

A DIACHRONIC APPROACH OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Galina BOBEICĂ

Universitatea de Stat din Moldova

It is commonplace now to speak of "one world" and to refer broadly to the interdependence of nations and to the lack of self-sufficiency of even the world's largest and richest countries.

The growth in interest in studies of intercultural communication in recent years has led, on the one hand, to an increasing number of projects focusing on the examination on communication between speakers from different cultural backgrounds in various contexts and across different channels. On the other hand, a number of scholars have, at the theoretical level, reexamined the very basic notions of "language", "culture", and "inter-culture", the main concept in studies of intercultural communication, from various perspectives. The contribution of this article represents this spectrum, beginning with theoretical background, moving on to exploring the interplay between intercultural communication and new technologies, and finally examining intercultural communication across different contexts.

Keywords: *language, culture, intercultural, inter-language, communication, thought, globalization, new technologies, context.*

O ABORDARE DIACRONICĂ A COMUNICĂRII INTERCULTURALE

Este un fapt comun să vorbim despre o „lume unică” și să ne referim în linii mari la interdependența națiunilor și la lipsa autosuficienței celor mai mari și mai bogate țări.

În ultimii ani, interesul accentuat față de studierea comunicării interculturale a dus, pe de o parte, la un număr în creștere de proiecte axate pe examinarea comunicării între vorbitori provenind din medii culturale diferite, în contexte variate și prin canale diverse. Pe de altă parte, unii cercetători, la nivel teoretic, au reexaminat din diverse perspective noțiunile esențiale de „limbaj”, „cultură” și „interculturalism”, care constituie concepte de bază în studiile dedicate comunicării interculturale. Contribuția articolului de față reprezintă acest spectru, începând cu premisele teoretice, continuând cu explorarea interacțiunii între comunicarea interculturală și noile tehnologii și examinând, în cele din urmă, comunicarea interculturală în diferite contexte.

Keywords: *limbaj, cultură, intercultural, interlingvistic, comunicare, gândire, globalizare, noi tehnologii, context.*

Introduction

The world today is characterized by an ever growing number of contacts resulting in communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This communication takes place because of contacts within the areas of business, military cooperation, science, education, mass media, entertainment, tourism but also because of immigration brought about by labor shortage or political conflicts. In all these contacts, there is communication which needs to be as constructive as possible, without misunderstandings and breakdowns.

Within this new era of pluri-lingual and multicultural societies, one word predominates: globalization. It is associated with the rapid development of communication, new technologies, political or economic reforms and the mobility of people as a new reality. All of these new societal considerations raise complex issues for all nations. These changes also bring new challenges to teachers and educational systems. With the rise of pluri-lingual and multicultural societies, cultural and religious boundaries are clashing with geographical borders. Cultural representations within and across countries are becoming fluid, changing and unstable. In times where culture seems to be considered as a simple commodity among others in the common market, can institutions such as schools promote social cohesion through education? It seems as though a *third culture*, through television, cinema and the internet, exists above the control of the nations and has created a transnational *language-culture* that accounts for the existence of the same trends, habits and even values in different points of the globe [1, p.221-237]. Consequently, national and ethnic identities have become more permeable and they influence each other. The purpose of this article is to seek out different viewpoints expressed by scholars in reference to the integration of the intercultural communication across time. Firstly, it makes reference to the earliest attempts of defining the intercultural communication and the theoretical advancements that followed up. Secondly, it examines the interplay between intercultural communication and the new technologies. And finally it assesses intercultural communication across different contexts.

This essay explores the development of the original paradigm for intercultural communication and how this paradigm was followed by scholars.

Historical facts

Tracing back the history of interest in studying intercultural communication across time is difficult not only for historical reasons, but for the multiplicity of locations, approaches, and scholarly traditions that can be identified as having had research interest in intercultural communication. One important aspect of research on intercultural communication is exploring the intricate relationship between *language, thought, and culture*, the study of which dates back at least to the nineteenth century. Wilhelm von Humboldt, Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Whorf are prominent scholars who all emphasized the relationship between *language, thought, and culture*. Humboldt viewed language as expressing the spirit of a nation. He argued that every language is entrenched in a particular worldview, and therefore diversity of languages reflects diversity of thought patterns, driven by different worldviews. This view was later followed and extended by Sapir and Whorf, who believed that differences in the way languages encode cultural and cognitive categories affect the way people think, and this is known as the "linguistic relativity hypothesis". In other words, they argued that linguistic categories influence the language user's perception of the world. This version of the hypothesis became known as the "strong version". The weaker version simply views language, thought, and perception as interrelated. Implicit in this trend is the idea that culture is a cognitive system, which exists in the mind [7, p. 2].

