

WEST/EAST AND NORTH/SOUTH DIALOGUE OF CULTURES INTERCULTURALITY AND COMMUNICATION

Ernest W.B. Hess-Lüttich

University of Berne, Switzerland

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Summary

Interculturality is a concept that captures the complex phenomenon of intercultural contact, including intercultural communication. The concept of intercultural communication combines the concepts of interculturality and communication. It also describes the problems and pitfalls of misunderstanding, and the skills and competencies required for successfully understanding members of other cultures. Examples for intercultural communication studies are given from the area of intercultural German studies. The semiotic aspect of intercultural communication is important, as it goes far beyond the realms of language alone. In institutional communication potential misunderstandings should be anticipated by counseling immigrants, for example. Examples are also given from different literatures and theater traditions, and immigrant discourse in films.

1. The Concept

Many anthropologists see cultural difference, transcultural contact, and interculturality as the basic condition of a developing civilization. The interest of numerous disciplines addresses an *intercultural communication* that explains the common topic according to their specialty, defines it with the help of specialized terminology, and outlines its history from the discipline's standpoint. *German studies* based on cultural scholarship

focus today on interculturality in all of the discipline's subsectors as a problem of linguistics, literary esthetics, literary history, comparative literature, and didactics.

When members of different cultures meet, the medium of their understanding each other becomes problematical to the extent that rules of usage are hindered on both sides. Mutual understanding can be influenced but also enriched by this. To the extent that automatic routine action in everyday conversation becomes deautomated by confrontation with other "foreign" routines, their structures, processes, patterns, designs, sign units, and linkage rules are accented more acutely in the individual conscience. Yet since the rise of work by the Prague School's circle on linguistic poetics, deautomation has also been described as a characteristic of esthetic language usage. Research on *intercultural communication's* everyday aspects as well as its esthetic, historical, medial, and institutional use can only gain significance in German studies as a sign of increasing transcultural contacts, contexts, and conflicts everywhere. (see *Local cultures and global dynamics*, *Cultural exchange*)

2. The Term

The term *interculturality* is a derivation combined from the prefix *inter* (< lat. *inter* = under, between) and the noun *culture* (< lat. *cultura* = agriculture, cultivation [of the body and soul]). The metaphor introduced by Cicero was revived in German only during the late humanist period (Pufendorf) and then used parallel for cultivating land, on one hand, and cultivating spiritual objects (*cultura animi*), on the other.

The general meaning of culture has evolved from the second meaning (since Herder) as a sign of the entirety of a society's spiritual and artistic contributions that can be seen to constitute the forming of their identity as a social group (political nation, language community, etc.). Wilhelm von Humboldt compared it with the term *civilization* – which had quite an impact on the history of thought in that respect. In 1871 Tylor sought to define "culture" as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" which, at least in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, has since been associated with the term "community": "A culture refers to the distinctive way of life of a group of people, their designs of living" (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952) (see also *Theory and History of Culture*). The phenomenology of the everyday life of individuals as social subjects in culturally defined social systems (Alfred Schütz) leads to the academic institutionalization of *cultural studies*. Since the 1960s, they shaped the liberal arts program and modern languages syllabuses, especially in the USA, which was perceived as multicultural (*new ethnicity*). During the 1970s, this led to the establishment of the teaching and research area of intercultural studies (introduced later in Great Britain and above all at the *Centre for Cultural Studies* in Birmingham). The term caught on as a newly coined jargon phrase, prevailing during the 1980s and 1990s in continental Europe with its corresponding French, Italian, and Spanish equivalents. This occurred not least due to the efforts of the *Centre UNESCO d'études pour l'éducation et l'interculturalité* in Besançon.

Stimulated by the reception of such theoretical concepts from the English- and Latin-language area as well as corresponding to the needs of the related academic practice (an

increase in the ratio of foreign students), a first topical outline and syllabus of a German sub-discipline *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (German as a Foreign Language) is being proposed simultaneously in the German-speaking countries as a supplement to mother-tongue philology. It is being rapidly implemented and (with the exception of German-speaking Switzerland) belongs in varying degree today as a firm component of the specialty at most larger institutes.

Interculturality is also becoming the image and framework term of an approach recommending establishment during the 1980s of "culturally differing lectures" in German literature *between* basic German and foreign-language study and German literature (at least in the context of the German sub-discipline "*Deutsch als Fremdsprache*"). It was urged that such courses become a segment of foreign-culture scholarship and comparative cultural anthropology. This approach to "intercultural German studies" made the claim (that did not remain undisputed) to have introduced a "new paradigm" into German studies research on the interacting relationship between "*Fremdem und Eigenem*" (things foreign and things peculiar to one's own culture) in language, literature, culture, and media.

