Review Article

MARCEL DANESI*

TEN PRINCIPLES OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION.
OBSERVATIONS ON IGOR E. KLYUKANOV'S FOUNDATIONAL TEXT

Intercultural communication is quickly becoming a pivotal area of study in an increasingly expanding global village brought about by rapid telecommunications technology. As a result, the danger for misunderstandings to arise when interlocutors who belong to different speech communities enter into intercultural communication situations are many. The study of the linguistic and interpersonal dynamics that characterize such situations has been carried out in recent years, producing many interesting findings. What this line of research lacks, however, is a theoretical framework. The recent work by Klukanov, which proposes ten principles for the study of intercultural communication, can be enlisted to construct such a framework. This paper examines these principles in the light of their general implications for the systematic study of intercultural communication and for discourse theory generally.

Keywords: intercultural communication, discourse analysis, theory of communicative interaction, linguistics.

* University of Toronto, marcel.danesi@utoronto.ca

Introduction

Human conversation is an extremely intricate social ritual that involves not only implicit social rules that are relied upon to keep the conversation going, but also an array of signals that determine whose turn it is to speak and, perhaps most importantly, how to fulfill a personal agenda in the conversation. Indeed, most conversations involve a form of *strategic interaction* (Goffman 1959, Di Pietro 1987) for carrying out personal goals, intentions, desires, and the like. If the interlocutors belong to the same speech community, the signals and devices required to interact strategically come instinctively during interactions. Their effectiveness will vary on an individual basis, but they remain substantially the same on both sides of the conversational terrain. When two people who speak the same language and who belong to the same culture enter into a conversation they automatically can "plug into circuits" of meaning exchanges, so to speak, which, like alternating electric current, allow for a successful (or at least meaningful) outcome to the conversation. But what happens when the speakers belong to different speech communities and/or cultures, yet engage in conversation through a common language, which may or may not be spoken by either one of them as a native language?

The problems and psychological aspects that characterize such *intercultural communication* (henceforward IC), which can be defined simply for the present purposes as conversation between interlocutors who belong to different linguistic and cultural communities, seem to be rather daunting upon first reflection. Yet, it is occurring more and more every day, given the nature of the global village in which we live, as the late Canadian communications guru Marshall McLuhan (1964) called the world in which communications among people traditionally kept apart by geography occur regularly through technology. IC has become so characteristic of the modern social landscape that its study is becoming more and more urgent. It is now either a branch of some pre-existing discipline such as psychology or sociology, or else it is assigned an autonomous status in various academies throughout the world. As a new fledgling interdisciplinary field, it is short on foundational texts that delineate its purview and establish (or at least synthesize) its underlying principles. Such a text has, however, come recently forward — Igor E. Kluykanov's excellent tome titled *Principles of Intercultural Communication* (2005). The purpose of this essay is not to provide a sim-

ple review of his book, which is well-written and worthy of praise for the way in which it presents the subject matter simply and comprehensively, but rather, to discuss his principles in a general way, since they can be seen to provide an initial theoretical framework for a serious scientific study of IC.

Principles of Intercultural Communication

Klyukanov calls his first principle of IC the "punctuation principle," which he elaborates as follows (2005: 16):

> In the study of communication, *punctuation* is a process of perception through which people organize their ongoing interactions into recognizable openings, closings, causes, and effects…Our experiences are divided through such [punctuation] marks, or boundary lines, into different cultures with their own identities.

As common-sensical as this principle appears to be, it is nevertheless something that needs to be articulated clearly if the study of IC as an autonomous mode of inquiry is to become a reality. Research on conversation reveals that it is, in fact, marked with all kinds of punctuations — devices that allow people both to connect with each other, to get something specific out of an interaction that is beneficial to them, etc. Clearly, these devices are negotiated in IC in a different way, since people from different cultures tend to "define their collective identities by drawing boundary lines between themselves, looking for a mutually acceptable boundary fit" (Klyukanov 2005: 21). In effect, the choice of language forms and the types of discourse strategies that are utilized in specific situations will vary according to the individual's cultural background. This is a crucial principle of IC analysis — indeed, it is probably the most fundamental one of all. Lack of knowledge of the appropriate conversational punctuation marks will entail a "meaning dissymmetry" whereby only a "set formula" is used or a wrong one applied to the situation. Misunderstandings are often traceable to "punctuation anomalies," as they can be called.

