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THE ETHICS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

There is considerable evidence that shows how people can improve their social skills. The secret of this type of training depends on the way the skills are defined. The main purpose of training social and communication skills is regarded as being complex due to various reasons. The pattern of social skills can be applied in many useful ways but it's important in the same time to keep in mind that social skills are different from physical skills due to several important matters. As we can perceive our own and other's behaviour, we have the capacity to reflect on how people perceive us, which is called meta-perception, and it was proven to be an important factor that defines how people react to one another. In this article I will try to identify the most useful communication skills when it comes to communicating with strangers. In order to understand the process of intercultural communication in order to improve its effectiveness, we need to take into consideration what makes the intercultural connection possible. The challenge is to understand their cultural background and their communication patterns. By doing so, the first steps into knowing the others is done. It's the step to further civilisation.

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1. Introduction

By culture we understand many things especially due to the fact of using the word in trivial and frequent conversations that the concept in itself requires a systematic approach. It is universally accepted that culture is a set of principles around which the activities of an entire society evolves. In other words, the culture refers to the social values that are transmitted, such as behaviours and symbols that are commonly shared by the members of a social group by which they interpret and enrich their experiences and behaviours. Other researches regard culture as a system of principles that all the activities need to respect. If this is so, then we regard this matter as being a bit too much because we cannot not take into consideration the whole, and culture is not all because no matter how much importance we might give, the whole cannot fit into a separation and our aim is to define it. The semiologist Umberto Eco offered this new topic a cultural and philosophical background making it possible to merge other issues as well which might have been regarded as not befitting the topic. Therefore, Eco started with a theory of cultural anthropology that is wide spread at the moment – the entire social life is considered as communication phenomena that are involved in the area of semiology due to the fact that the communication process cannot take place unless we use signs.

2. Problem Statement

As we suspect, the need for intercultural communication has existed ever since the entanglement of languages form Babel Tower, according to the Bible. When communication takes place at an intercultural level, other tradition forces are triggered. Therefore, people are struggling to identify the problems that emerge from inappropriate understanding.

Due to worldwide communication networks and economic development, there is an increased awareness for the need to understand other cultures and different people. It is impossible to understand other people if we do not take into account their culture. Therefore, for a successful intercultural communication it is important to "view things in which one's group is the centre of everything. And all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (Summer, 1940, p. 27).

Communication has an important, well-known and recognized role between people, groups, and cultures. All these would not have been capable of surviving unless this consistent binding was present, i.e. communication, which ensures good relations for the horizontal line – between contemporaries – and on the vertical line – between generations (Anghel, 2012, p. 259).

Our century, even more than the previous ones, is already defined as a century of cultural relations and people feel more acutely aware of this fact, knowing that other people's culture is of great importance, and it is combined with the desire to make known individual values (Boteanu, 2010, p. 4).

Habermas (1983) perceives reality according to three transcendental points of view that determines three possible knowledge categories: *information* – that extend our technical power to get things; *interpretations* – that allow an orientation of actions amid common traditions; and *analyses* – that free consciousness of dependency with regards to certain hypostatic powers. According to Habermas (1983), these different points of view have their origin in a complex assembly of interests that are specific to species related to socialisation from the very beginning, namely: labour, language and domination. The human species ensures its existence in the context of certain systems by organising together the social

labour and self-affirmation in a mediated living based on certain traditions by using communication and current language; and finally, connected to certain self-identities that consolidates every stage of individual consciousness in rapport to group norms (Habermas, 1983, p 135).

Edward O. Wilson (2010), professor at Harvard University, has a theory on the things that make people behave in a certain way. He thinks that a great part of human behaviour – such as male dominance, taboos referring to incest and other patterns perpetuated by tradition and cultural practices – are not solely the inventions of culture. Wilson believes that these types of cultural patterns are under the control of genetics, which we all have implemented in our brain. A special feature of evolution shaped this type of behaviours where genes and culture – forces of nature and food – worked together (Whitten, 2001, p. 60).

Wilson and his colleague Charles J. Lumsden (1999) claim that human genes and culture are strongly connected to each other for thousands of years. They entitle their theory "genetic-cultural coevolution". They say that it's high time we connect biology and social sciences in a new human Darwinian science. Wilson and Lumsden (1999) published a book that suggests that cultural and genetic evolution became connected somehow sometime two millions of years ago by nurturing each other and initiating a "promethean fire" that led to the brain evolution at a level unknown to other organ. They claim that this genetic-cultural coevolution led the human mind to his culture. The socio-biology implications over human behaviour are diverse and continue to be debated with passion inspiring many studies that strengthened the supporters of this theory but did not change the opponents' perception over it.

3. Research Questions

For a proper communication, it is required a certain standard of understanding. The reasoning of our research starts from the following question and hypothesis:

▪ What happens when people are not aware of the other culture when they engage into the communication process?

