historically stabilized norms, conventions, rituals and routines are the conditions for performative acts to function. The meanings draw strength from them, and there is a "reality-conferring power" in their repetition (Bohle & König 2001: 26). Drinking toasts satisfy narrow concepts of performance that include stylization and artistic display (Finnegan 1992).

We can conceive of toasts as *open texts*, since they integrate elements of other genres (such as stories). Prayer formulas have long been integrated into Georgian toasts and are now considered traditional aspects of the toasting repertoire. Elements of other genres, such as verbal dueling, can also be found in Georgian toasts (Kotthoff 1995; Goldstein 1999). Since Georgian toasts tend to appear as links in an intertextual series, and individual toasts are part of an ordered set, different forms of intertextuality can be discerned (Briggs & Bauman 1992).

In the Georgian case, toasting is strongly embedded in the historical process of nation building (Tuite 2006). Mühlfried (2006: 130ff) analyzed travel reports and found much evidence that the *supra* (traditional table ceremony) is not a relic of an earlier or even prehistoric period (as travel guides often claim), but rather assumed its current form as recently as the nineteenth century. The Persian banqueting culture also influenced it. Here as well, historians have shown that it was especially in the nineteenth century that cultural practices of 'nation building'

were institutionalized and legitimized. Thus the poet Orbeliani used the poems he called “drinking toasts” to promulgate national values (Mühlfried 2006: 132). Kothhoff (1999) points out that in the Soviet period, as well as during the transition to independence, drinking toasts were omnipresent in Georgian discourse, serving as indexes of Georgian national identity. Swedes and Russians also regard toasting as a specific account of their nation’s customs that helps them to transmit and reaffirm their national identity.

No Georgian expects as elaborate a toast from a foreigner as he would from other Georgians. I have never met any foreign visitors who relate as strongly as Georgians to cultural values such as homeland, family, nation, etc.

There are many occasions when the *tamada* explicitly tells how his toasts give expression to Georgian customs. This occurs, for example, when non-Georgians dominate the table or when a meal is held in honor of foreign guests. While the Georgian *tamada* offers Toast 2 in German, in the drinking toast itself he teaches little lesson about Georgian customs.

- (2) Toast 2⁵ (recorded in Tbilisi, in a large circle of German and Georgian German studies scholars, T = a Georgian professor, A = a German colleague)

- 1 T: ich MÖCHte:, ich MÖCHte de:r georgischen
tradition FOLgen,
I would like, I would like to follow the Georgian
tradition,
2 HEUTE,
today,
3 ich möchte natürlich nicht AUFdringlich sein
und
I naturally do not want to be importunate and
4 ich werde eh unsere gäste eh
I will eh not force our guests eh
5 nicht ZWINGen eh das glas bis zur NEIge
auszutrinken,
to drain the glass to the dregs,
6 Aber-
but-
7 A: hahahaha
8 T: ja:,
yes,

In toast 2, 3 and 6 accented syllables are made prominent within a syntactic phrase.

- 9 aber ich werde DI:E trinksprüche eh versuchen
but I will uh try the drinking toasts
10 trinksprüche auszubringen die auszubringen SIND
to offer THE drinking toasts that ARE to be given
11 und die ÜBlich sind an der georgischen tafel.
and that are customary at a Georgian table.
12 a:hm,
13 ich möchte jetzt auf unsere Eltern das glas
erheben,
i would now like to raise my glass to our
parents,
14 au:f das WO:hl,
to the well-being,
15 ehM der Eltern,
uhm of the parents,
16 auf das wohl DER eltern di:e am Leben sind
to the well-being of those parents who are alive
17 un:d di:e MIT uns da sind,
and who are with us here,
18 e:h un:d zum Andenken DERjenigen di:e uns schon
verlassen
e:h and to the memory of those who have already
left us.
19 haben.
20 gaumarʒos

In line 2, he insists that he does not want to be importunate, thereby alluding to a common critique of Georgian table customs expressed by many non-Georgians (the pressure to drink excessively). A German colleague chuckles (7). By taking into consideration the reluctance of many foreign visitors to down a whole glass after an important toast, such as one to parents, he realizes a specific “recipient design” (in the sense of Sacks 1992) within an intercultural context. As a cosmopolitan scholar, the *tamada* knows how an intercultural can be created and celebrated at the table. In principle he structures the evening when Toast 2 is offered according to Georgian standards, but he also makes concessions to practices he thinks his foreign guests prefer (not drinking a whole glass after each toast). In line 10, he “does culture” by pointing out that he will follow the Georgian custom and drink to the well-being of parents, thereby reproducing and reaffirming this old tradition. With this toast, he pays homage to his mother, who is present at the event. By also drinking to the memory of deceased parents, he evokes a transaccidental context, again a typical procedure. His ‘performative agency’ (Duranti 2007) leads him to a very special realization of the generic repertoire.

