

CROSSING BORDERS, CULTURES AND MENTALITIES THROUGH MEDIA COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *Whenever you cross the border of your native country, you are exposed to intercultural differences which you sincerely hope to address successfully. This is the case for journalists and politicians who are confronted with such situations, unavoidable in their jobs. It is said that intercultural competence consists in meeting representatives of other communities, in trying (and eventually succeeding) to know, understand and accept somebody else's culture, universe, beliefs and mentality. Sometimes, journalists and politicians find themselves in difficult situations having to ask questions or to answer them in a convenient way. There are situations when mentalities and convictions of persons taking part in an interview are opposite to each other, but the participants to the interview must behave in a "face saving" way. We intend to analyze some manifestations of intercultural competence in two programmes: Internationales, on TV5 International et Hard Talk, broadcast on BBC International. These programmes deal with aspects of political life as seen through the eyes of politicians and journalists. The journalists and the politicians belong to different countries and they try, during the interview, to express their opinion or the opinion of their respective governments, about events that have been taking place and concern their respective countries without hurting their interlocutor's feelings. Such communicative exchanges are interesting from a linguistic point of view, more precisely from the point of view of politeness theory and the one of conversational maxims. Papers must be prefaced by an abstract in English up to 250 words. The text will be written in 10pt high, Italic, justified, left-right alignment. A number of maximum 8 keywords will be written 10pt below the abstract. The words will be 10pt high, Italic, left alignment, and separated by a semicolon.*

Keywords: *intercultural communication; politeness theory; media communication; conversational maxims*

1. INTRODUCTION

In theory, intercultural competence consists in meeting representatives of other communities and in trying, hopefully with a certain amount of success, to know, understand and accept somebody else's culture, universe, beliefs and mentality. More than that, it is accompanied by a really serene, relaxed and peaceful exchange, dialogue or even cooperation to achieve a common goal. It is not only about language, it also implies non-verbal communication, pose and positive reaction in various, and quite often, unexpected and unpredictable situations. The above mentioned competences should be embodied in a cultivated, open-minded and, why not, intelligent person, perfectly aware of the existence of differences between people, between their beliefs, civilizations, customs and, at the same time, perfectly able to handle them in each and every situation.

We think we have some knowledge about other people or other communities simply because

we have come across or acquired some information through stereotypes. We know that French people like refined food and refined wines; but does it hold for all the French? We imagine the typical American as a man wearing a Texan cowboy hat and smoking Cuban cigars, but not all Americans are Texans and some of them might be smoking cigarettes or not smoking at all; we think about Italians that they are very talkative and they usually talk in a loud voice; or that they can sing very well, they have a nice voice and they are all playing serenades under the balcony of their Juliet. Anyhow, times have changed and nowadays, a young man courting a young woman would send her a text message on Twitter or some photos on Facebook to express his feelings. This would be another stereotype dying a quiet death in the era of fast, digital communication. The list of stereotypes about certain people, belonging to certain nationalities, may continue and the examples are not always positive ones. Let us consider the classic Scottish avarice: Scottish people are well-

renowned for their parsimony and a lot of jokes are circulated on this topic. A question arises: is parsimony characteristic to Scottish people alone? The answer is definitely no. Russians are thought to be heavy drinkers of vodka, by most of the peoples in Europe, except for the British, who kindly award this title to the Irish. In the end, we have to admit that each nation has its fair share of drunkards and sober people. So, having taken a closer look at all these stereotypes, we can conclude that to take this kind of knowledge for intercultural competence would mean to make a huge mistake. Intercultural competence is indeed someone's capacity to be aware of differences between people, but this capacity should be doubled with that of handling those differences in a situation of communication. To be more precise, in any situation of communication.

Handling this situation of communication implies various dimensions: linguistic, sociolinguistic, psychological and cultural (Abdallah-Preteuille, 1996:29). Since communication is the key-word in dealing with differences between peoples' cultures, mentalities and beliefs or customs, we must take into consideration the main factors of the situation of communication, such as the speaker, the interlocutor, the time and the place of the respective communication, and, of course, the content of messages exchanged between the participants to the communication. One of the most appropriate manifestation of such an exchange is the interview, which is made public through print media or broadcast media.