▪ If people are more aware of the ethics when it comes to intercultural differences, then the possibility for proper understanding increase

In every culture there are recommended and forbidden patterns to reach acceptable values. In other words, each culture has its own accepted methods to reach cultural ideals. The patterns of reaching cultural ideals imply shared agreements on the way people accept to behave. There are alternative approaches to examine cultural processes. One approach is to take a look into how a culture works from the inside. Using this approach, we are concerned to understand human behaviour in a culture from the people's point of view. Another approach would be to compare one culture with another. This approach is using predetermined categories to examine selected aspects of the culture studied. In other words, the objective is not to understand a culture as their members perceives them, but to determine how cultures can be compared by reference to a particular quality. The distinction is not new; at first, it was proposed by Sapir in 1925. The distinction is also made by linguist K. L. Pike (1966) that uses the terms "emic" and "ethic" to categorise the first and respectively the second approach (Gundykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 39).

Even if we accept the genetic-cultural theory of the distinguished professor Wilson (1999), still we cannot give up the role of learning, of taking into consideration the Promethean fire of properties

submitted. The culture is learnt, and perhaps not coincidentally, first book writer in Romanian literature is "The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius". Everything is based upon the following doctrine: "And I now, my offspring, I will teach you," as Solomon says, "Son, receive the teachings of your father and listen to the advice of your mother to live forever. Therefore, my sons, I teach you" (Lumsden & Wilson, 1999).

4.   Purpose of the Study

Our purpose is to highlight the importance of proper intercultural communication to increase the mobility among cultures, global economy and marketplace and the emergence of multicultural organizations and work forces that require the development of communication skills and abilities appropriate to a multicultural society.

The very first Romanian historian, Grigore Ureche (1958), appeals to it from the very first sentence of his book: "Many writers had to write the story of the countries and confessed the good and the bad in order to remain as a teaching to the sons and grandsons in order to avoid the mistakes and learn form the good advice in order to fortify your character" (Ureche, 1958, p. 6).

Dimitrie Cantemir starts his book "Descriptio Moldaviae" – a study required by Berlin Academy: "Whoever wants to provide a political description of the Moldova, according to my judgement, needs to research in every possible way the way the country is rules, as we judge that the country description was failed by even the greatest teachers of the time" (Cantemir, 1981, p. 51).

Finally, our great national poet, Mihai Eminescu (1997), was providing heavy criticism to the previous generation especially based on teaching: "Our intellectual emptiness, thirsty for civilisation, received without any control whatsoever all the ideas, good or bad, appropriate and inappropriate, the entire nation, with just few exceptions, could not grasp the fact that a word cannot replace a reality and that the cultural phrase is never equivalent to that of the real work of intelligence and especially the strength of own judgement which is the true culture, and the phrase of freedom is never equivalent to true freedom which is the faculty to form itself by work and work capitalisation. It is not a utopia; a thousand utopias populated the heads of the last generations that imagined freedom without work, culture without teaching, modern organisation without analogue economic growth. A series of cheap phrases copied from foreign newspapers of second hand writers, from the discourses of politicians born and raised in other countries, replaced and still are replacing the willingness to teach the self; foreign reasoning, arose from different state of facts, replace the exercise of own judgement" (Eminescu, 1997, p. 294). These types of statements enrol in the disputatious concept of 19th century that militates against the forms without substance.

Consequently, our attention is focused on the fact that cultures evolve differently and so does their language. Dean C. Barnlund (1988) in "Communication is a global Village" traces communication and transportation development that have led to the apparent shrinking of the contemporary world and the emergence of the global community. He points out the ramifications of the global village in terms of the forms and kinds of interactions that necessarily accompany such a new community of people. Barnlund (1988) considers problems of meaning associated with cultural differences, interpersonal encounters,

intercultural encounters, and the role of "collective unconscious" in intercultural interactions (Samovar & Porter, 1987).

5. Research Methods

The research method used was the document analysis that focused on the skills and abilities to improve intercultural communication. As there is an important and stringent need to identify the reasons that lead to inappropriate understanding, we focused on the segments that highlight communication i.e. family, education, society, and customs. The data analysis, being purely theoretical, aimed, in our case, to identify the importance of intercultural communication starting with its definition, purpose, importance and relevance.

In school, as well as in the family, children are taught that they depend on the others around to receive the necessary things: food, clothes, protection, shelter against bad weather. Elisabeta Stănciulescu (1996) considers that "the education revolution that accompanied the occurrence of modern societies led, by the obligation and prolonging educational years, to diminish the family importance as a socialising agent. The phenomenon is considered salutary, since the partial loss of the educational function of the family favours the democratization of society; the share of attributive elements in the social stratification system and the dependency of the social position of the child on its social origin, can thus be diminished" (Stănciulescu, 1996, p. 63).

