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Intracultural Communication and Intercultural Communication: Are They Different?

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Abstract

The paper discusses the differences between intracultural communication and intercultural communication from a socio-cognitive perspective that treats this relationship as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Movement on the continuum, and differences between the two phenomena are affected by different factors that will be discussed in the paper. The hypothetical left end of the continuum is intracultural communication and the right end is intercultural communication. Neither exists in pure form. The question is to which end a given communicative situation is closer to and what characteristics it is dominated by. While moving on toward the right end communication becomes less dependent on standards, norms, frames, core common ground and formulaic language and is characterized more by emergent common ground, ad hoc generated rather than formulaic expressions, norm creating attempts and individual creativity in solving communication problems.

Keywords

intracultural – intercultural – continuum – common ground – intersubjectivity – formulaic language

1 Introduction: Understanding Culture

Theoretically human verbal communication can be considered a process with two extreme ends: intracultural end and intercultural end. However, practically communicators are always in between, closer or further to one of the ends creating and interpreting meaning by using their existing linguistic tools. So

it would be a mistake to talk about a dichotomy. There is nothing like pure intracultural communication or intercultural communication. What we have is something in between on a continuum between the two ends.

Before we explain how the continuum works we need to define culture as understood in this paper. We adopt Bates and Plog's definition according to which culture is a system of shared beliefs, norms, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another (Bates and Plog, 1980: 6). However, culture cannot be seen as something that is "carved" in every member of a particular society or community. It can be made, changed, manipulated and dropped on the spot. In fact, it is not culture that can be changed, manipulated and dropped in talk but its manifestation.

Gumperz (1982) and Gumperz and Roberts (1991) called our attention to the fact that "culture" is not present in communication in the "old" sense of a transcendent identity which is composed of values and norms and linearly related to forms of behavior. Cultural phenomena in speech are contingent, situational, and emergent in nature. Blommaert claimed that what we can observe and analyze in intercultural communication are

different conventions of communication, different speech styles, narrative patterns, in short, the deployment of different communicative repertoires. As far as "identity" is concerned (cultural, ethnic identity), it can be an inference of these speech styles: people can identify selves or others on the basis of such speech styles. But in actual fact, not "culture" is deployed, but communicative repertoires.

1998: 4

The main argument of the view represented by Gumperz, Hymes, Blommaert, Rampton and others is that there is no single language, culture, or communicative style. What we have is language, culture, and communicative style instantiated in several group and individual varieties. In intercultural communication, speakers have a "repertoire" of varieties of styles and a combination of styles which are deployed according to communicative needs in the changing context. The nationality or ethnic membership of people may suggest the possibility of ethnic or cultural marking in communicative behaviour. However, the interplay of several different factors affects the emergence of "ethnically" or "culturally marked" aspects of communicative behavior which is most frequently dominated by other than cultural factors.

Blommaert (1998), following the line of argument developed by Gumperz (1982), Hymes (1968) and others, claimed that culture is rarely unified, and new

contexts generate new cultures and new forms of intercultural communication. Rampton's research (1995) provided empirical substance for the old Sapirian claim that one society can hide many societies, one culture can hide many cultures, and one language can hide many others.

This approach, however, should not mean that there is nothing relatively stable and unifying in culture. On this issue there is a significant difference between the constructivist view represented by Blommaert, Gumperz and Rampton and the socio-cognitive approach promoted by Kecskes (2010, 2013a, 2013b). According to Blommaert, Rampton and others there is no single language, culture, or communicative style. What we have is language, culture, and communicative style instantiated in several group and individual varieties. Interlocutors have a repertoire of varieties of styles and a combination of styles which are deployed according to communicative needs in changing contexts. The difference between the constructivist view and the socio-cognitive approach lies in the understanding of the nature of existing "communicative repertoires" and the ways these repertoires are deployed. In intercultural pragmatics existing communicative repertoires have been developed from prior experience and communicative encounters in a language or languages including the common language of communication (Kecskes, 2013a). What the online creation of culture means is similar to what online, actual meaning construction means: the bringing about of something relatively new needed in the actual situational context by using and blending existing repertoires and newly emergent elements. Culture, just like meaning, is characterized by both regularity and variety. It certainly is more than just an online created and co-constructed phenomenon. In communication, interlocutors can rely on two types of repository of prior experience and encounters: lexical units and communicative styles. Like lexical items, cultural patterns (often expressed in different communicative styles) code prior experience and encounters, i.e., relatively standard cultural behavior models and expectations which are activated in a given situational context. Here is, for instance, an exchange between a librarian and a student:¹

- (1) Student: I am returning these books.
 Librarian: Can I see your library card, please?
 Student: Here you are ...
 Librarian: Do you want to extend the due date of any of these books?