Klyukanov's second principle is called the "uncertainty principle" in analogy with the principle of the same name in physics. Developed by German physicist Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976), the principle states that both the position and the momentum of a subatomic particle can-

not be accurately determined simultaneously. Heisenberg discovered this principle in 1927, for which he won the 1932 Nobel Prize, *ipso facto* founding one version of the field of physics called quantum mechanics. In 1913, the Danish physicist Niels Bohr (1885-1962) had suggested that electrons in an atom could travel only in a certain set of orbits around the nucleus. Bohr had also shown that atoms radiate light due to changes in the arrangement of their electrons. Bohr is also the one who articulated the observer's paradox — a central tenet of quantum physics — that led to the uncertainty principle. This asserts that objective knowledge is impossible since the observer of a phenomenon is a part of the observation. Klyukanov cites the paradox in his text (2005: 32):

> We may compare the observer with that of a football game where the act of watching, accompanied by applauding and hissing, has marked influence on the speed and concentration of his players, and thus on what is watched. It is the action of the experimentalist who designs the apparatus, which determines essential features of the observations. Hence there is no objectively existing situation, as was supposed to exist in classical science (Bohr 1956: 35).

According to Klyukanov this principle applies, by extension, to the domain of human communication. All human interaction is, in fact, colored by uncertainty, whether it be predictive or explanatory in nature (2005: 36): "Predictive uncertainty is the inability to predict what someone will say or do, while explanatory uncertainty is the inability to explain why people behave as they do." The implication of this principle for IC study is rather profound, since it suggests that interlocutors tend to bring specific expectations to the speech situation and that these are hardly ever objectively determinable. Most of the time, the "objectives" that are latent in a conversation involve Self-Other regulation, and thus are uncertain. The two main objectives are, arguably:

(1) the formation or maintenance of close bonds, and
(2) the linkage of the conversation to perceptions of solidarity and empathy.

Of course, these objectives can be enacted in a fairly straightforward fashion by speakers with a common cultural background, although many failures to do so also characterize such interactions. But in the case of IC, they are perhaps the most difficult ones to accomplish.

The third principle enunciated by Klyukanov is the "performativity principle," which portrays verbal communication as performance (2005: 60):

> When people communicate with one another, they try to reach their goals by using various language means. Every act of communication is a performance whereby people face each other (either literally or in a mediated fashion, such as via telephone or the Internet) and, as if on stage, present themselves — their very identities — dramatically to each other.

The concept of communication as performance is now a well-established one in communication science and in linguistics proper, starting with the work of the late Erving Goffman (1959). Every time we speak we are exposing who we are, or purport to be. We are playing a role in the theater of life each time we engage others in conversation. This role entails knowledge of the script that a specific culture makes available, and that is where the problem lies in IC — there tend to be different cultural scripts being acted out in many situations. The strategies used in the delivery of a personal agenda in conversation, even in highly ritualized situations, are not predictable to anyone who does not have access to the source scripts as fashioned by cultural forces. This suggests that discourse is not a simple matter of information exchange, nor that it is generated in an arbitrary fashion, but rather that it is highly performative and thus unfolds on the basis of sensory and emotional linkages to the overall situation (social, dynamic, cultural, psychological, and physical) in which it takes place. In conversation, words ensure that there is a predictability to Self-Other relations; i.e. they ensure that the ways in which people interact in their cultural spheres, and in society generally, are regular and fluid. They are, in other words, regulatory strategies designed to maintain cooperation and harmony, even if, paradoxically, the actual act of conversation is often perceived to be a duel.

Klyukanov characterizes his fourth principle as the "positionality principle," which he defines as follows (2005: 93):

> Intercultural communication is a matter of positionality. As cultures occupy different positions and interact, their cultural gaze makes it possible for them to see the world and their own place in it. In this process, cultural meanings are generated, or — to put it another way — each culture is grounded.