We intend to demonstrate that interviews such as those in *Hard Talk*, a very successful programme on BBC International channel, or those broadcast on TV5 International, the French channel, in a programme called *Internationales* represent the very illustration of crossing borders, cultures, beliefs, customs, habits and mentalities. The British journalists, as well as the French ones, while engaging in exchanges with political personalities, such as diplomats, ambassadors, prime-ministers of other country should be conscious of the challenge awaiting them. Such face-to-face exchanges, unlike interviews in printed media, present much more factors that can be analyzed and that illustrate differences between cultures, habits or behaviour. And, if we contrast media with literature, depending only on the writer's style and talent, we will be able to put forward the variety of means at the disposal of media communication which combine language, image and sound.

2. INTERCULTURAL ASPECTS IN BROADCAST MEDIA. TERMS OF ADDRESS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

In linguistic theory, there is a difference between terms of address and terms reference. The terms of address are the set of expressions at the disposal of a speaker which are commonly used to name the speaker's interlocutor, whereas the terms of reference are the terms used by the speaker to designate the interlocutor, something like a trade name (Charaudeau, Maingueneau, 2002:30-32). There is another great difference between those terms. While the terms of address have a deictic value, the terms of reference represent the specific quality of a linguistic sign or of a phrase to refer to an entity in the real world. The terms of reference used by the participants in the process of communication or rather of enunciation are deictic ones, as they interfere closely with the use of verbal tenses (Charaudeau, Maingueneau, 2002:487-489). In addition to that, we should consider the sociolinguistic point of view, as both terms of address and terms of reference express the social status of the persons taking part in the process of communication. It should be expected, on behalf of both parties, that they respect each other's status, they refrain themselves from the use of inappropriate terms, or at least, they confine themselves to a neutral position.

We are going to make a parallel analysis of the use of terms of address and of reference terms in two programmes broadcast on the French channel TV5 International (URL: <http://www.tv5monde.com/cms/chaine-francophone/>) and BBC International (URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/>). Both programmes have as main theme international politics, current affairs, national or international conflicts throughout the world. Watching *Internationales – Le magazine de l'actualité* (TV5 International, May, 7th, 2017) is a very good opportunity to identify various points of view on current political issues. The programme is broadcast every Sunday and every time, the French journalists are the same: the presenter, Philippe Dessaint, and two journalists, specialists of foreign affairs and working for *Radio France International*, Sophie Malibeaux, and for the daily newspaper *Le Monde*, Christophe Ayad. On that day, their interlocutor was Salman El Herfi, introduced to the audience as “chargé de la Mission de Palestine en France” (Head of the Permanent Mission of Palestine in France). His status is very clearly stated by the presenter, in order to avoid any confusion, since the state of Palestine is not

recognized by all countries, including France. Nevertheless, France accepted the presence of diplomat on its territory, until further developments of the relationships with Palestine. Taking into consideration all these facts, the presenter insists on the diplomat's status, a thing he considered as being part of his job as a journalist, that is being accurate and precise in his statements. At the same time, he is very conscious that he cannot afford to commit any blunders, as such a behaviour may lead to a diplomatic incident. The presenter, speaking about recent events in politics, mentions the name of the American president and that of the President of the Palestinian authority in the following context:

Tout d'abord c'est Donald Trump qui reçoit Mahmud Abbas, le chef de l'autorité Palestinienne, il le reçoit donc à Washington à la Maison Blanche.

The two other journalists, referring to The American president, call him "Trump, Donald Trump". For the European and even the American journalists, it is a very common practice to name the politicians by their full names such as Donald Trump or even by their last name (Trump), i.e. by using what linguists call terms of reference. In their opinion, this does not mean being disrespectful towards the American president. As a matter of fact, from a linguistic point of view, "proper nouns, or names, are highly referential" (Geoffrey Finch, 2000:175). The Palestinian diplomat thinks and feels otherwise, according to Middle East mentality which puts forward the idea that you should show some respect to the powerful persons, especially heads of governments or countries, and more than that, who are still in office. That is why, when he speaks about all those heads of states, he does not forget to specify first their status, and only after it, their name. So, he refers to them as "president Trump" although he may not like him; the former president of the United States is referred to by the term of address "president Obama". Although he is not in office any longer and has not contributed to solving the Palestinian situation or to the recognition of Palestine by all states, Obama still imposes respect, ergo the reference term "president Obama". The other heads of states mentioned by the Palestinian diplomat are representatives of the political powers in the Middle East, so they are entitled to the same respectful reference terms:

le Prince saoudien bin Salman, le roi Abdallah de Jordanie, le président Mahmoud Abbas, le Président Al Sissi, le dirigeant américain (the Saudi Prince bin Salman, King Abdallah of Jordan,

President Mahmoud Abbas, President Al Sissi, the American leader).