¹ Conversation recorded at the University Library at SUNY, Albany.

Student: No, thank you.
Librarian: Here I your card. You are all set.

In the course of interaction these existing models are modified and blended with situationally emergent new elements. This process of blending that relies both on existing and emerging factors constitutes the communicative encounter. Blending means joining existing and emerging elements/factors into new intercultural. So in the interaction the communicative repertoires of speakers are not just deployed but actually they are modified and blended with emerging elements as the process develops. The socio-cognitive approach emphasizes that this “third culture” creation means not just putting together what we have and bringing about a third phenomenon which is neither this or that, but actually giving sense to the communicative repertoires and changing them by relating them to the actual situational context that also adds to or takes away something from what is existing. Cultural constructs and models change diachronically while cultural representation and speech production by individuals changes synchronically.

Durkheim (1982) argued that culture is distributed. Cultural norms and models gain individual interpretation in concrete social actions and events. People both produce culture and are governed by it. Because of people’s ability to reify social reality, the socio-cultural world comes to have life of its own and can dominate the actors who create them (e.g. Simmel, 1972).

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon. Existing relatively definable models are modified and blended with situationally emergent new elements. As we discussed above, there is a major difference between the socio-constructivist view and the socio-cognitive approach. While social constructivists argue that models and frames have to be rebuilt again and again so it is just our impression that they exist outside language, the socio-cognitive approach claims that cultural models have some kind of psychological reality in the mind, and when a situation occurs the appropriate model is recalled, and adjusted, which supports the appropriate verbalization of triggered thoughts and activities. This is the view that this paper adopts.

2 The Difference

The dominant view is that there is no principled difference between intra-cultural communication and intercultural communication (e.g. Winch, 1997; Wittgenstein, 2001). This is true as far as the purpose and mechanism of the communicative process is concerned. However, according to Gumperz and

Gumperz (2005) monolingual people and multilingual people do not differ in what they do with language, but in how they do what they do. So our focus should be on the “how they do what they do”.

Here is the working definition of the two ends of the continuum in the socio-cognitive approach. Intracultural communication occurs in interactions between members of a relatively definable L₁ speech community following conventions of language and conventions of usage with individual choices and preferences. Intercultural communication refers to interactions between speakers who have different first languages, communicate in a common language, and, usually, represent different cultures. So how is this difference reflected in language use?

From a pragmatic perspective the main difference between intracultural communication and intercultural communication appears to be that the later, to some extent, shifts the emphasis from the communal to the individual. Kecskes (2013a) argued that what standard pragmatics assumes about how things work in communication depends on there being commonalities, conventions, standards and norms between speakers and hearers. Commonalities, conventions, common beliefs, norms, shared knowledge and the like all create a core common ground on which intention and cooperation-based pragmatics is built. (Of course, there are plenty of varieties within those commonalities.) This, however, may not be exactly so in intercultural communication. When this core common ground appears to be limited as is the case in intercultural communication interlocutors cannot take them for granted, rather they need to co-construct them, at least temporarily. So what is happening here is that there appears to be a shift in emphasis from the communal to the individual. It is not that the individual becomes more important than the societal. Rather, since there is limited common ground it should be created in the interactional context in which the interlocutors function as core common ground creators rather than just common ground seekers and activators as mostly is the case in intracultural communication. So the nature of intersubjectivity seems to be being changed. There is more reliance on language created ad hoc by individuals in the course of interaction than on pre-fabricated language and pre-existing frames that are based on core common ground and existing common knowledge and beliefs. In the case of interlocutors who use a common language and whose L₁s differ (intercultural communication), the lack of full control over language skills (L₂) and full knowledge of conventions, beliefs and norms in the target language (L₂) used as the medium of communication may lead to a more conscious approach to what is said, and how it is said. This should certainly affect the way we evaluate speaker production, hearer comprehension and implicatures in intercul-

tural interactions. Furthermore, in intercultural communication more conscious recipient design may be involved than in intracultural communication in which interlocutors do not have to deal with language skill issues and may rely on more spontaneous, (partly) prefabricated speech and less monitoring. This conscious recipient design is demonstrated in the following sequence. A man from Hong Kong and two Brazilian “au pair” girls are talking.²

- (2) HKM: Aha. But if you want to come here, what do you do? Do you have some transportation, something or do you have a car?
 BRF1: We have car.
 BF2: We have our own car.
 HKM: Yeah. Who provides you with the car?
 BF1: Host family.
 HKM: Yeah. So they give you the car, yeah?
 BF2: Yeah.
 HKM: You can use the car freely, whenever you want, yeah?
 BF1: Yes and no Some of the girls have the problems with the car.
 HKM: Yeah.
 BF1: For example, they cannot go ... more than ... I don't know, one hundred miles for a week. Errh ... It is up to the family ... like people are different ... I don't ...
 HKM: So they can limit the mileages ...
 BF1: Yeah.
 BF2: Most families they don't do that ... but some of the families.

