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CULTURAL DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND LINGUISTIC SECURITY

Titela VÎLCEANU

Communication framework

Peters (1999) discusses the etymology and evolution of the word communication:

"Communication" is a word with a rich history. From the Latin "communicare", meaning “to impart, share, or make common”, it entered the English language in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The key root is “mun-” (not “uni-”), related to such words as "munificent", "community", "meaning", and “Gemeinschaft”. The Latin “munus” has to do with gifts or duties offered publicly - including gladiatorial shows, tributes, and rites to honor the dead. In Latin, “communication” did not signify the general arts of human connection via symbols, nor did it suggest the hope for some kind of mutual recognition. Its sense was not in the least mentalistic: communication generally involved tangibles. (Peters 1999: 7)

Communication is a multifarious concept, simultaneously activating linguistic, rhetoric, anthropological, sociological, (critical) discourse analysis, pragmatic, etc items. It is a question of qualitative change, of revaluation or reconceptualisation of social facts from a systemic perspective (abandonment of a linear cause and effect explanation in favour of circular causality). Accordingly, defining communication should embed the idea that language is a social phenomenon, a mode of action and interaction between the members of a speech community engaged in a nexus of relationships. Mucchielli (2001) states that communication as message transmission has become more important than the message itself due to a worldview fronting transparence and equal participation of the social actors. Defining communication could not be done, to our mind, but in an interdisciplinary conceptual landscape pervaded by glimpses of specificity. As seen, literature is replete with different formulations of communication as an integrated theory of action (at the phenomenological level, at the sociological level and at the linguistic one).

A more critically engaged perspective

Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) stress the idea that language – “a potent instrument of cultural control” – acts upon social reality, while also describing it and unearthing the hidden agenda:
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_Language provides the term by which reality may be constituted; it provides the names by which the world may be “known”. Its system of values – its suppositions, its geography, its concept of history, of difference, its myriad gradations of distinctions – becomes the system upon which social, economic and political discourses are grounded._” (Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995: 283)

Quoting Foucault – “Knowledge is power”, Cameron et al. (in Jaworski and Coupland, 1999) raise the question of the interplay between power and knowledge, focusing on expert discourse (pertaining to whatever field) which seem to exert more power than economic institutions:

_Scholars of language and society may be less powerful than lawyers and doctors, but we have certainly contributed to “regimes of truth” and regulatory practices which are hard to defend. (Cameron et al. in Jaworski and Coupland 1999: 142)_

... we live in what might be called a “communication culture”’. By that I do not mean merely a culture that communicates, nor one that regulates communication behavior (all cultures do those things). Rather I mean a culture that is particularly self-conscious and reflexive about communication, and that generates large quantities of metadiscourse about it. For the members of such a culture it is axiomatically “good to talk” - but at the same time it is natural to make judgments about which kinds of talk are good and which are less good. People aspire, or think they ought to aspire, to communicate “better”; and they are highly receptive to expert advice. (Cameron 2000: viii)

Linguistic interaction is social interaction and language policies mirror real politics. Accordingly, we may infer that communication experts become powerful people – language users, language makers and language guardians alike (concerned with _verbal hygiene_, in Cameron’s words) – whereas ordinary people are powerless – as only language users. Nevertheless, the division of linguistic labour allows powerless people to be empowered by powerful people since power is not monolithic, operating across many social divisions. Individuals have different power potentials in different social settings and relations. The social system is open and outcomes are never entirely predictable.

Martin (2007: 85) pleads for an extended theory of Critical Discourse Analysis, which, admittedly, further needs to examine “diplomacy, mediation, collective bargaining, counselling” alongside “appraisal, the rhetoric of solidarity, humour, metaphor, symbols, image, diagrams, music, ceremony, aesthetics, space grammar, etc” beyond “what we might uncharitably characterise as “Watergate Linguistics” – the idea that by exposing language in the service of power we are contributing to a better world”.
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Intercultural competence

Intercultural Competence brings to the fore the need for cultural security to be achieved via short- or long-term accommodation processes. Globalisation means global thinking, individual accountability and the development of new sensitivities and capabilities. In what follows, different models of Intercultural Competence are critically examined in order to establish recurrent aspects and guidelines of intercultural and linguistic behaviour across a wide range of situations, thus validating a general framework.