4. Comparing toasts and their etiquette

In the following, we will continue to compare toasts. Certain concerns are frequent toast topics everywhere in the world, such as love, friendship, health, peace, family well-being and children. All cultures regard certain occasions as special, such as weddings, birthdays, childbirth, getting a job, other life transitions and many festivities. Typical sub-topics and formulaic strategies can be distinguished for toasting women and men, grandparents, birthday children of various ages, good neighbors, respected employers, etc. I have so far presented toasts given in Georgia by Georgians on occasions such as entertaining foreign guests. These toasts differ from the drinking toasts recorded by Friesen (2012) and ten Thije (2009) in Russian circles, or the toasts collected by Röcklinsberg (2009) in Sweden.

4.1 Russian toasts

After numerous personal experiences in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, I am convinced that at Russian banquets imbibing alcoholic drinks (particularly champagne, wine and vodka) is as obligatory as are toasts (Jatzkowskaja 1994; Richmond 1992; Margolina 2004; Eichwede 2006).

Friesen (2012) discusses many examples of toasts from social occasions in Russia, such as the one discussed below. Here the toastmaster seems to work with “stock conversational witticisms” (Norrick 2007: 304). Toasting can be taken as a context in which “set humorous phrases” often find expression, as Norrick discovered on other occasions. In Toast 3, a good family friend (S is male, ca. 56 years old) congratulates the ‘birthday girl’ (A is female, ca. 53 years old, ? = several of the guests) on her birthday. Many friends and family members are gathered around (B, C, D, E):

(3) Toast 3

01 S: ГОЛУ:бушка ты НА:ша!
 goLU:buškatyNA:ša!⁶

our dear treasure

02 я поздравля:ю тебя;
 jəpozdravljA:ju tebâ;

I congratulate you

- 03 с твоим очередНЫ:М; (-) семнадцатилЕ:тием;
 stvoimocereDNY:M; (-) semnadcatilE:tjem;
 on your repeated seventeenth birthday
 <<в сторону> ну да (.) это стандартный тост был,>
 <<v storonu> nu da (.) èto standartnyj tost byl,>
 <<aside>well, yes, it was a standard toast>
 04 но что я тебе хотел пожелать (.) вот, =
 no čto â tebehotelpoželat' (.) vot, =
 but what I wanted to wish you thereby
 =я тебе хотел пожелать, =
 =â tebehotelpoželat', =
 I wanted to wish you
 05 =ну то что успехов в работе-
 =nu to čto uspehov v rabote-
 =well then, that you are successful in your work
 06 =ты добьешься (.) это:-
 =tydob'eš'sâ (.) èto:-
 =you will definitely accomplish that
 07 ((смеется)) не интересно уже;
 ((smeetsâ)) neinteresnouže;
 ((laughs)) (that) is no longer interesting
 08 это уже не интересно, да;
 èto uže ne interesno, da;
 that is no longer interesting, yes
 09 B, C: ((laugh))
 10 S: Я тебе хотел бы пожелать-
 Â tebe hotel by poželat'-
 I would really like to wish you
 11 вот (.) твоя семья рядом сидит;
 vot (.) tvoâ sem'â râdom sidit;
 here beside you sits your family
 12 чтоб твоя семья, (-) всегда с тобой сидела,
 čtobtoâ sem'â, (-) vsegdastobojsidela,
 that your family would always remain with you
 13 и всегда находилась чтобы (.) рядом,
 ivsegdanahodilas' čtoby (.) râdom,
 and that they would always be near you
 14 и (-) [xa xa
 i (-) [ha ha
 and [ha ha
 15 lifts the speaker's hand, with which he raises
 the glass