The interlocutors are talking about how the au pair girls use cars of the host families. The two Brazilian girls try to use several strategies (repetition, long explanation, etc.) to make the Hong Kong man understand what they are talking about.

There seems to be reason to take up the question of how people go about formulating utterances and interpreting them when they can't count on, or have limited access to those commonalities, conventions, standards and norms and in a sense, they are expected to create, co-construct them in the communicative process. What people depend on that makes pragmatic mean-

² Excerpts used in this paper come from the Albany Database of Intercultural Communication unless otherwise noted. ADIC contains recorded conversations between native speakers and nonnative speakers of English and nonnative speakers and nonnative speakers of English.

ing reliable within a speech community—the focus of standard pragmatic theories—becomes more visible when we see the troubles, misunderstandings and also different routes to success that may arise when those commonalities and/or conventions are missing or limited cross-culturally. This means that while analysing language use in intercultural communication we may be able to see and notice things that standard theories of pragmatics may miss or just take for granted. For instance, in the Gricean paradigm cooperation is considered rational behaviour of human beings. It is essential that human beings are cooperative in the course of communication subconsciously and automatically. In intercultural communication, however this rational and subconscious behaviour is enhanced with a conscious, often monitored endeavour of interlocutors to be cooperative and make deliberate efforts to comprehend others and produce language that is processable by others. So it is even more emphasized that the goal of coming to an understanding is “intersubjective mutuality ... shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another (Habermas, 1979: 3)”. This is what we can see demonstrated in example (2).

3 The Success Approach

If we accept that what we do in any kind of communication is similar but the ways we do those things are different then we should focus on the different or modified routes to success when those L1 commonalities and/or conventions are missing or limited as is the case in intercultural interactions.

There have been several attempts (e.g. Samovar and Porter, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Gudykunst and Mody, 2002; Nishizaka, 1995) to explain the difference between intracultural and intercultural communication. Samovar and Porter (2001) argued that “intracultural communication” is the type of communication that takes place between members of the same dominant culture, but with slightly different values, as opposed to “intercultural communication” which is the communication between two or more distinct cultures.

Many scholars argued that interculturality is the main reason for miscommunication (e.g. Thomas, 1983; Hinnekamp, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Intercultural communication as a field of inquiry was basically constituted as an analysis of understanding troubles (e.g. ten Thije, 2003; Gumperz, 1982; Gudykunst and Kim, 1992), on the presumption that “during intercultural communication, the message sent is usually not the message received” (Neuliep, 2006: 1).

When understanding troubles occurred in intercultural interactions, analysts typically searched cultural differences for a cause, without considering other factors, or more importantly, examining what non-native and native speakers might be doing to overcome them.

The deficit view was best summarized by Gass and Varonis:

NNS and NNSS are multiply handicapped in conversations with one another. Often they may not share a world view or cultural assumptions, one or both of which may lead to misunderstanding. In addition, they may not share common background ... that would permit them to converse with shared beliefs about what Gumperz and Tannen (1979) call the “semantic content” of the conversation. Furthermore, they may have difficulty with speaking and interpreting an interlocutor’s discourse as a result of a linguistic deficit.

1985: 340

However, some researchers’ findings showed the opposite (e.g. House, 2002, 2003; Kecskes, 2007, 2015). The use of semantically transparent language by non-native speakers results in less misunderstandings and communication breakdowns than expected. The insecurity experienced by lingua franca speakers make them establish a unique set of rules for interaction which may be referred to as an “interculture”, according to Koole and ten Thije (1994: 69) a “culture constructed in cultural contact”.

What we need when we analyse intercultural encounters is a success rather than a failure approach. Those who adopt the failure view tacitly regard people interacting as passive victims of their differences. However, people generally produce language as participants in interaction, and in interacting they actively engage in making it work, in achieving understanding and being understood. This is congruent with Kidwell’s (2000) proposal that we use a “success approach” in the study of intercultural, cross-linguistic communication that has as its aim explicating the resources that enable participants to accomplish their communicative tasks.

The “success approach” has a profound effect on language learning and international education as well. Students using not their L1 for education but another language such as English are not considered deficient learners but learners on their own rights. These learners are perfectly capable of expressing themselves through L2 and negotiate meaning by creating “intercultures” that can be considered as unique tools of creating meaning as, for instance, in the following sequence (3) in which a Polish woman is speaking about housing with a man from Hong Kong and a Brazilian woman.