Bennett (1993) designs a six-stage Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity as a gradual process from ethnocentric anchoring (at Denial, Defense and Minimization stages) to ethnorelative standpoints (Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration). Thus, intercultural sensitivity is scalar, ranging from Denial to Integration, and progression through the stages should not be envisaged as linear or permanent as it may even be reversed. The process allows monocultural individuals to become bi- or multicultural agents. Intercultural sensitivity is not mere receptiveness, it is also active experiencing and selection of relevant cultural items.

Gudykunst and Kim’s model (1997) also places intercultural adaptation along a continuum. Adaptation is achieved via enculturation, deculturation, acculturation and assimilation. Enculturation means socialization of the home culture prior to the individual’s prolonged contact with the host culture. Interacting with a new culture engenders resocialisation or acculturation work by detecting similarities and dissimilarities between the two cultures and beginning to understand and acquire the other culture. Acculturation is almost paralleled by deculturation or uprooting from the home culture. The final stage is represented by assimilation, defined as the highest degree of acculturation and of deculturation. Nevertheless, the process does not run smooth because there is a continuous interplay between acculturation and deculturation and because people are likely to undergo cultural identity renegotiation and reconstruction at different paces and with different intensities. Adaptation involves expansion of linguistic repertoires and socio-cultural resources alongside critical awareness development in order to achieve legitimation in the new cultural environment.

Castano’s (2004: 8) characterisation of identities, in the very prototype theory fashion, runs as follows:

– Identities can be nested, conceived as concentric circles or Russian Matruska dolls, one inside the next. Obviously, the author refers to the hierarchy of identities (actually, he acknowledges the existence of international, national and local identities while ascribing paramount importance to the “baseline national identity” (p.50)), where smaller community identity is embedded into the larger community one in a recursive manner.

– Identities can be cross-cutting... Some, but not all, members of one identity group are also members of another identity group. Needless to say, not all the identity groups intersect between them - Wittgenstein’s family resemblance theory seems to apply here.
– Identities can be separate...There are non-overlapping members and identity is shared only across one group. We think that such rigid adherence to one single identity is rare occurrence, if at all.

The author goes further and states that identity is ascertained on subjective (identification with the group) and objective grounds (sharing a feature of the category) alike. There are several guiding principles in identity shaping and re-shaping, which may be time or culture-bound. Castano further provides a checklist for the Western identity: continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Shi (2006) sees the cross-cultural interaction as more than development of survival social skills. Intercultural encounters may foster psychological growth (self transcendence) and round the individual’s identity (self-renewal) offering opportunities for exploring deep-structure cultural loads. There are diverse adaptation tactics (multiple and hybrid positionings) that individuals adopt in order to become culturally compatible in the new highly interactive heterogenous (linguistically and culturally) environment, which is finally identifiable to the global village.

Intercultural communicative competence

As seen from the ongoing discussion, theorising Intercultural Communicative Competence implies acquiring knowledge from an array of ideologies and making choices so as to build an unbreakable bridge across cultural anthropology, ethnography, sociology, (inter)cultural psychology, general linguistics, social pragmatics, intercultural pragmatics (such divisions seem to proliferate not only inside pragmatics), rhetoric, critical discourse analysis, biology, economic sciences, etc make a fair contribution to the well-grounding of a flexible framework of intercultural communication beyond disciplinary confines.

Defining Intercultural Communicative Competence is not a risk-free enterprise. Scientific objectivity is achieved by compiling subjective views hold by different theorists, i.e. by identifying a common core, reading across theories and practices while also departing from such intakes to roughly tune in.

Hymes’s (1972, 1980) and Canale’s (1980) models of communicative competence offer guidelines not only for training in communication skills, but also, although these are not pivotal elements or explicitly described, for personal and social growth. One serious limitation of these models is that they envisage only intralingual communication making implicit reference to the educated native speaker entitled to assess communication success or failure.