⁶ The transliteration from Russian follows the scientific standards “ISO 9” (see: ISO 9:1998, information and documentation – Transliteration of Cyrillic characters into Latin characters – Slavic and non-Slavic languages. In *Bibliotheks- und Dokumentationswesen*. Berlin: Beuth, 2002 (DIN 343))

- 18 B, C, D: [ha ha ha ha ha
 19 S: и чтобы эта семья только прибавлялась, =
 i čtoby ètasem'â tol'kopribavlâlas', =
 20 and that this family will grow,
 =прибавлялась, =прибавлялась, =
 =pribavlâlas', =pribavlâlas', =
 =grow and grow
 21 [иещёраприбавлялась;
 [i ešë raz pribavlâlas';
 [and again grow;
 22 A, B, C, D, : [ha ha ha ha ha ha
 23 ?1: [это кому тост? ((...))
 [ètokomu tost? ((...))
 24 A: to whom is this toast (dedicated)?
 я б–
 â b–
 Tw(ill)
 25 S: а Это уже пускай (.) ольга (.)
 владимировна –
 а Ètoužepuskaj (.) ol'ga (.) vladimirovna –
 26 Ol'ga Vladimirovna should decide that
 [сама умает;
 [saMAdumaet;
 [by herself
 27 A: [ha ha ha
 28 A, B, C, S: ((laughter while S. and A. give each other
 a friendly smacking kiss))
 29 A: спасибо,
 spasibo,
 thank you,

is evident that the toast is being presented in a comedic style. It nonetheless fulfills generic standards with the usual phraseology (I congratulate you, that your family would always remain with you) and combines it with quite standardized humor (Norrick 1993:25), such as “on your repeated seventeenth birthday,” and an aside commenting on his own modest performance (04). This frame-breaking is so amusing. The toast continues with standardized wishes, such as to be successful at work (07) and to have her family always close to her (14, 15). The addressee does not take the toast very seriously; A comments in line 9 that job success is no longer so important for her. This is a bit cheeky as a reply to the toastmaster's good wishes, especially her implying that she is already successful enough. However, as Norrick pointed out (1993), friends are often quick to interpret many impertinent stures as amusing. This seems to be the case in Toast 3. Toastmaster S agrees in

line 10. The toaster and his recipients produce a distancing agency. The public's laughter continues. The wish for a growing family (19, 20, 21) seems out of place when addressing a woman over fifty, who presumably can no longer have children. That could be the reason for the guests' continuing mirth. The toastmaster's many repetitions (grow and grow and again grow) also frame the performance as overtly standardized, as a sort of staging of the minimal demands. This sort of humor should be viewed as a distancing procedure.

The friends also insert tongue-in-cheek comments, such as inquiring as to the addressee of the toastmaster's wishes for a growing family (23). It is as impudent to ask the toastmaster to identify the addressee as it is for the toastmaster himself to urge the main addressee to choose the proper addressee herself (25). The whole group plays with genre standards and seems to find it very entertaining. They certainly know the genre, but here are acting as independent performers to whom light-hearted entertainment is more important than social correctness.

While Toast 3 represents an informal realization of the genre among friends, ten Thijs (2009:8) presents a typical (though modest) laudatory toast by a Russian host. This was performed in English during an evening with a Dutch delegation at the conclusion of its working visit to a Russian institution. (It is reproduced here using ten Thijs's transcription conventions, which do not number the lines, slightly revised):

(4) Toast 4

Vladimir: Now my dear friends

I would like to thank you with all our our hearts

For the splendid work you've done here.

We'll wish you bon voyage nach nach Holland.

All: laugh

Vladimir: well for just for Hans, while Hans is in a quite different situation

because he has been part of our teaching staff already.

He is /as for / as for/ as for Otto to whom I would like to have him as a permanent member in the future.

So for our future cross-cultural contacts for many many years to come.

So happy return home.

Ten Thijs (2009:9) finds typical characteristics of a Russian toast included in this performance, e.g. formulations such as “with all our hearts,” “splendid

work,” “so for the future... contacts for many years to come.” The double code-switching “bon voyage nach Holland” alludes to the multilingual framework of the project (besides the French *bon voyage*, the German ‘nach’ means ‘to’). We agree with ten Thije that the toast praises the activities engaged in during the work visit, affection for the people at the table, and wishes for continuing contacts and a safe return home. Unfortunately omitted from the transcript is the conclusion of the toast, in which the participants repeat toast formulas and clink glasses. Ten Thije uses Fienemann’s concept of ‘courteous goodwill’ to characterize the ritual aspects of the toast (which fits nicely with the above discussed concept of ‘positive politeness’).