During the 1920s and 1930s a group of American anthropologists worked on the themes of the notion of culture as a homogenizing factor and the effect of culture on personality, which contributed significantly to laying the foundation of the discipline of intercultural communication.

The rise of the discipline of intercultural communication occurred around the middle of the twentieth century, when the Foreign Service Institute in the United States recruited a number of anthropologists and linguists to provide language and culture training to Foreign Service officers and other state Department personnel. Among these was anthropologist Edward T. Hall, who is viewed by many to be the founder of the field of intercultural communication. His influential book, "The silent Language" is considered "the founding document of the new field of intercultural communication".

Interest in studies of intercultural communication grew in a parallel fashion in some other parts of the world, for example, in Japan and Europe. Japanese scholars explored aspects of intercultural communication, including aspects of nonverbal communication, such as bowing and silence. In Europe, interest in the study of intercultural communication "was firmly oriented towards language issues – the role of language in intercultural encounters and the role of intercultural communication in language education" [6, p.22].

There is an undeniable link between *language, thought and culture* [8, p.202]. Language represents not only the primary means of communication between people of different cultures, but also has the capacity to generate symbolic orders of power, and shapes individual perceptions and visions of social worlds. Language allows us to constantly rethink the issue of the construction of cultural representations. It is important to view language teaching and learning as an entry to discover another culture. It embodies, by its nature, the presence of the other culture and contact with alterity, the act of noticing differences and similarities and becoming aware of *Otherness* without changing into someone else. It involves an important part of mediation in the interactions with members of the other culture. There is no doubt that *language, thought and culture* are interrelated. The study of language, thought and culture as a harmonious whole lead to an overall better understanding of their interdependence and thereby favor the development of language teaching and language learning models that would foster the development of intercultural communication.

In the areas of business and politics, researches interested in intercultural communication have typically examined negotiation between politicians and business delegates from different nations. A main focus of such research has been toward intercultural communication skills training. A key notion in this area of research has been "national negotiation style" [4, p.81-96].

During the 1980s and 1990s, a large number of studies began to appear that explored topics such as storytelling (narrative) in different cultures, discourse structures across cultures, and cultural influences on thought patterns and language. Clyne (1994) classifies studies of intercultural communication in that period into three categories, based on their approach adopted, as follows:

1. Contrastive approach
2. Interlanguage approach
3. Interactive intercultural approach

Studies that followed a *contrastive approach* compared discourse across cultures, mainly between native speakers and nonnative speakers. An example of this was the study of the speech act of apology across different languages and cultures. The *interlanguage approach* examined the discourse of nonnative speakers in their second language, often in comparison with their first language or with native speakers of the language. An example of this was the study of apology in the second language by nonnative speakers in comparison with speakers of American English. The *interactive approach* examined and compared "the discourse of people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting either in a lingua franca or in one of the interlocutors' languages" [2, p.3].

Intercultural Communication in the New Era

The advent of the twenty-first century has witnessed a revolution in the contexts and contents of intercultural communication. Technological advances such as chat rooms, e-mails, personal weblogs, Facebook, Twitter, and mobile text messaging, on the one hand, and the accelerated pace of people's international mobility, on the other hand, have given a new meaning to the words "intercultural communication". For many people across the globe, intercultural communication is now the default context of communication in every day life. The remarkable growth in the prevalence of intercultural communication among people from many cultural backgrounds, and across many contexts and channels, now requires more sophisticated approaches, theoretical frameworks, and analytical tools to be developed and applied to the study of intercultural communication. A popular cultural framework was proposed by Edward T. Hall, in which he stated that all cultures can be situated in relation to one another through the styles in which they communicate. Hall's focus was on communication across cultures. He concluded that "culture is communication and communication is culture" [5, p.186]. In some cultures, such as those of Scandinavians, Germans, and the Swiss, communication occurs predominantly through explicit statements in text and speech, and they are thus categorized as low-context cultures. In other cultures, such as the Japanese and Chinese, messages include other communicative cues such as body language and the use of silence. Essentially, high-context communication involves implying a message through that which is not uttered. This includes the situation, behavior, and paraverbal cues as integral parts of the communicated message. These differences in communication styles across cultures are expected to pose challenges to the ways in which Web sites communicate their messages most optimally.

