# Language of Interaction and Communication Design
## Mgr. Jan Brejcha

Jan Brejcha's dissertation is an important contribution to an emerging field of intercultural studies of UI (user interfaces), which he is trying to establish by introducing semiotic and linguistic approaches to HCI. While most HCI scholarship concentrates on the cognitive (even phenomenological), social and technical aspects of the interfaces, Jan Brejcha's dissertation manages to introduce the concepts of culture and language as the bases upon which we can understand how humans interact with various systems. While I am impressed by the potential of the cross-cultural studies of interfaces, which this work opens, I am less convinced that language or any theory of signs and the metaphor of "grammar" can do justice to what Jan Brejcha accomplished with his pilot empirical study of Chinese and Czech users. This preliminary empirical study demonstrated that Chinese users have a preference for verbs rather than nouns in the menus, different color preferences, and that these reactions are related to school experiences with textbooks and models of presenting the world, which we learn early through different systems of socialization and culturalization.

His work is innovative in terms of its theoretical framing and attempts to connect HCI with the neglected discipline of semiotic and with contemporary linguistic theories, which lead Jan Brejcha to cross-cultural perspectives to HCI. The real contribution is however in his pilot study, in which he designed and empirical framework and to define a "set of guidelines" for assessing interfaces, which together translate his theoretical insights into a novel methodology of research. In this sense, we can discuss his work in three related topics, which open different issues and can potentially have different impacts:

1.  Critique of the present theories of interfaces and the epistemological bases of HCI in cognitive science and related philosophical traditions using various concepts of consciousness and being (what is called "ideology of the interaction").

2.  Introduction of semiotic and linguistic approaches to HCI with emphasis on approaches based on pragmatic categories of action, but also culture, history and everyday life, which serve as the base a more complex theory of communication.

3.  Proposal for cross-cultural studies of interfaces with an empirical study as an example (we could call it a pilot study), which defines a new methodology of research of cultural bases of interaction and interfaces (cross-cultural UI comparison with related discussions of cultural differences in perception and in the design of interfaces).

While the first and a second part have mixed results, the third part is simply brilliant and Jan Brejcha is defining a whole new discipline of cross-cultural studies of interfaces, which can potentially change both parts if it serves as a starting point for future studies. The strategic decision is whether "patterns of natural language" as the original conceptual tool Jan Brejcha is using are useful at all: do they define culture or they are defined by culture? His empirical study shows how these patterns relate to cultural facts (education, ways of living, socializing, historical and other facts) and open question whether he should move away from the semiotic paradigm into more complex categories of culturalization and socialization. After all, the work was able to identify various variables for cross-cultural comparison (spatial organization, shapes, direction of reading, motion, color combinations), which are not purely linguistic, but visual, and later even culturally defined. I think that parts of this work, which try to save semiotics, are the weakest (grammar of interaction and semiotic evaluation), while the parts that define new categories for defining interfaces in cross-cultural studies are brilliant. The "hidden aspect" which his semiotic analysis managed to prove our basically its own blind spots and, which lead him to embrace a more empirical concept of "culture". This pattern of structuring interfaces and ways of interacting is structured by social and historical phenomena, and he managed to open a more interdisciplinary definition of the variables we need to follow when discussing and assessing interfaces.

This dissertation is opening a fascinating field and question on the importance of building not only interfaces but also hardware tools, which will be using metaphors and ways of thinking specific to different cultural artifacts related to different cultures. Interfaces in this sense need translation and not only adoption, they are means of exploring different cultures and ways of living, which include not only phenomenological insights in ways humans make meaning of their everyday life, but also history and tradition particular to specific regions, which are often part of the material culture.

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