Another important thing we should point at is the term of address used by the French journalists during the entire interview. They addressed him as "Monsieur l'ambassadeur" which is not quite appropriate. The correct term of address when speaking to an ambassador, recommended by diplomatic etiquette, is "Votre Excellence" ("Your Excellency") followed by the full name of the respective ambassador. Nevertheless, we should not interpret this form of address as impolite but we should attribute it to the established customs and routine of French journalists. This fact can be verified in another programme, this time an interview with Ehab Badawy, the ambassador of Egypt in France. The team of journalists is the same and the presenter, Philippe Dessaint, addresses him by calling the ambassador by his name: "Ehab Badawy, vous êtes l'ambassadeur d'Egypte en France" (Ehab Badawy, you are Egypt ambassador in France). The other journalist, Sophie Malibeaux, from RFI (Radio France International) takes the opportunity of a very brief pause to intervene, but her intervention is made quite abruptly and almost in an impolite way when she addresses the ambassador like this:

Ehab Badawy, Monsieur l'ambassadeur, je voudrais intervenir pour vous demander... (Ehab Badawy, Mister Ambassador, I would like to intervene and to ask you...).

Even in less polite form of address in English, it should have been "Ambassador Ehab Badawy". At times, we sense that even the reference terms are charged with a supplementary connotation, with a certain implicature. The journalist Sophie Malibeaux speaks about Egypt's President in office by using the term of reference "General Sissi", while the ambassador of Egypt in France refers to him as "le Président Al Sissi" (President Al Sissi) underlying by the use of this reference term that his country is ruled by a President, and not by the army.

Speaking about terms of address and reference terms, let us take a look at the British programme, Hard Talk. Usually, the journalist in charge of the interview is Steven Sackur and the interlocutors belong to a various range of personalities: former prime-ministers of European countries, former presidents or vice-presidents of African countries, politicians, Senators in the United States' Senate, newsmakers and personalities from around the globe. One of these personalities being interviewed by Stephen Sackur is Arseniy Yatsenyuk, former prime-minister of Ukraine. Being asked about

other Ukrainian politicians such as Yulia Tymoshenko and Micheil Saakashvili who have a different attitude towards the existing crisis and about the steps that should be taken, he calls them “lunatics”, quite an inappropriate reference term, pronounced in a very determined voice. This contradicts the journalist’s opinion and attitude, who calls them “prominent politicians”, using what he considers the most appropriate reference terms. More than that, when Arseniy Yatsenyuk speaks about the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, he calls him “the guy”: “The guy wants to run the world or at least, part of the world”. The term of reference is somewhat disrespectful, but at least, it is not an insult as the one he used for his Ukrainian fellow countrymen and colleagues. In fact, his misuse of language does not represent a threat, since he is no longer in office, so he feels free to express his feelings against his opponents in the field of politics and against the one he considers the aggressor of his country and of his people. Nevertheless, it is not a proper way to discuss politics and in the eyes of the viewers of the programme, it would be considered as highly unusual, highly impolite and improper. Western Europeans customs in dealing with politics do not coincide with such Eastern Europeans manners.

3. COMMUNICATION, POLITENESS THEORY AND POLITICS

3.1 Theoretical basis The three elements mentioned previously, communication, politeness theory and politics are to be found in interviews of politicians made public through broadcast media. Media communication has some particularities which should necessarily be taken into account, for three reasons: 1. it is not casual conversation; 2. it does not consist of mere speech acts; 3. it is more than observing Grice’s conversational maxims and cooperative principle. Media communication, according to Patrick Charaudeau (1997:67-72) is something like a contract of communication and it has its own terms: it depends on the conditions of the exchange situation in which it appears. The French linguist compares the situation of communication to a theatre stage on which word exchanges are taking place, and, consequently, the participants become characters in the play. This contract of communication implies external conditions, such as the main goal of the exchange, the status of the persons involved and the topic of the discussion. As for the internal conditions, these are related to the enunciation theory: who is talking, where and when and, most important of all, what is he saying. At this very moment we

have to resort to politeness theory (Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) combined with Grice’s cooperative principle (1979). It is clear that the persons involved in the interview are the journalist(s) conducting the interview and the interviewed person. Together, they have to work, cooperate and make everything depending on them for the dialogue to start, continue and end with a good result for the audience and a positive impression about themselves. How is it going to be achieved? It is not an easy task, and it implies a lot of preparing, good will and competence in everyone’s field of activity materialized in everything everyone is doing and saying.