Scholarly literature has already seen an upsurge of many studies that explore various aspects of communication in the new era, in particular in cyberspace and within the context of globalization.

The scale of intercultural communication that is now taking place between speakers who do not speak English as a native language makes traditional studies of intercultural communication that mainly focused on native – nonnative communication less relevant and thus calls for further studies that explore communication between nonnative speakers.

The demographic changes and the ever-increasing complexity of the nature of communication in the new era have led to proposals regarding certain types of "competence" that either naturally arise from the complexity of modern forms and contexts of communication or appear to be required for successful and smooth communication.

Intercultural Communication through the New Technologies

At about the same pace as the popularity of the Internet increased, visions of the World Wide Web had flourished as a tool for bringing the world together. The marketing world in particular quickly embraced the Internet as an ideal medium for reaching beyond domestic markets in order to disseminate products to foreign markets. The first generation Web sites, which were simple and text-based, needed a mere translation to be cross-cultural. However, the development of Flash and the implementation of video and sound have brought new potentials to the Web and set new standards for efficient and effective Web communication.

Nowadays a Web site is not just a collection of text; it is a conglomerate of images, multimedia, interactive features, animated graphics, and sounds. From a marketing-strategic perspective, a company that defines itself as cross-culturally aware knows or should know that creating appealing and efficient Web sites for other cultures is no longer just a matter of language and modification of time- and date-formats. Cross-cultural Web design nowadays requires dealing with design issues that include culture-specific color connotations, preferences in layout, animation, sounds, and other effects that are characteristic of today's generation of Web sites. In order to do this successfully, the designer must study the target group of the Web site.

By understanding how communication styles may be reflected on Web sites, we come a step further towards identifying, and subsequently realizing the potentials of the interactive nature of the Internet. This

would be rewarding not only from the marketing perspective, but also for those organizations that are working on bringing the world closer together through dialogue. Intercultural communication competence is imperative for human progress, and it is by studying communication styles and understanding how to use them that we may be able to communicate more clearly, and promote dialogue between "us" and "them." The interactive and global nature of the Internet has fostered many visions of mutual understanding among cultures, although the means for achieving this are still at a very early, exploratory stage.

On the other hand, the emergence of new channels of intercultural communication, such as the Internet, has added the complexity of intercultural communication at various levels. At the level of identity, for example, speakers may now communicate with each other without foregrounding their cultural identities, or they may even choose to hide them on purpose. The emergence of sociodigital interactions in recent decades and global mobility has presented some challenges for the very notions of "culture" and "interculture" in many contexts, for example, where people's lives have been substantially organized around, and therefore influenced by communication through new technology. Some scholars have even questioned the helpfulness of the notions of "culture" and "intercultural" in the context of postmodern thinking about the nature of interactions in the new era [7, p.8]. For instance, Dervin in his book "Politics of Interculturality" presents a critique of the essentialists' understanding of culture, those that tend to stereotype people and view people as being imprisoned in the walls of their culture. The essentialists views of culture often assigned certain value judgments to cultural norms and therefore viewed some cultures, and thus their members, as being superior to others [3, p.74-95].

When originally introduced to the field of language learning, computers were mainly used as an interactive textbook to check for structural accuracy and later language development through communicative exercises. Their use was primarily limited to the pedagogical aspects of language learning and did not necessarily promote the cultural components of the language being learned. However, with the fast-progressing speed of technology, we have witnessed great developments in the field of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Computers are used today as a tool to create a platform where speakers and learners of a language, regardless of their geographical and/or cultural distances, are able to converse. Language learners are now able to engage in real-time conversation with other native or nonnative speakers of the language they are learning.

The "intercultural" aspect of this platform is gaining increasing attention from language teachers and researchers in the field alike, who aim to develop the intercultural communicative competence of language learners.