4.2 Swedish toasts

Röcklinsberg (2009: 511) quotes Magdalena Ribbing, whose etiquette book places the Swedish ‘*skål* ceremony’ in the context of “doing” national culture:

Raising one’s glass to someone goes back to the Viking mead horn. This should not be forgotten. Few words from the Swedish language, which is not very widely spoken, are known abroad, but the word *skoal* is internationally well known and is usually – and rightly so – also tied to Swedish.

(Translated into German by C. Röcklinsberg. English by H.K.)

The toasting ritual is much simpler at informal gatherings in Sweden, but still requires a very specific sequence of steps. These include reaching for a glass, raising it, expressing wishes, clinking glasses, putting down the glass, etc.

Röcklinsberg (2009: 498ff) describes an evening dominated by Swedish students. A group member replies to the introductory question, “Should we drink to cultural differences?” with “Yes, of course,” and then everyone raises a full glass and repeats *skoal* (To your health). In Sweden, toasters look each other in the eye for 6–7 seconds, take a sip, make renewed eye contact, and only then put down their glass (Röcklinsberg 2009: 500). This nonverbal ritual plays an important role.

One of my informants, the linguist Suzanne Schlyter, states that occasions such as weddings, doctoral degree parties, birthdays and the like require that toastmaster formally laud the central persons. These toasts are often long-winded, but may be realized in a light-hearted style. Christmas, Easter, Midsummer and a few other holidays are celebrated with liquor, which is served in small glasses. After emptying such a glass in one gulp, the toasters sing an appropriate song.

In Sweden (and to a lesser degree in Russia), toasting speeches and practices vary a lot, depending on an event’s degree of formality. In contrast, whenever they gather together and consume food and drink, Georgians formalize the occasion

with “toast talk.” According to Schlyter (personal communication), at many informal Swedish gatherings the hostess raises her glass only once and greets the guests with a phrase such as, “Welcome, *skål*, nice to have you here.” After that, the guests are free to drink as much and as often as they please.

4.3 Foreigners’ toasts

Although many foreign guests are aware of the local customs in a general way, they are seldom able to perform toasts exactly as do the natives. Still, they often realize that they are also expected to offer toasts after being praised and thanked. Thus, they respond with actions chosen from a specific repertoire of conventional toast routines. Often they express thanks and/or praise the surroundings, or they propose a drinking toast in a humorous style. Both approaches are unproblematic. It seems sufficient to comply with basic politeness standards and insofar to demonstrate not only an awareness of national customs, but also a desire to do justice to the cultural expectations of the natives at the table. The natives understand that outsiders cannot know all the rules of their toasting rituals. In addition, as we have seen, in the toasting genre insiders can allude to their national identity. This is one of the elements of toasting not expected of foreigners. They are permitted to vary and adapt the genre as long as the specific formula is expressed. Native speakers and foreigners ‘do difference’ in their toasting styles, thereby reflecting local identity constructions and their complex global situatedness.

Humor also plays an important role in foreigners’ toast performances and helps persons unfamiliar with the genre to participate. Here is a toast offered in English (from ten Thije 2009) by Hans, the Dutch delegation leader, which was translated into Russian (the Russian is not given by ten Thije and is of no interest here, slightly revised):

(5) Toast 5

Hans: Alec, may I make another toast?

In Holland I am not used to making so many toasts.

But now I have a special reason for this.

It’s eh/ the first was about the visit to this institution.