This interaction between the two parties consists of a limited number of exchanges, previously agreed upon, according to media practices. On the other hand, according to politeness theory practices, the two parties involved have to interact in such a way as to enable them to save their faces (the respect that someone has for himself/herself) and to avoid face threatening acts. How can someone save his face? He/she might want to preserve a positive face or a negative face. For both cases, more often than not, preserving someone’s positive or negative face does not depend only on himself/herself. Keeping to Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (1987), preserving someone’s positive face during an interview would mean to be accepted and liked by others, i.e. the journalists, the audience and, most important than anything else, by the power in office in your own country. It also helps, in the same circumstances, to preserve your negative face, meaning that you want to be regarded as a self-governing and free person, you would not accept to be imposed a certain attitude and you also would like to be respected by others in terms of possession. This time, by possession we mean possession of ideas, mentalities and convictions, which really belong to you and have not been imposed by other forces. In order to achieve these goals, a lot of strategies can be put in place. The main goal would be to avoid embarrassing the interlocutor/hearer or making him/her feel uncomfortable. It is not difficult to try and respect each other’s expectations regarding self-image and take into account others’ feelings.

To achieve these goals, the journalists have to make a lot of effort, especially when they want to raise their profile, which is quite a different goal. In such cases, they resort to face threatening acts. In usual, current affairs interviews (such as interviewing a prominent actor/actress, members of the administrative apparatus, sportsmen/sportswomen), such practices are acceptable and

accepted by both parts involved in the interview. Interviewing a foreign politician requires other rules and even other politeness strategies. It is a minefield, both for politicians who can jeopardize their position and for journalists who risk their position in the media company and a diplomatic conflict.

We still have not introduced in our complicated equation Grice's cooperative principle and his already well-known maxims of conversation. It comes without saying that each party involved is aware of its cooperation to achieve mutual conversational ends, that is to try and cooperate with one another to construct meaningful conversation (H.P. Grice, 1975). Let us remember the four maxims of conversation: (1) Quantity. Make your contribution as informative as required. Do not say too much or too little. (2) Quality. Do not say what you believe to be false. (3) Relation. Be relevant by staying on topics. (4) Manner. Avoid obscurity and ambiguity.

They seem to be quite good and effective instructions, guiding the person(s) concerned and leading to good results and positive achievements. In the following lines we shall test all our statements and analyze the results.

3.2. Actual solutions of linguistic theories in media practice. It is commonly accepted that an interview with a prominent political representative should follow a certain practice: the interview begins with questions that do not embarrass the politician and the next part should follow the same pattern. The interview with the Egyptian ambassador Ehab Badawy in the French broadcast on TV5 can be considered as a proof that journalists do not keep to the linguistic rules and norms and they easily tend to transgress them in order to raise their profile. Let us come back to the interview with the Egyptian ambassador in France, during which politeness theory is strongly shaken and becomes very unstable. At times, the exchanges present no real danger, as it is the case with the Pope's visit to Egypt in April, 2017, to reassure the Coptic community of the Christian's church support after the previous terrible attacks. Acting as if there is nothing amiss, the journalist Sophie Malibeaux asks a question about the Pope's visit to Egypt, saying that it seemed to her that the Pope's visit to the University of Al Azhar marked general Al Sissi's intention to reform religious discourse, but he is met with frictions on both sides.

Trying to preserve his negative face, that of a person who has his own opinions and is not easily influenced or misled, the ambassador answers:

Je ne suis pas nécessairement d'accord avec le fait qu'il y a des frictions, mais il faut dire que le président a évoqué maintes fois le discours religieux et il a constaté qu'il nécessite d'être revisité" (I do not necessarily agree with you when you state that there are frictions between the parties, but it must be made clear that our president mentioned several times the religious discourse, saying that it should be revisited).