Intercultural Communication in Context

It should be noted at this juncture that although the new era has witnessed an unprecedented increase in the size and complexity of communication due to technological advancement, the prevalence of face-to-face intercultural communication should not be underestimated. Global mobility, for example, through migration and asylum seeking, continues to increase, and in many contexts these groups of speakers engage in face-to-face interactions with speakers from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The increasing expansion of business activities into the international market and international recruitment have made linguistic and cultural diversity common attributes of a majority of workplaces in the world today, where most of the daily interaction among people inevitably involves intercultural communication. The advent of multicultural/multilingual workplaces has further motivated a great body of research on the necessity of providing intercultural training for both the employees and the employers. The existing intercultural training paradigm, however, underestimates the complexity of culture and tends to advocate a rather reductionist perspective. Such a view often results in stereotyped understanding of culture and language [7, p.13]. It fails to appreciate the dynamic nature of culture and communication, which is impacted by the context in which, and the interlocutors with whom, communication is happening. It also reduces language competency to a bare minimum of linguistic proficiency. A more recent constructionist approach to culture and communication has drawn attention to the dynamic and the in-process nature of both, which are impacted by the context and the process of communication.

Migrant studies is another field that highlights the inevitability of intercultural communication. During the course of an intercultural encounter there is the potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding. The potential often has direct correlation with the language proficiency of the interactants in the language in which they are communicating. One of the significant sources of miscommunication is the failure of the interlocutors to culturally contextualize the behavior and utterances of each other.

A discipline that is closely linked with intercultural communication is that of second-language teaching, as the main aim of learning a second language is usually to be able to communicate with other speakers of

the language, who in most cases do not share a cultural background with the learners. The field of second-language education has traditionally been predominantly concerned with developing learners' linguistic competence in the target language, using native speakers as the model for learning.

Conclusion

Overall, the developments and observations discussed in this paper have provided new opportunities, as well as challenges, for the study of intercultural communication and its increasingly complex nature in the early twenty-first century. In a world that is increasingly interconnected, the success of communication depends on effective intercultural communication. This article explores the development of the original paradigm for intercultural communication and how this paradigm was followed by scholars.

The anthropologist Edward T. Hall established the paradigm for intercultural communication, drawing particularly on the Whorf-Sapir theory of linguistic relativity. Hall insisted that a learner had to *do* intercultural communication, not just *talk* about it. The research confirms that *language*, *thought* and *culture* are complementary to one another, not only interdependent. It also reveals what is common to all participants: their ethnic identity. The emergence of socio-digital interactions in recent decades and global mobility has presented some challenges for the notions of culture and intercultural. The high speed of development of the high technology in recent decades, on the one hand, and global mobility on the other hand, has presented an upraise of communication through new technologies. Speakers may have efficient an effective communication with each other without highlighting their cultural identities. But, it should be also mentioned that face-to-face communication has a decisive contribution to an effective intercultural communication. The increasing expansion of business and political activities into international relationships generated the cultural diversity as a common attribute. Thus, as this study has demonstrated, the advent of multicultural relations has motivated scholars on the necessity of providing intercultural training for both speakers. Moreover, such developments have provided new opportunities, as well as challenges, for the study of intercultural communication and its increasingly complex nature.

This paper presented a review of past research in intercultural communication and described its development in the new era. Therefore we must understand other manners and actions in order to have flourishing relationship.

Bibliography:

1. AGAR, M. The intercultural frame. În: *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 1994, vol.18 issue 2, p.221-237.
2. CLYNE, M. *Intercultural Communication at Work*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994,
3. DERVIN, F., LIDDICOAT, A.J. *Linguistics for Intercultural Education*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013.
4. GRAHAM, J.L. The Influence of Culture on Business Negotiations. In: *Journal of International Business Studies*, 1985, vol.16, p.81-96.
5. HALL, E.T. *The Silent Language*. New York, 1959.
6. MARTIN, J.N., NAKAYAMA, T.K., CARBAUGH, D. The History and Development of the Study of Intercultural Communication and Applied Linguistics. In: *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication* by Jackson J. New York, 2012, p.17-36.
7. SHARIFIAN, F., JAMARANI, M. *Language and Intercultural Communication in the New Era*. Routledge, New York, 2013.
8. STERN, H.H. *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press, 1983.

Prezentat la 18.04.2014