My second is to eh the fact that it is the eighth of March today

And we are glad that we have six such beautiful examples of feminine human nature among us

Vera: laughs

Zina: that’s a compliment

- Boris: that's a joke
 Hans: some/ some eh sometimes eh our compliments are doubted a bit
 But this a very serious one
 I am very glad to be here with you and
 I wish you everything good in your life, all the things that you as a woman deserve to have in your life
 Anna: well said
 Hans: (raising his glass) Tanja, Zina, Ida
 Ida: Thanks. You are a proper/you are a proper gentleman (clinking glasses)

At first glance, Hans proposes a typical toast. Legkov's little booklet on "tosty" (1999) contains many toasts to women ("who beautify our table" and the like). However, as ten Thijs (2009:10) states, his compliments elicit various reactions. A Russian woman named Vera laughs, and Zina explains that the toast was meant as a compliment, whereas the Russian Boris also thinks that it was meant as a joke. Ida thanks Hans for his toast. The Dutchman demonstrates his ability to propose a toast in an appreciated form. He expresses positive feelings for the group and sincere wishes to the women. Anna and Ida react to his gesture with compliments. Ten Thijs presents another toast proposed by a Dutchman that contains a humorous story about a misunderstanding. In and around the two toasts the group chats about Russian and Dutch ways of speaking, ways of proposing toasts and what they mean. In this situation, it is evident that all the participants mutually appreciate one another and hope for future cooperation. Ten Thijs broadly discusses the interpretation of the toasts. For our purposes, it is important to note that in and around the toasts the participants start a discourse on Russian and Dutch toasting practices. Both sides are not quite sure of what to take seriously and what to regard as humorous. In any case, the Dutch guests offer informal, humorous toasts. Teasing and joking while toasting are finally negotiated as a form of constituting the in-group, but not smoothly (as ten Thijs points out). Although the Dutchmen do well in the genre, which is not an everyday matter for them,⁷ deformatization via joking seems to be a strategy that helps them to produce the expected table talk and at the same time to communicate a degree of distance. As we saw in Toast 3, the natives do this as well.

⁷ In Germany and the Netherlands, for the last forty years toasting has been limited to special occasions, as already noted.

Finally, in this section I examine a drinking toast given by a German visiting Georgia for the first time. A German assistant professor named Rolf made the following toast during an early evening dinner in a Georgian village in the region of Mtskheta. An extended family is sitting together with some neighbors and two Germans. This toast diverges considerably from Georgian standards, but it still compliments one of the persons present (T is an elderly woman), as well as the village.⁸

(6) Toast 6 (translated from the original German)
 Rolf (R), Tata (T), all (a)

- 1 R: ich (- -) FREUE mich auch (- -) dass ich nicht nur mit
I (- -) am also pleased (- -) that I am not only permitted
 2 eurer faMILie am tisch sitzen darf
to sit with your family at the table,
 3 sondern auch mit einer anderen Person aus dem dorf,
but also with another person from the village,
 4 aus diesem schönen dorf,
from this beautiful village,
 5 das zum ersten mal
which for the first time
 6 T: spasibo, spasibo
thanks, thanks
 7 R: das ich zum ERsten, aber hoffentlich nicht zum LETzten mal gesehen habe.
which I have seen for the first, but hopefully not for the last time.
 8 a: hehehe
 9 T: spasibo.
thanks.
 10 R: ich MÖCHte auf zukünftige anlässe wie diesen trinken.
I would like to drink to future occasions like this.
 11 Ich wünsche Ihnen allen das Beste.
I wish you all the best.
 gaumaržos

Rolf expresses gratitude and makes compliments such as “beautiful village,” which carry a strong weight because they meet the basic local requirements of a toast. Toast 6 has a main addressee, an elderly woman named Tata (an honored guest from the village). Rolf makes eye contact with her while speaking. Tata thanks him in Russian, the *lingua franca* of the former Soviet Union. She knows that Rolf understands a little Russian. Her effort to establish direct contact is unmistakable. The toast was translated later. Although Rolf’s toast is stylistically far from equaling examples such as Toast 1, he makes compliments, expresses gratitude and states a wish to continue the relationship. Thus, he includes the basic obligatory elements of a Georgian toast.

Röcklinsberg (2009: 514f. English translation by H.K.) also shows how German etiquette manuals reflect the increasing informality of German toasting customs; along with rhetorical deformatization there is also distancing from toasting as an expression of German identity, as in the sixties of the twentieth century. He cites Graudentz and Pappritz (1956: 384), on p. 517:

A salute with a glass is a typical German custom. Hardly any of us would dare to take a glass without ‘being accompanied by someone’ ... In exclusively German circles, in principle no guest takes a glass before the head of the household has raised his and stiffly and obligatorily nodded to his wife, as well as to other guests. We thus wait for this in every case before we ourselves drink – even if due to a longer stay abroad this custom may seem to us a bit antiquated.