- (3) HKM: How about you? ... circumstances ... Where do you live? You rent ... or?
 POF: Mmm ... I am live ... not so far from the university.
 HKM: Hmm.
 POF: It is a college ... you don't know ... It is not so far. It's Albany.
 HKM: Hmm.
 POF: But I have 3 minutes ... errh ... to go to my work.
 HKM: Hmm.
 POF: And this house is ... errh ... on our own so my husband and I ...
 HKM: Hmm.
 BRF: Doesn't have any kids?
 POF: No. don't have ...
 BRF: No?
 POF: Yeah.
 BRF: Errh ... Are your husband American or ...?
 POF: Errh ... Actually he is ... he is Polish. He is American but ...
 BRF: OK.
 POF: ... because he came into the United States when he was a child.
 HKM: Hmm.
 POF: He was something like twelve.
 BRF: All right.

Intercultures are co-constructed common ground elements that rely both on relatively definable cultural models and norms as well as situationally evolving features (Kecskes, 2010, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). In this conversation the following elements can be considered intercultural: Polish woman rents a house with her husband; they live close to work and university; husband is a Polish-American. This phenomenon will be discussed in details later.

4 Factors Defining Move on the Continuum

4.1 *Language Proficiency*

Relatively high proficiency in language use allows the speaker to pay more attention to the communicative process itself rather than just to language use issues (word choice, fluency, correctness, etc.). There is hardly any proficiency issue affecting intracultural communication.

Consequently, one would assume that the higher the language proficiency of the interlocutors is the more the communicative process resembles intracultural communication. Of course we should recognize that there are individual

differences in L1 use too. However, those affect language use in a different way than in intercultural encounters where looking for words and building meaningful utterances may require more significant effort than in L1 communication.

Language proficiency facilitates the development of a skill set that equips the interlocutor with skills to seek out and discover the expectations of his/her partners in any given interaction and to apply that knowledge to avoid misunderstandings and further their own goals while employing the appropriate cultural tact and speech customs. This skill set is not necessarily language-specific as it can be also employed when the interlocutor uses another language.

We, however, have to be careful with the language proficiency issue. Although the language gap between interlocutors usually acts as a barrier for intercultural communication, there can still be particular situations that suggest that the opposite can occur. What I mean is that the “success approach” should also be used when we evaluate the role of proficiency in intercultural encounters. There are several studies (e.g. Ting-Toomey, 1999; Peirce, 2005; Mancini-Cross, 2009) that demonstrate that in specific cases such as tourism the language gap and intercultural inexperience of travellers can be positive rather than negative attributes in the intercultural exchange between interlocutors. The following exchange between a native speaker of American English and a Thai “au pair” girl records a situation when language proficiency does not work as a barrier at all. Both speakers are highly motivated and interested in the topic of conversation. They focus on the content rather than the “carriers” of the content.

- (4) NS: Do they: um (0.5) are you teaching them any Thai? (0.2) Do they speak °Thai°?
- NNS: So:metime=it difficult (to) them, sometime they (like a copy) me::?
- (0.5)
- NS: Oh::
- NNS: <When they heard> me talk on phone or something.
- NS: Oh [okay.
- NNS: [Some girl- (0.2) just one girl (love) to learn Thai language.
- NS: ↑Oh that's so ↑cool.
- NNS: Just <four years old>, she love Thai foo::d
- NS: Oh↑oo
- NNS: She love to speak Thai:: hh
- NS: Do they- is she good?
- NNS: She count one to ten in Thai.

- NS: ↑Wow::, that's so [goo:d
 3:30
 NNS: [Yeah:: heh, she so cute, I love her.

4.2 *Preferred Ways of Saying Things and Preferred Ways of Organizing Thoughts*

Intracultural communication is dominated by preferred ways of saying things and preferred ways of organizing thoughts within a particular speech community (Kecskes, 2008). The development of preferred ways of saying things and preferred ways of organizing thoughts is the result of conventionalization, normativization, core common ground, historical development and relative coherence of the speech community. This is not the case in intercultural communication because the development of “preferred ways” requires time, and conventionalization within a speech community.

Kecskes (2007) argued that using a particular language and belonging to a particular speech community means having preferred ways of saying things and preferred ways of organizing thoughts. If approached this way, the question of who is a “native speaker” can also be defined. Anybody can be a “native-like speaker” if s/he knows “preferred ways” in that speech community and actually uses them.

“Preferred ways of saying things” is expressed in a well-balanced blend of prefabricated language with ad hoc generated language. Preferred ways of saying things are generally reflected best in the use of formulaic language and figurative language. Selecting the right words and/or expressions in communication is more important than syntax. Americans *shoot a film, run a business, make love, do the dishes* and *put out the fire*. The TV anchor asks you to *stick around*, and the shop assistant tells you at the end of the transaction that *you are all set*.