The notion that language, culture, and worldview ("cultural gaze" as Klyukanov terms it) are interlinked generally falls under the rubric of the *Whorfian Hypothesis* (WH), after the American anthropological linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941). This has a long history within linguistics. Suffice it to say here that it posits, basically, that languages predispose speakers to attend to certain concepts as being necessary. But, as Whorf emphasized, this does not mean that understanding between speakers of different languages is blocked. On the contrary, through translation people are always attempting to understand each other. Moreover, Whorf claimed, the resources of any language allow its speakers to invent new categories any time they want. For example, if for some reason we decided to refer to "those who drink only decaffeinated coffee," then by coining an appropriate word, such as *decaffers,* we would in effect etch this concept into our minds. When someone with the stated drinking preference came into view, we would be able to refer to him or her as a *decaffer*, thinking of him or her as exemplifying a distinct class of individuals. When we name something, we are classifying. What we are naming belongs to no class until we put it in one.

The WH raises some interesting questions about expectations during conversation, because a specific language would seem to predispose its users to view certain social roles in culture-specific terms. Feminist critics have maintained (correctly) that English grammar is organized from the perspective of those at the center of the society — the men. This is why in the recent past (and even to some extent today) we would say that a woman "married into a man's family," and why at wedding ceremonies expressions such as "I pronounce you man and wife," were used. Such damaging language produces effects on speakers. In IC situations it may even trigger unanticipated reactions, so much so that, according to Klyukanov, it may be the most typical source of arguments in encounters between people of radically-different cultural backgrounds.

Klyukanov's fifth principle, which he calls the "commensurability principle," is really a corollary of the previous one. Basically, it posits that words are meaningful signs that shape thought and that their meanings, in turn, shape the flow of communication. He argues that, as such, they are the product of a body-mind-culture interface. Essentially, this means that in face-to-face conversation there are three sources of interference — the language of the body, the language of the mind, and the language of culture, all of which coalesce in the production of meaning during interaction.

The problem in IC lies in the fact that we are inclined to interpret the world with the signs we have learned in cultural context. To put it figuratively, signs constitute the "conceptual glue" that interconnects our body, our mind, and the world around us in a holistic fashion. Most of the raw, unorganized sensory information that comes from seeing, hearing, and the other senses is organized into meaningful wholes by signs. Our understanding of the world is thus not a direct sensory one. It is mediated by signs and, thus, by the images that they elicit within our mind-space. Charles Peirce (1931-1958). referred to these three dimensions as *firstness*, *secondness*, and *thirdness*, throughout his writings. A sign starts out as a sensory structure, that is, as something that has been made to simulate an object in terms of its sensory properties. It is then used by the sign-user to establish a connection to the object, even if the actual object is not present for the senses to perceive (= secondness). Finally, the sign itself becomes a source of knowledge about the world, once it enters the world of culture and distributed for general usage (= thirdness). Cultures are, essentially, "sign-preserving" systems that distribute signs to people for various kinds of practical purposes. Human cognitive activity starts from an unconscious "feeling" that the world has meaning to it, moving towards a cogitation of the world with the resources of language ("thinking in words").

Kluykanov's remaining five principles are, basically, corollaries or elaborations of the first five. They are called, respectively, the "continuum," "pendulum," "transaction," "synergy," and "sustainability" principles. The continuum principle states that binary thinking — the tendency to think in opposites (right vs. wrong, left vs. right, Self vs. Other, we vs. them, etc.) — is something that must be overcome in IC situations if the continuum that exists in conversations between same-background interlocutors is to be established. The pendulum principle implies that a balance of opposing tendencies needs to be struck during IC — tendencies that are usually negotiated in discourse among members of the same speech community in a fluid way. The transaction principle entails the utilization of strategies that allow for people from different cultural backgrounds to become "flexible" during conversation, striving to seek common reference points in order to negotiate a transaction. As Klyukanov (2005: 207) puts it: "It is clearly important for people from different cultures to move from positions to interests and make the most of the negotiation zone. It is likewise important for people to be flexible and inte-

grate their resources." The synergy principle is really a version of the previous one. It is defined by Klyukanov (2005: 232) as follows:

"Intercultural communication is a process whereby people from different cultures integrate their resources, striving toward an optimal result that cannot be achieved by any culture individually."

Finally, the sustainability principle states that IC "is a process whereby people from different cultures display mutual tolerance, trust, and resistance, sustaining their collective identities and the overall process of their interactions."