In 1991, Countess Schönfeldt (189) indicates in her book *1 mal 1 des guten Tons* (in English the title might be, e.g.: ‘The ABCs of good manners’) that this custom has become less standardized (cited according to Röcklinsberg 2009: 516, similar to Linke 2000):

The ceremony of toasting, whereby one holds the wine glass at the level of the breastbone and smartly calls out ‘prosit’, has died out. If there is a festive opportunity, if the guests congratulate a birthday boy or girl, if they give three cheers for a bride and groom, then the head of the household or the last speaker raises his glass and everyone follows his example and joins in the toast. If we hold a wine or champagne glass correctly, namely by the stem, then when we clink glasses, it sounds like a fairy song. On festive occasions, people clink glasses, in families with a ceremonial inclination in descending rank order, in families that just like festivities, as they happen to be sitting together. If someone has a birthday, it is customary in many families that each clinks with the birthday child. ... Simply to raise a glass and silently drink to good friends is a beautiful gesture that transcends all rules.

When they are alone together, the German university students recorded by Röcklinsberg rather playfully vary the Swedish ritual by not precisely following

the usual sequence of steps, and everyone supplements the formula (Röcklinsberg 2009: 520). The group is participating in a student exchange in Sweden.

In the frame of his study of culture-specific interaction styles, Röcklinsberg (2009: 496f.) discusses a relatively simple toast shared by German students in Sweden: Five students are already sitting at a table and are still busy arranging candles when Armin proposes a toast in German (translation by H.K.):

- (7) Toast 7
- 7 Armin: okay then I would say first of all that
8 we toast a nice evening =
- INA POURS WINE FOR CLAUDIA AND HANDS HER THE GLASS
- 9 Ina: [yes:]
- 10 Armin: [and this (xx)]
- 11 Claudia: [unexpected] ähehe
- 12 BREAK (0.6)
- 13 Armin: yes
- 14 Claudia: unexpected gathering
- 15 Ina: [yes]
- 16 Armin: [the unexpected] [often happens]⁹ hehe
17 [often happens]
- LAUGHTER
- 18 Claudia: [well]¹⁰
- 19 Igor: [°well]⁰
- 20 Ina: [well then]
- 21 Armin: [skoal]
- 22 Claudia: haha
- 23 Ina: [skoal]
- 24 Igor: [skoal]
- 25 Claudia: [skoal] ah[ha]a
- 26 Armin: [skoal] hehe
- THEY CLINK GLASSES (1.3)

Armin expresses the central wish to raise their glasses (that we toast a nice evening) and thereby performs an obligatory part of the ritual. The toast proposal

9. The original German expression is a pithy saying, “unverhofft kommt oft.” It achieves its effect by making a paradoxical claim, emphasized by the rhyme, which is likewise unexpected.

10. The original German word is “also” (thus or therefore), which can initiate action more strongly than “well.” Germans often say, e.g. “Also, gehen wir,” which means “Well then, let’s go!”

is received positively. Claudia repeats “unexpected” (11) and expands it to “unexpected gathering.” (14) Armin supplements this with the formula: “The unexpected often happens” (German: “unverhofft kommt oft.” This is a commonplace German saying, popular because of its brevity and the rhyme, which is lost in translation).

Claudia, Igor and Ina overlap with the structuring particle “well” (German: ‘also’, meaning thus, therefore, consequently, hence), introducing the toast, which is completed with the Swedish toast formula *skoal*. Röcklinsberg emphasizes that not everyone has wine in his or her glass at the start of the toast, which points to an informal, playful performance of the drinking ritual. Quite obviously, the group is not following a strict pattern. As indicated above, Germans have no cultural requirement to share a toast when sitting together over drinks in the evening. The German students here are ‘doing being in Sweden’.

The modest toast above is, however, not hard to understand as an activity of positive politeness, and those present are expressing in word and deed their desire for a gathering that everyone will enjoy. The group is paying tribute to ‘being in Sweden’ and demonstrating its willingness to defer to the rules of the host country.