Language socialization, to a great extent, depends on the acquisition of what is expected to be said in particular situations, and what kind of language behavior is considered appropriate in the given speech community. For instance:

- (5) Husband and wife are talking.
 – Are you OK, Mary?
 – I am fine, Roy.
 – I would have believed you if you hadn't said “Roy”.

“I am fine” is a formulaic expression. But Mary added “Roy”, the name of the husband to the expression, which, with this action, ceased to have its usual function, and expressed the opposite meaning: “No, I am not fine.” As

his response shows the husband recognized his wife's feeling bad for something.

Formulaic language is the heart and soul of native-like language use. In fact, formulaic language use makes language use native-like. Pawley and Syder (2000:164) argued that "it is knowledge of conventional expressions, more than anything that gives speakers the means to escape from the one-clause-at-a-time constraint, and that is the key to nativelike fluency". Dell Hymes (1968) said that "a vast proportion of verbal behaviour consists of recurrent patterns, ... [including] the full range of utterances that acquire conventional significance for an individual, group or whole culture" (Hymes, 1968: 126–127). Coulmas (1981: 1–3) argued that much of what is actually said in everyday conversation is by no means unique. Rather, a great deal of communicative activity consists of enacting routines making use of prefabricated linguistic units in a well-known and generally accepted manner. Successful coordination of social interactions heavily depends on standardized ways of organizing interpersonal encounters because conventional ways of doing things with words and expressions are familiar to everyone in the speech community so speakers can be expected to be understood according to their communicative intentions and goals. Wray and Namba (2003: 36) claimed "... speech communities develop and retain common ways of expressing key messages". This fact also affects the development of preferred ways of organizing thoughts. Prefabricated language brings together members of the speech community. Newcomers should acquire these preferred ways in order to be included in the "group" or community.

Several studies referred to the low rate of use of formulaic language in intercultural communication (e.g. Prodromou, 2008; Kecskes, 2007). Researchers argued that the main reason of this is that interlocutors prefer semantically analyzable units because they cannot be sure of how much of formulaic language their partners can process the way they do, i.e., how much their partners know preferred ways of saying things in the target language. Discrepancy in formulaic language use in intercultural communication can lead to serious misunderstandings as the following example shows.

- (6) A Korean student is talking to the clerk in the Human Resources office.
 Lee: Could you sign this document for me, please?
 Clerk: *Come again ...?*
 Lee: Why should I come again? I am here now.

Although the clerk used an interrogative intonation with the expression "come again", the Korean student still misunderstood her because she did not know the formulaic function of that expression.

Developing preferred ways of saying things is a natural endeavor of any speech community. Kecskes (2007, 2015) demonstrated that, although the idiom principle affects any language production no matter whether it is L1, L2 or Lx, it results in less formulaic language use in L2 and Lx than in L1 because there are several factors that are not present in L1 but are there in L2 or Lx affecting the functioning of the idiom principle in different degree. Such factors include language proficiency, willingness to use certain formulas, language fluency of other participants, lack of core common ground, and others. As a result, the actual production of formulaic expressions in the L2 or Lx will always be lower than in L1. But what is important for us here is that it is a natural endeavour of any speech group or community, however temporary it may be, that their members attempt to create a group-inclusiveness by making up and using certain expressions in a way that means the same for each member of the community. This is also true for intercultural communication when the interlocutors spend a relatively short time together. Kecskes (2007, 2015) reported that lingua franca speakers created their own formulas even during 30 minute conversations such as “native American”, “one good thing”, “we connect each other very often”, etc. Obviously, the more time a speech community spends together the more they formulate their own preferred ways of saying things.

4.3 *Reliance on Emergent Common Ground Rather Than on Core Common Ground*

Common ground refers to the ‘sum of all the information that people assume they share’ (Clark, 2009: 116) that may include world views, shared values, beliefs, and situational context. What standard pragmatics assumes about how things work in communication depends on there being commonalities, conventions, standards and norms between speakers and hearers (Kecskes, 2013a). This, however, may not be exactly so in intercultural communication. Commonalities, conventions, common beliefs, norms, shared knowledge and the like all create a core common ground on which intention and cooperation-based pragmatics is built. (Of course, there are plenty of varieties within those commonalities.) However, when this core common ground appears to be limited as is the case in intercultural communication interlocutors cannot take them for granted, rather they need to co-construct them, at least temporarily. So there appears to be a shift in emphasis from the communal to the individual. It is not that the individual becomes more important than the societal. Rather, since there is limited common ground it should be created in the interactional context in which the interlocutors function as core common ground creators rather than just common ground seekers and activators as is the case in intracultural communication.