Although some of the discussion tends to be repetitive, Klyukanov is correct in emphasizing an overall need for cooperation and mutual intelligibility based on ethical notions. The principles enunciated in the text are consistent, moreover, with a central idea in discourse analysis, namely that speech must be regulated not by preconceptions and expectations, but by collaboration. Even though there is much leeway in the linguistic choices that can be made to match a communicative objective, the choices should not, as Kluykanov argues, be insensitive to cultural variation. Indeed, he suggests strongly that the language used in conversation must be contextualized strategically (from a cultural perspective) in order to make communication as fluid as possible under all kinds of situations. Some examples of what this might entail are the following.

Requesting information, a service, or goods: *What time is it? Do you have a match? Could you please pass the sugar?*

This shows knowledge of what is appropriate for literally bringing someone into contact. An opening gambit based on time is relevant in those cultures where time is a consideration of some importance. It would, for instance, be meaningless to ask a Buddhist monk in his ambiance such a question to start a conversation. The linkage of time with situation at hand is crucial in IC.

A request for a social response: *This weather is awful! This city is getting too crowded!*

Again, opening a conversation to request a social response by linking it to a cultural domain such as perceptions of the weather is something that

is context-dependent. It would be irrelevant to open up a conversation referring to the weather to an inhabitant of, say, Arizona, where the weather is fairly constant. In such a situation it would be interpreted literally as some kind of warning or comment, not as an opening gambit.

An offer of information: *Did you hear about what happened last night?*

This strategy is based, typically, upon linking a need for information with opening up a contact. In societies and regions where such information is not considered relevant, this opening gambit would be interpreted in a vastly different way.

An expression of anger, pain, joy, as a ploy to solicit an opening response: *Wow! Look at this!*

This expression as requires knowledge of the modality of expressivity available in a language as a means of getting attention. In various Inuit societies of Canada this would not work, because in such cases, such expressions are allowed to occur when the need is real, i.e. when intervention or help is truly required.

Formulas: *Hello! I'm sorry? May I help you?*

Formulas have evolved over time through interactional situations, i.e. through associations between, say, helping and talking. These vary from culture to culture and need to be taken into account in any theory of IC.

A substitute statement to avoid a conversation about a subject the speaker anticipates his or her interlocutor will broach: e.g. *The weather is sure changing, isn't it?*

This is used to avoid a confrontation in many contexts.

One line of research in discourse theory suggests that many situations are so typical that the speech forms used for them are highly formulaic. This kind of knowledge is thought to be stored in memory in the form of *frames*, which are adapted to fit with present reality, so that they are altered as required. For example, ordering from a menu at a restaurant

constitutes a frame whereby both waiter and customer enter into a kind of dialogue that seems to flow in a script-like fashion. Such frames exist in many areas of social discourse: e.g. asking for services (at a bank, at a post office), negotiating a transaction at a gas station, at a store, and so on. But, the thing to keep in mind is that the actual words and forms used in such frames are, upon closer scrutiny, sensitive to cultural setting, as Kluykanov argues throughout — i.e., they are based on linkages that connect the situation to meaning structures across the network of meanings that constitute a culture. It is the task of future work in this domain to document these linkages so that one can better understand the nature of human meaning-making in all kinds of situations.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, Kluykanov's text is a timely one, establishing a theoretical framework for studying the question of how intercultural communication unfolds through strategic linkages to the cultural orders of interlocutors. Verbal communication between two people is not a simple transfer of signals. It is an outgrowth of interaction based on various modes of expression — gestures, the vocal language, the necessity to engage in joint action, etc. — which have all played a part in bringing about communicative fluidity among the members of speech communities.

One of the more fundamental questions that this line of investigation begs is: Are all aspects of human verbal interaction based on cultural reasoning? This remains to be seen. The analysis of intercultural conversations in terms of the notions put forward by Kluykanov will provide a basis for answering this question, at least in part. Verbal interaction is a complex phenomenon that involves belief systems, intentions, moods, and other factors that are part of the overall shape and path it takes in a specific situation. The choice of words in speech is part of a larger life scheme in which we participate — social, personal, and physical. Understanding the intentions, beliefs, and life schemes of interlocutors is crucial in analyzing breakdowns during IC.

As a closing word, it should be mentioned that any framework, no matter how seemingly obvious and useful it may be, will never be able capture the emotional and aesthetic subtleties of the conversations we enter into. To make an analogy, a framework describes the notation and structure of music; it does not tell us how that notation and structure is

translated into "music." Nevertheless, one cannot help but be thankful to Klyukanov for providing us with a "notation" to start analyzing IC in earnest.

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