3. The Development

Intercultural communication in the broad sense is an intranational as well international everyday phenomenon. Scholarly attention to it grew steadily during the last quarter of the 20th century. This promoted systematic sector formation up to academic institutionalization, as can be seen in the founding of journals (e.g., *Plurilingua*, *Multilingua*), book series (e.g., *Jahrbuch für Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, *Cross Cultural Communication*), handbooks (*Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, in preparation at de Gruyter), scholarly associations (*Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Germanistik*) and the proceedings of their conventions, departments, and chairs (e.g., in Munich, Hamburg, Bayreuth, Karlsruhe, Mainz, and Chemnitz among others).

In a transdisciplinary dialogue with linguists, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, pedagogues, psychologists, as well as text and media scholars, the specific German studies topic of *interculturality* is devoted today especially to the role of language in intercultural contacts and contexts, relationships with and among foreigners, perception of foreignness and xenologic study, the potential for misunderstanding and causes of conflict in interethnic communication, problems of intercultural learning and their language-specific political consequences, perspectives of intercultural translation, behavior of minority cultures (subcultures) and majority cultures, development of training and continuing-education measures to prepare activities abroad or to impart intercultural knowledge domestically, the culture-specific accent of specialized and scholarly communication as well as intercultural communication on the job, functions and effects of the fine arts (literature, theater, film) in mediating between the cultures, intercultural communication in and through the mass media, as well as impacts of modern technologies on international communication.

Within the inner circle of intercultural German studies – in the sense of the challenge by Albrecht Schöne who asked in 1986 for a intensified "exchange" between domestic and foreign German studies – development of a hermeneutic of plurality with varied cultural

perspectives on German literature stands in the foreground with a special stress on "cultural topics" such as foreignness, politeness, work, tolerance, food, travel, etc., on which *Publikationen der Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Germanistik* (since 1985) provides an abundant overview. How foreign cultures appear in German literature (travel literature, exile literature, etc.), is of as much of interest as adaptation of German culture in the texts of foreign authors ("*Gastarbeiter*" literature, migrant literature, etc.).

Literary-historical description for foreign-culture readers has been reflected theoretically and has been realized in a number of projects in different countries. Within the context of contrastive phraseology, a new branch of comparative analysis has emerged to profile specific cultural stereotypes from proverbs and expressions. New tasks for intercultural German studies are finally expanding to include issues of comparison (theater, film, and journalism), especially in the sphere of intertextual and intermedial relations (Fischer-Lichte ed. 1995; Hess-Lüttich ed. 1992). In this connection, there is also a challenge to reconstitute the discipline as "media culture science" (Schmidt 1996) and to open it entirely to intercultural perspectives.

Yet now as before, the largest portion of empirical research in intercultural communication so far is found in linguistics (and, with special emphasis on nonverbal communication, in social psychology, though no attention will be paid to this here, for introductions see Jandt and Luchtenberg in the bibliography).

German studies based on a theoretical framework for culture and communication, and not fixed on its own specialized history, but open to pay attention to the signs of its times, will declare, focus, question, illustrate, and apply intercultural studies as a teaching and research object in its own right and in all its aspects. From the abundant fields of applications that have become inescapable in the meantime, only four are cited here as new tasks of German intercultural communications research in their semiotic dimensions.

4. The Applied Semiotics of Intercultural Communication

4.1 Language and Institution

Institutions for the purpose of education, clarifying disputes, health care, administration, etc. are normally generated by society on the basis of the social formation and function, but they are culture-specific, *i.e.*, based on historic developments of varying significance as Rehbein wrote in 1985. If foreigners in Germany seek the advice of a physician, an attorney, or their children's teacher, they do this based on their experience in contact with representatives of such institutions for health care, the law, or education in their own home countries. On the other hand, German physicians, attorneys, or teachers usually have only vague ideas about institutions in these alien countries. The medium of understanding also strengthens the position of institutional representatives who must subject the individual concern to the regulations of his institution. The foreigner seeking advice who neither grasps these regulations nor can equal his opposite's mastery of the language, easily sinks into the uncomfortable Kafkaesque feeling of being extradited to obscure powers.

The Chinese patient can learn forms of medical counseling and therapy in Berlin that may be new or unfamiliar to him. The German lawyer must seek to decipher the case for his Afghan client in the context of legal counsel based on the premises of another legal system rather than to perceive it as dysfunctional. It is normally the case today in big-city classrooms with ethnically heterogeneous groups that communication problems are compounded with pupils who may be used to quite different teaching styles in their home-country schools and ascribe a different role to their teacher. If the teacher lacks intercultural knowledge, he will presume the causes of communication problems to lie at the wrong point; the wrong therapy will follow the wrong diagnosis, and conflicts will multiply.