Kecskes and Zhang (2009) argued that we need to make a difference between core common ground and emergent common ground. Core common ground refers to and is based on prior experience. People usually infer this “common ground” from their past conversations, their past immediate surroundings, and their shared cultural background and experience. People belonging to a speech community share much core common ground, which makes communication relatively smooth between members of the speech community.

Emergent common ground is the result of creating and co-constructing intercultural communication. It is important to underline that this co-construction is not separated from core common ground. Co-construction, creation of emergent common ground builds not only on actual situational needs and context but also existing shared knowledge and information. During this process new and old are blended into a synergistic whole. This phenomenon also exists in intracultural communication. However, while intracultural communication builds on existing core common ground that is the result of relatively similar prior experience of interlocutors and less on emergent common ground, intercultural communication relies more on emergent common ground because of the limited availability of core common ground resulting from little or no mutual prior experience. So again, what we see as difference is the degree of reliance on core common ground and emergent common ground in different types of interactions.

The result of emergent common ground is intercultural communication that Kecskes (2011) defined as situationally emergent and co-constructed phenomena that rely both on relatively definable cultural norms and models as well as situationally evolving features. Intercultural communication are usually ad hoc creations (see example 3 above). They are created in a communicative process in which cultural norms and models brought into the interaction from prior experience of interlocutors blend with features created ad hoc in the interaction in a synergistic way. The result is intercultural communication in which there is mutual transformation of knowledge and communicative behaviour rather than transmission. The process of developing intercultural communication resulting from emerging common ground is connected with the process of shaping intersubjectivity.

4.4 *Change in the Nature of Intersubjectivity*

Cognitive-oriented approach to intersubjectivity has put emphasis on the process of cooperative meaning-making (Habermas, 1979) with a focus on a shared meaning as an end goal. Similarly, psychologist Rommetveit (1998: 358) viewed intersubjectivity as an end goal within social understanding framing it as “reciprocal perspective setting and perspective taking” within a pursuit of a “state of intersubjectivity”. It refers to the development of a shared understanding

and/or focus on particular elements of the communicative process between speaker(s) and listener(s).

In intercultural communication the nature of intersubjectivity seems to be changing. As discussed above there is more reliance on language created ad hoc by individuals in the course of interaction than on prefabricated language and pre-existing frames. In the case of interlocutors who use a common language and whose L1s differ (intercultural communication), the lack of full control over language skills (L2) and full knowledge of conventions, beliefs and norms in the target language (L2) used as the medium of communication may lead to a more conscious approach to what is said, and how it is said. This may not be so in intracultural communication in which interlocutors do not have to deal with language skill issues and may rely on more spontaneous, (partly) prefabricated speech and less monitoring. But a more conscious recipient design in intercultural communication may help interlocutors get their message through. The following conversation between a female student from Japan and a female student from China demonstrates this well.

- (7) CH: And basically I don't like American food
 J: Mhmmm
 CH: Like there are too many ... too much fat in it So I just ... I cannot cook either but my roommates and friend they can cook very authentic Chinese food.
 J: Oh really?
 CH: And Chinese dish so I ...
 J: It's good for you!
 CH: Yeah (laughing) it's good for me ... like I just ask them to cook hometown food and then I'll be in charge for all the cleaning thing.
 J: Oh
 CH: They don't have to worry about it.
 J: It's very reasonable and fair because sometimes like cooking but they don't like cleaning
 CH: Mhmm
 J: But you don't like cooking you like
 CH: I don't like (laughing) yeah but I have to like to be responsible for the whole dinner thing.
 J: Ahh

Intersubjectivity and common understanding of cooking is very nicely being shaped in this exchange. The Japanese student gently makes her Chinese part-

ner describe what her relationship to cooking is. She does not speak much but gives back-channelling support (“oh really?”; “it’s good for you”, etc.) to her partner.

Reliance on emergent common ground, and shaping intersubjectivity through developing intercultural communication, all this results in a shift from the societal to the individual. It is the responsibility of the participating individuals to develop their socio-cultural frame for the conversation, create common ground and find linguistic elements that are mutually processable in the actual situational context. So the basic difference between intracultural communication and intercultural communication from the perspective of intersubjectivity is that while participants in intracultural interactions can rely on existing frames that affect them top-down, in intercultural interactions participants must build up those frames bottom-up while negotiating meaning with their interlocutors. Diversity of individuals participating in the communicative process will result in social frames that are built on mutual understanding of different ethnicities rather than just on the experience of one particular speech community. Rampton’s data (1995) showed that, depending on who is addressed, when, and in what particular type of activity (e.g., playing, discussing, listening to music), the role and function of ethnically marked communication styles may change.