5. Conclusion: ‘Doing difference’ in intercultural encounters

In Germany and the Netherlands, speeches of praise to persons who are present are incomparably less frequent, and toasts play a far smaller role in the society’s genre repertoire than in countries formerly belonging to the Soviet Union or in Sweden. They are, in fact, performed only at certain festivities, like marriages and graduation parties. At the most, two or three toasts are offered, never a series of ten to twenty (as is common in Georgia), and even these are often framed as humorous and ironic. On German Internet pages, toasts are found almost exclusively in humorous contexts, and even at weddings, it is usual for parents and relatives to season their good wishes for the bride and groom with affectionate witticisms and humorously framed stories. The keying of pathos is met with skepticism, especially in Germany (see Kotthoff 2007).

The values expressed in toasts can only be understood against the background of a specific cultural history, and they “do culture” by reproducing these values, which are not always shared by everyone – even among Georgians a variety of opinions about toasting can be found. Many Georgians consider the rigid toasting order of a long evening (or lunch or even breakfast) to be overly long-winded and object, above all, to the resulting excessive alcohol consumption.

In this article, I have discussed Georgian, Russian and Swedish toasts. From Georgia I presented one quite pathetic example and another designed specifically for foreign guests. From Russia, I mentioned a toast that is a variation on the

quite basic ones containing abundant phraseology. Toasts are realized in such a spectrum in all the countries considered here, but Georgian toasts stand out because they border on the genre of prayer. The Georgian *tamada*’s performance is especially likely to simultaneously perform his own identity and those of other table members. Everywhere toasts are often associated with the “doing” of national and/or regional standards, as they are often explicitly announced as being typical of the country’s traditions. Not only etiquette books or Internet pages, but also toasters themselves explicitly stage national and regional standards.

I have analyzed how foreign table guests realize a genre that is not part of their everyday communicative repertoire. With a ritual genre devoted to reproducing cultural membership, it not only appears unproblematic when foreigners do not comply with local norms, but in- and outsiders rather jointly affirm their acceptance of cultural difference. Natives are usually aware of their ritual standards, and they do not expect foreigners to toast exactly as they do. We have seen, however, that the norms are not strict. As a performative agent, the *tamada* always varies the degree of formality in a given situation and also expresses his stance towards the generic tradition.

Hosts definitely expect communicative activities of positive politeness from the foreign guests at their table. If they express thanks and praise and make compliments in their toasts, foreign guests are on the right track. It is completely acceptable for them to fulfill the minimal genre standards that everyone knows and upholds at home, such as uttering the toasting formula at the end and clinking glasses. That foreign guests often tend toward a humorous keying is not negatively viewed, for drinking toasts can most certainly be realized in this keying. The foreign guests’ drinking toasts that I analyzed in this article express connection and affiliation, and simultaneously index otherness. Thus toasting practices in intercultural situations turn out to be a way of ‘doing difference’ that by no means blocks cooperation and feelings of mutual goodwill.

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I am inclined to believe that noodle soup, with the right kind of seasoning, touches more channels of memory than—say, a lullaby or even a picture of the homeland.
(Steiner 1975:68)

The flavors of multi-ethnic North American literatures

Language, ethnicity and culinary nostalgia

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This paper analyzes culinary remembrances by Asian Canadian, Latina, and Caribbean writers, investigating the multivalent meaning of food in literary texts. In ethnic literature, food figures as a powerful symbol of ethnicity, becoming a significant site where identity construction, community building and social critique can take place. Descriptions of culinary practices set in motion thoughts on belonging and national identity, offering affective encounters with the past. Culinary nostalgia, this paper argues, allows ethnic subjects to identify as ethnic via their relationship to food, opening up ways of engaging the politics of identity. Using a language through which to imagine alterity, these narratives provide a space for reflections on the complex interplay of “here” and “there,” of “home” and “away.”

1. Introduction: Spicing up the literary mainstream

North American ethnic literature is filled with images and metaphors of food. Food tropes serve as figures of speech that construct and reflect relationships to racialized subjectivity, addressing issues of belonging, authenticity, and nostalgia. The construction of ethnic identity in literary texts has been shaped by depictions of experiences of food production, culinary creativities, appetites, food desires, and hunger. As Kalcik states, “Foodways are an especially significant symbol in the communication of statements about ethnic identity in the United States—about links with ethnicity and denial of it” (1984:55). Food also works as a powerful symbol in ethnic Canadian literature. Indeed, it is fair to say that food is a visible sign of ethnicity which figures prominently in all immigrant and diasporic