Van Ek (1986) designs a more comprehensive framework of what the author terms communicative ability for foreign language learners. It makes explicit reference to social competence, the promotion of autonomy of the language user and the development of social responsibility. Communicative ability is a multifaceted concept comprising:

– linguistic competence: the ability to produce and understand meaningful utterances which are formed in accordance with the rules of the language concerned and bear their own conventional meaning. – that meaning which native
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speakers would normally attach to the utterance when used in isolation (p. 39). We think that such a definition is amenable to criticism, first of all, because the message model of linguistic communication, i.e. communication as mere exchange of information insofar as the hearer decodes the same message that the speaker encodes, is not flawless. It is true that we start from the Presumption of Literalness: literal utterances have a certain communicative priority, i.e. a speaker is presumed to be speaking literally unless there is some reason to suppose the contrary (Akmajian et al. 2001: 385). Nevertheless, there are numberless cases of structural ambiguity and discontinuous dependencies (the message often contains information about particular entities being referred to and such reference is not uniquely determined by the meaning of the utterance when used in isolation) and there is need to detect which of the meanings of the utterance is operative under the circumstances, i.e. what is the communicative purport.

– socio-cultural competence: every language is situated in a socio-cultural context and implies the use of a particular reference frame which is partly different from that of the foreign language learner; socio-cultural competence presupposes a certain degree of familiarity with that context (p. 35).

– sociolinguistic competence: the awareness of the ways in which the choice of linguistic forms is determined by such conditions as setting, relation between communication partners, communication intention, etc. Sociolinguistic competence covers the relation between linguistic signals and their contextual – or situational – meaning (p. 41).

– discourse competence: the ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts (p. 47).

– strategic competence: when communication is difficult we have to find ways of “getting our meaning across” or of “finding out what somebody means”; these are communication strategies, such as rephrasing, asking for clarification (p. 55).

– social competence: involves both the will and skill to interact with others, involving motives, attitudes, self-confidence, empathy, and the ability to handle social situations (p. 65).

In our opinion, these components are not discrete items; there is a high degree of conceptual overlapping especially between socio-cultural competence and social competence even if from the definitions provided by the author we may infer that socio-cultural competence is restricted to schemata. By expanding socio-cultural competence, we may state that we need to bridge the gaps between different cultural cognitive systems as oftentimes such gaps are more likely to account for communication dysfunctions rather than linguistic gaps (alone). In other words, cultural learning is instrumental to communication.

Chen and Starosta’s (1996: 358) conceptualization of Intercultural communication competence could be summarised as “the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and to execute appropriately effective communication behaviours that recognise the interactants’ multiple identities in a specific
environment”. The authors promote complexity in the configuration of identity during the communication process; affective, cognitive, behavioural components are intertwined. The salient affective factors refer to self-concept, open-mindedness, being non-judgmental and social relaxation. From the cognitive point of view, the individual should possess self-awareness and (inter)cultural awareness. In behavioural terms, there is need for intercultural adroitness identified to communication skills such as message skills (encoding, transmission and decoding), appropriate self-disclosure, behavioural flexibility, interaction management and social skills.

Nichols et al. (2001: 5ff) see intercultural competence as a composite of cognitive (knowledge and skills), psychological (attitudes) and ethical (values) parameters, laying the “democratic basis for social interaction” (p. 7). In what follows, we shall enlarge upon the authors’ definition of the intercultural competence sub-components:

– intercultural attitudes (savoir être) roughly equated to “the ability to decentre” (p. 5), i.e. the ability to relativise one’s own personal set of values, beliefs and practices breaking away from a narcissistic worldview or ethnocentric bias.

– knowledge (savoirs) focusing on the mechanisms of social groups and of social identities emergence and maintenance.

– skills of comparison, of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre) – most likely in an intertextual and cross-cultural management of information, alongside skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre / faire) – referring to the ability to acquire and cultural knowledge and make it operational “under the constraints of realtime communication and interaction” (p. 7).

– critical awareness (savoir s’engager), i.e. critical thinking strategies and appreciation of examples of best practice (intuitively and on the basis of explicit objective criteria).