4.5 *Context-Sensitivity*

Kecskes (2008, 2013a) argued that context-sensitivity works differently in intracultural and intercultural communication. In linguistics context usually refers to any factor—linguistic, epistemic, physical, social, etc.—that affects the actual interpretation of signs and expressions. This is too broad a definition which does not reflect the complexity of the issue of context. In the socio-cognitive approach context represents two sides of world knowledge: one that is in our mind (prior context) and the other (actual situational context) that is out there in the world (see Kecskes, 2013). These two sides are interwoven and inseparable. Actual situational context refers to the linguistic and extralinguistic factors as well as the situational environment in which a given interaction takes place while prior context encapsulates the interlocutors’ previous experience with the linguistic signs used in the given situation and similar situational frame(s) that the actual situational environment resembles.

Actual situational context is viewed through prior context, and vice versa, prior context is viewed through actual situational context. Their encounter creates a third space. According to this approach, meaning is the result of the interplay of prior experience and current, actual situational experience, which are both socio-cultural in nature. Prior experience that becomes declarative knowledge is tied to the meaning values of lexical units constituting utter-

ances produced by interlocutors, while current experience is represented in the actual situational context (procedural knowledge) in which communication takes place, and which is interpreted (often differently) by interlocutors. Meaning formally expressed in the utterance is co-constructed online as a result of the interaction and mutual influence of the private contexts represented in the language of interlocutors and the actual situational context interpreted by interlocutors.

This approach calls for the revision of how we understand the role of context in communication in general and in intercultural communication in particular. This revision is needed because context does not exactly affect meaning production and comprehension in the way it does in intracultural communication. There are several reasons for this. One of them is that actual situational context cannot play the role of catalyst in intercultural communication the way it does in intracultural communication because the participants' different socio-cultural background ties them to culturally different L1 communities where both prior context and actual situational context function in a variety of ways. Besides, context-sensitiveness may also work differently because of the increasing number of "interpretation sensitive terms". Cappelen argued that:

[N]atural languages contain what I'll call *interpretation sensitive terms*: terms the correct interpretation of which varies across interpreters (or, more generally, contexts of interpretation). An interpretation sensitive sentence can have one content relative to one interpreter and another content relative to another interpreter.

2008: 25

When Cappelen talks about "interpretation sensitive terms" he does not think about nonnative speakers of a natural language. He refers to native speakers of a natural language. However, he is right that this notion is important in natural languages no matter whether the given language is used by a native speaker or a nonnative speaker. What these *interpretation sensitive terms* are, and how they function for nonnative speaker language users is an important matter in intercultural interaction as we will see in the examples below. The content of an utterance should be understood relative to a speaker and a hearer. The same utterance can express several distinct propositions depending on who the hearer/s is/are. The question is what makes those "terms" interpretation sensitive in intercultural interactions and how the nature of interpretation sensitive terms may depend on the culturally diverse background of interlocutors.

The following excerpt is an interaction between an African French and a Korean speaker. The common context is that they both live in Albany, NY but

have different cultural background. The interlocutors appear to jump from one topic to another, seemingly changing their intention and interrupting the flow of communication. However, a closer look shows that they think along topic-comment lines, and co-construct a coherent narrative in which emergent intention and common ground plays an important role. The topic-comment lines are as follows: living in Albany—likes/dislikes—likes: quiet, nice neighbours—dislikes: offices and forms. Their prior context gives different understanding to terms such as school, driver station (?), manager, etc. The actual situational context does not help them much to specify the meanings of those key expressions (interpretation sensitive terms) so they need to negotiate their meanings in the course of interaction.

- (8) K: I like living in Albany. Because the Albany is the ... especially I [word] almost two months ... it's quiet ... nice people ... neighbor ...
- AF: Yeah you have nice neighbors.
- K: Yeah, yeah.
- AF: The manager in the apartment is good?
- K: Yeah good.
- AF: ah ... so you have good neighbors ... it's quiet ... good ... so everybody has difficulties where they live so since you came from Korea what kind of difficulties you ... what are the problems that you have to live in Albany?
- K: Ah I came ... when I came here ... the first time about ... I applied the driver's license and you go to there
- AF: Yeah.
- K: DMV ... yeah yeah ... driver station
- AF: Yeah.
- K: And then they require so many documents
- AF: I see.
- K: So I had to go another office.
- AF: To apply to school.
- K: Yeah social number or ... officer ... anybody ... anyway I had to go there and then ... receive the document I gave them ... so long time I ... take a long time.

Context-sensitivity, which in the socio-cognitive paradigm means *actual situational context-sensitivity* works differently in intercultural encounters and intracultural encounters. There are universal contextual factors that affect language processing similarly no matter what language is actually used. These factors are

connected with general knowledge of the world such as weather, landscape, human relations, etc. When I say “have a good one”, it is not necessary to name whether I mean day, night, afternoon, morning, the actual situational context does that. Or in Russian when we say *Саша и Света поженились* (Shasa and Sveta got married), we do not have to refer to the fact that they got married to each other (examples from Kecskes, 2013a).