The family is the one that ensures transmission. Attach yourself to those people that can make you better, receive those people whom you can help, teaches Seneca and Columella in *Res Rustica* stated, "not only nature, but teaching as well creates habits." This wants to suggest that the acts of culture are transmitted from one person to another, from a generation to another, from a people to another. The civilisation of writing is relatively recent, the ancient culture was transmitted in oral manner, especially by proverbs, songs and, more rarely, by epopees.

As Anca Nedelcu (2008) states: intercultural communication investigates those cultural elements that influence the most the interaction between people of different cultures when they are faced to interpersonal communication (p. 15).

According to Larry Samovar (1987), "perception is the internal process by which we select, evaluate, and organize stimuli form the external environment. In other words, perception is the conversion of the physical energies of our environment into meaningful experience. A number of corollary issues arising out of this definition help explain the relationship between perception and culture. A basic belief is that people behave as they do because of the ways in which they perceive the world and that these behaviours are learned as a part of their cultural experience. We tend to notice, reflect on, and respond to those elements in our environment that are important to us" (Samovar, 1987).

6. Findings

The findings of our research proved us that the focus should be at improving the qualities and skills of intercultural communication. In order to avoid segregation, conflicts and misunderstanding, there is a stringent need to avoid our own self-destruction as humans by focusing on the ethics of intercultural communication. There should be a concerted effort to understand and get along with people that are

different from us. In order to do so, there is a need to specify the nature of intercultural communication and understand why people regard things differently.

Emile Durkheim (1995) considers that alongside the free forces that constantly refresh ours, there are other forces that are fixed in different techniques and traditions that we use. The first is the language that we use, without it being created by ourselves but we use somebody else's rights i.e. the thesaurus of knowledge that was transmitted from previous generations. The conclusion is that we owe the society the different winnings of civilisation if generally we are not aware of the source but, at least, we know that they are not our creation. But these are the very things that offer humankind a personal physiognomy amid other beings, as a human is human due to civilisation. He cannot live outside his peers, he needs what other people are producing, not only what the nature offers, but, above all, he needs communication, he needs to share his thoughts and feelings. In conclusion, he cannot ignore the feeling that there are external causes that act and gives him the specific traits of his nature, similar to some powers that protect him and offers a privileged destiny. For all these, says Durkheim, the man must give dignity according to their measure (Durkheim, 1995, p. 199).

Fortunately, as we are all different, the relevance of the researched topic explored the diverse psychologies and concepts of intercultural communication. By defining the role of human communication, people are aware of the factors that lead to proper communication.

7. Conclusion

Based on our research, we can clearly state that there is no greater obligation as humans but to make ourselves understood by our fellows. That includes the people that come from different cultures and languages. By understanding the variables involved that affect intercultural communication, we have all the chances to understand how to control the communication process.

The quality of culture of being dynamic was also proven by its capacity to propagate. The Great Teacher drew the attention on the fact that nobody lights a candle to hide it i.e. to make it unseen. The peoples that held a truth, a discovery, an invention just for themselves transformed into dead roots and did not prosper. The other way round, the peoples that knew to share their discoveries, to sell them, attracted others and put them in circuit and became superior cultures determining other peoples to follow their example. "Life in the third millennium is characterized by fast and sudden changes which lead to slow adjustment to the new social context" (Nistor, 2014).

This is the fate of Greek and Roman culture, and, later on the English culture. According to professor Randy Kluver (2000), at the beginning of the century, the globalising powers of economic, tourism and migration integration became, more than ever, important factors that justify the special interest for increased competence of intercultural communication. He mentions a few important categories that deserve the attention of intercultural communication theorist (Kluver, 2000). He groups them into potential relations between man and nature: authority over nature, harmony with nature and subjection of nature. These solutions are usually without complications, simplistic and can be better illustrated with examples. "In the industrialised societies like the United States, the mastery over nature view tends to predominate. This orientation involves the view that all natural forces can and should be overcome and/or put to use by humans; examples are damming rivers, moving mountains, and controlling

illness through medicine. The harmony with nature orientation draws no distinction among human life, nature, and the supernatural – any one is an extension of another" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 44).

Since antiquity, the wise man – the owner of experience and mind values – had a certain place established at the top of hierarchy. There is no culture that can exist without the society, says the English sociologist Anthony Giddens (2010, p. 26), such as no society can exist without culture. Without culture we are no longer humans, but only survivors of the planet. As professor Petre Anghel (2009, p. 10) states, we would have no language to express ourselves; we would just be sending signals as birds and animals. And, most importantly, we would not have the sense of self-consciousness, we would be unable to meditate over our own destiny, and our thinking and judgement capacity would be limited, resuming ourselves only to procreations and getting food. Without culture the experiences of a generation would be dissolved in nothingness and man would return to its original state of fruit picker.

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