The first thing to mention here is that the ambassador avoids a face threatening act when he denies the French journalist statement about religious discourse. And then we must mention the euphemism used by both parties when they brought into discussion "the religious discourse". It is not a secret to anyone that that religious discourse they are talking about is the extremist Islamic religious one, used by extremist Islamists religious leaders to push Islamists to extreme actions against Christians. So, instead of using terms that would have threatened both faces (positive and negative) of both sides, the journalists and the ambassador agreed to use a neutral term.

Anyhow, it does not mean that this was the end of their confrontation and that their strategies ended. The whole interview is a continuous exchange of words. The ambassador was constantly heckled; in return, he always gave a proper answer which was meant to save both his face and also the journalist's face. And, at the same time, being very experienced in politics and diplomacy, he tried to preserve a positive face when he answered a question about the relationships with the Israeli neighbours and their support in combating terrorism in Sinai:

Ecoutez, en ce qui concerne les accords avec Israël, ils sont là pour durer, on les a très bien testés" (fr.) (Now, as for our agreements with Israel, they are long lasting and well tested on both sides.

Sometimes, a participant in the exchange (taking place) during the interview is confronted with more aggressive strategies of protecting positive and negative face. Let us consider the interview with Turkey's ambassador in France, Ismail Hakki Musa, broadcast on TV5 Monde, during the same programme, *Internationales*, in mid-March 2017. It took place before the referendum launched by the Turkish president Recep Tayip Erdoğan in order to reinforce its power as a president. The team of journalists from *Internationales*, Philippe Dessaint, Sophie Maibeaux from RFI, and Christophe Ayad from Le Monde, are ready to discuss the situation, since

some political controversies arose, caused by the fact that Germany and the Netherlands refused to accept the organization of supportive meetings in favour of president Erdoğan before the referendum. The Turkish president protests against the decision of the European Court of Justice to ban veal in public institutions. The first problem to be dealt with is brought into discussion by the presenter, Philippe Dessaint, who characterizes the Turkish press as reacting bluntly, with no moderation as they published Angela Merkel's face with a Nazi uniform and performing the Nazi salute. The Turkish president accused the Europeans of being Nazis, of fascism and state terrorism. He goes as far as to say that the Europeans launch a crusade against Turkey. The presenter asks the ambassador what is his opinion on the attitude of Turkish newspapers which published such offensive and insulting photos representing the German Chancellor. The same presenter reminds the ambassador that he lived long enough in Europe, where he studied and then began a long career as a diplomat, so he should be more familiar with European customs. So the question was if it is normal to assume such photos of Angela Merkel represented as a Nazi and if this situation does not embarrass him. In a way, this was a most direct and least polite strategy of politeness theory and it was answered with the same strategy. The ambassador gave a surprising answer, saying:

En quoi ça choque? Quand certains medias en Europe traitent notre président de dictateur, ça ne choque personne? Ça ne dérange personne? Quand Monsieur Erdoğan est traité de dictateur dans la quasi-totalité de la presse en Europe, ça ne dérange personne? (Why should this shock anyone? When Mister Erdoğan is qualified as a dictator by most media in Europe, does it shock anyone?)

His explanation is that:

Monsieur le président a été révolté quand il a vu son ministre condamné à siéger dans une voiture à 30 mètres du Consulat général de la Turquie à Rotterdam, une femme de surcroît. (Mister president was disgusted to see that his minister was obliged to stay confined in a car, 30 meters away from the Turkish Consulate in Rotterdam, and, more than that, she was a woman!)

So, we can see that politeness strategies can be inspiring, when one side uses a strategy, the other

side answers in the same manner. We could consider it, on the one hand, a failed face threatening act on behalf of the French presenter, or, on the other hand, a successful face saving act on behalf of the Turkish ambassador.

In addition to all those strategies, both journalists and diplomats, aware of their position, do not engage in endless conversations and their exchange of words does not exceed the limits of a normal conversation. They seem to have understood that any maxim, being it conversational or other, represent good advice and should be taken into consideration.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Intercultural competence is a concept derived from the cultural competence and both imply various manifestations. Both of them refer to human activity and especially to human behaviour and human language. Human activity is diverse and so is intercultural competence.

One should acquire this intercultural competence in each and every field of human activity. Diplomats and journalists are frequently exposed to intercultural exchanges, but this is also true about all those who travel, either for work or relaxation. They should be open to know, understand and respect somebody else's culture and mentality.

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