Gudykunst and Kim (2003: 17) synthetically define intercultural communication as “a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people of different cultures”.

Stier (2006), while drawing attention to “the absence of an exhaustive or unequivocal meaning of the term”, states that intercultural communication is a complex process, embedding ontological, epistemological and axiological presuppositions. The author is mostly concerned with policies of intercultural communication education, which should achieve the goals of internationalisation (eventually equated to social harmony). In his view, intercultural competence is a twofold concept, including content-competencies and processual competencies. The former category has a static character and designates the knowing that, i.e. knowledge about the home culture and the other culture(s) in a rather stereotyped way. The latter category shows the dynamic character of intercultural competence as context-bound; it is about knowing how (to our mind, a kind of technological intelligence if we consider the term technological as application of knowledge for practical ends). Furthermore, processual competencies are subdivided into
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Intrapersonal competencies and interpersonal competencies. Intrapersonal competencies designate awareness of the other’s perception, i.e. perspective alteration, self-reflection, side rotating (insider, outsider), problem-solving strategies in intercultural encounters, cultural detection strategies, axiological distance, i.e. no automatic biased judgment of the other, emotional response (strategies for coping with uncertainty, ambiguity, ethnocentric views, etc). Interpersonal competencies refer to interactive skills, to the development of interpersonal sensitivity and situational sensitivity. Stier concludes that intercultural studies underlie a six-i model: intercultural themes and examples, an interdisciplinarity perspective, an investigative character by arousing curiosity for new cultural knowledge and experience, an integrated approach – involving persons belonging to different cultural backgrounds, an interactive pattern facilitating communication, and an integrative view – connection between theory and practice. Hence, knowing that and knowing how should be complemented by knowing why, i.e. by reflectivity.

The need for re-shaping Intercultural Communicative Competence

We have adopted Byram’s (1997) denomination of intercultural communicative competence because we conceptualise it as an extension of the models proposed by Hymes (1972, 1980) and Canale (1980) where the term communicative appears. We are fully aware that literature circulates parallel terminology: Intercultural Sensitivity, Intercultural Communication Competence, Intercultural Literacy, Global Literacy, although these notions do not fully overlap.

Cumulatively, the checklist for intercultural communicative competence, as securing democratic citizenship, includes:

– linguistic proficiency – a word of caution here: learners of a foreign language do not acquire the language under the same conditions as the native speaker. Besides, we think that the bilingual, having perfect command of two foreign languages, is still a desideratum. Linguistic proficiency as underpinning a communicative, (inter)action-oriented approach to language, equally implies the ability to identify and switch between various communicative conventions (meet different style and register requirements via accommodation work), and full development of meaning negotiation skills with full dialogical commitment.

– intercultural literacy: sensitivity to culture power differentials, appreciation of and respect for other cultural patterns, development of an intercultural background made up of a common core of cultural significance and of paramount cultural specificities.

– (meta)cognitive flexibility and intrapersonal dynamics skills: the ability to discriminate among information items (relevant cultural knowledge) and to use such information creatively and interactively, mental alertness and curiosity about new cultural settings (via ethnographic knowledge discovery strategies), nomothetic rather than idiographic capability, the ability to plan ahead and to hypothesize, problem-solving strategies, etc.
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– psychological adequacy and interpersonal dynamics skills: extroversion, motivation, self-confidence, tolerance for ambiguity, conflict avoidance, openness (the Other is not a potential barrier in communication, but a challenge to be dealt with in a constructive way), the ability to interrelate co-operatively and to empathise so as to fully match expectations, the ability to adjust to different more or less familiar circumstances, dealing flexibly with change and innovation, personal accountability, etc.

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ABSTRACT

The diversity of cultural contexts generates the problem of the participants’ linguistic security to the act of communication. The competence of intercultural communication represents a complex of psychorelational, cognitive and linguistic factors, and the formation as well as the development of this competence implies the decentring capacity, i.e. the transition from a narcissistic perspective to an integrative one.

Key words: cultural contexts, cultural communication, decentring capacity