They can also break out within the institution of the "family", if children must grow up with an erosive discrepancy between differing cultures. These frequently observed conflicts of the so-called "second-generation" have led to various proposed solutions. In daily practice, the child, the teacher, and the parents have obviously been helped very little by well-intended goal recommendations such as "integration without assimilation", development of "bicultural competence", preservation of "cultural identity" with "multilingual socialization", etc. This also applies to contact with authorities, financial or social offices, job and housing agencies, alien police and welfare inspectors. Here a great deal of valuable practical work has been performed in adult education of foreign immigrants with targeted training programs that could be even better justified in theory by systematic research of intercultural *institutional communication*.

This occurs above all through study of codes of intercultural communication, *i.e.*, language and gestures, texts and signs in exchanges between native speakers and foreigners. This is primarily the task of intercultural pragmatics with its now highly sophisticated methods of conversational analysis. Intercultural misunderstandings are very often based on discrepancies in treating culture-specific mechanisms of assuring understanding and of differences between intention and interpretation of certain gestures and expressions, of kinemic and proxemic conventions of which those involved are usually unaware. Yet culturally specific differences also show up in everyday rhetorical forms and presentations of certain discourse types, such as narrative, reports, descriptions, congratulations, condolences, and arguments. Here, depending on the situation, the boundaries between individual types of discourse may be drawn differently in other language communities in different ways. This can lead to irritation concerning reciprocal assessment of the situation or definition of the relationship.

The presumably neutral and objective style of scholarly argumentation is not the same everywhere either: In 1985 Galtung has already made the well-known distinctions between Saxon, Teutonic, Gaelic, and Japanese scientific styles and described their idiosyncrasies. The established "technolinguistics" of specialized and scientific jargon has largely excluded this outsider perspective to culture-specific forms of speaking and writing up till now. In doing so, it would not only be of importance for imparting specialized language in the context of acquiring second and foreign languages, but also for international scientific communication and for the intermedia sphere of scientific know-how transfer in mass-communication systems of information societies and developing nations. (see *Global information fluxes and cultures, Global cultural integration and differences*)

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Biographical Sketch

Ernest W. B. Hess-Lüttich, Professor of German; Chair, Discourse Studies, University of Berne, borne 1949 in Wiesbaden (Germany) 1985 Dr. paed. (Bonn); 1980 Dr. phil. habil. (Berlin); 1976 Dr. phil. (Bonn); 1974 M.A. (Bonn); 1972 M.I.L. (London). 1992- Full Prof. German (Language and Literature), Communication Studies U Bern; 1990-92 Full Prof. German & Comparative Literature Indiana U

Bloomington; 1985-90 Assoc. Prof. German & Linguistics FU Berlin; 1980-85 Asst. Prof. Germanic Studies U Bonn; 1975-80 Asst. Prof. German FU Berlin; 1974-75 Research Assistant English TU Braunschweig; 1972-74 Tutor English U Bonn; 1970-72 Lektor German U London. Research: Discourse analysis in various fields of theory and application, e.g., social, literary, aesthetic, intermedial, intercultural, intra-/subcultural, institutional, technical, public.

President, German Association for Semiotic Studies 1994-99; Vice President, German Association for Applied Linguistics 1986-88); Fulbright Award 1987; Distinguished Max Kade Prof. 1989 and 1999; DAAD Visiting Prof. 1990 and 2000; Pro Helvetia Fellowship ("Swiss Chair") 1998; (Co-)Editor of several journals and book series (Kodikas, Fal, Sic, Assk, Ccc); Books on: *Literary Theory and Media Practice* 2000, *Grammatik d. dt. Sprache* ³1999, ²1993, ¹1989, *Angewandte Sprachsoziologie* 1987, *Zeichen u. Schichten in Drama u. Theater* 1985, *Kommunikation als ästhetisches Problem* 1984, *Grundlagen d. Dialoglinguistik* 1981) Editions (e.g. *Autoren, Automaten, Audiovisionen* 2001, *Medien, Texte und Maschinen* 2001, *Kommunikationstheorie und Zeichenpraxis* 2000, *Signs & Space* 1998, *Signs & Time* 1998, *Kult, Kalender u. Geschichte* 1997, *Fremdverstehen* 1996, *Textstrukturen im Medienwandel* 1996, *Semiohistory and the Media* 1994, *Medienkultur – Kulturkonflikt* 1992, *Literature and Other Media* 1991, *Interkulturelle Verständigung in Europa* 1990, *Code-Wechsel* 1990, *Text Transfers* 1987, *Integration u. Identität* 1985, *Zeichengebrauch in Massenmedien* 1985, *Textproduktion – Textrezeption* 1983, *Theatre Semiotics* 1982, *Multimedia Communication* 1982, *Literatur u. Konversation* 1980); 200 Articles ("peer reviewed") in journals, handbooks, book chapters 200 Reviews, reports, short articles, radio interviews, Internet, Cd-Rom, etc.