However, most actual contextual factors are language and culture-specific. Each language has interpretation sensitive lexical items, expressions, utterances where a part or whole of the knowledge that is necessary for processing is taken for granted in the given culture. No wording is needed because actual situational context does the rest. For instance, when in Russian we say “Как дела?” (How are things?), speakers know what the word “дела” (things) refer to. Basically the closest equivalent of this expression in English is “how are you doing?” This is where the major problem of intercultural communication with context occurs. *Whose context are we talking about in an intercultural communicative encounter?* The prior context of the L1 or the prior context of the L2 or the actual situational co-constructed context or all three? If we go back to the definition of intercultural communication then our answer should be “all the three”. However, we should know that the lower the proficiency of speakers is in the target language the more they will be affected by the prior context of the L1 and ignore or pay little attention to the actual situational context. So context-sensitivity in these cases cannot work the way it does in *intracultural communication where salience and common ground are governed by the (relatively) same culture*. However, this does not mean that there is much more misunderstanding in intercultural communication than in intracultural encounters. Interlocutors negotiate meaning and with relying more on semantics than context they work out their differences as in the example below in which a Japanese student and an American student are talking through Skype (Data collected by Emiko Kamiya).

- (9) A: .. You know (.) I used to play tennis myself
 J: Oh really
 A: Yeah I (..) I just I used to play () the first serve? ((gesture))
 J: [Mm hm?
 A: [You know? then (.) you know? () a couple of () [()
 J: [Ahhhhhh
 A: I never () but played a little bit (here and there?)
 J: Ahahaha
 J: [I
 A: [Hahaha
 J: I can just play (0.3) SOFT tennis?

- A: Sof (..) now soft tennis (.) you play with a racket and a tennis ball though right?
- J: Ah (1.2) white ball↑
(1.4)
- A: White ball↓
- J: Yeah (.) gom? (.) gom ball?
(1.4)
- A: gom ball
- J: a (.) I don't know
- A: HAHHAHA
- J: ((laugh))
- A: Are you using a (gumball?)? to play tennis? hehehe
- J: Mmm (..) Yyeah (.) maybe hahaha
- A: I use my () hehe=
- J: =ffff

The Japanese student is explaining to the American that she also played some game similar to tennis. However, she does not know the right word in English for softball so she uses the ad hoc constructed phrase “soft tennis” and tries to explain to the American what she really means by telling about the ball they used. However “gom ball” (instead of “rubber ball”) does not get her through because of the two things: 1) wrong pronunciation, and 2) wrong choice of word (“gom” instead of “rubber”). She uses “gom” (gum) because she has prior experience with that word rather than with “rubber”. Actual situational context does not help the interlocutors much in this situation. What they rely on is their prior context, prior experience. However, there is discrepancy between those experiences. But their differences are worked out after all in the actual situational context but not with the help of actual situational context.

5 Conclusion

The paper has promoted the idea that the relationship between intracultural communication and intercultural communication can be explained by a continuum whose two ends represent the two “types” of interaction that never occur in a pure form. Movement on the continuum and differences between the two phenomena are affected by different factors.

As a main difference it was mentioned that there is a shift from the communal/societal to the individual because conventions, common beliefs, norms, shared knowledge and the like that constitute a core common ground in Li

are quite limited in intercultural interaction so the participants should co-construct them. The socio-cognitive approach emphasizes that this shift does not mean that the individual is more important than the societal. What it means is that both are important but the actual situational frame is expected to be co-constructed by individuals who participate in the process because this language use frame and context is not given the way as it is in intracultural communication where prior experience of members of a speech community results in relatively similar interpretation of situational frames. The process of co-construction of common ground, shaping intersubjectivity and developing intercultures that all characterize intercultural communication should be described by using a “success approach” that focuses on how interlocutors manage to get their messages through.

The socio-cognitive approach as described here and other papers (see Kecskes, 2010, 2013a) looks like the opposite of the socio-cultural view that is based on ^{break correct?} Vygotsky's ideas (1978) promoted by several scholars (e.g. Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; van Compernelle, 2014). Socio-cultural theories require a shift from ‘the individual human mind’ as the single unit of analysis in understanding human thought to the recognition of the socially and culturally constituted practices through which human thinking and behavior develop (Scribner, 1997). Informed by such a theoretical perspective, language learning in students is viewed as a process of changing participation in the socio-cultural activities of students' communities, where identity development is conceptualized as socially, culturally and historically constructed (Rogoff, 2003).

There are two problems with the socio-cultural view from the perspective of the socio-cognitive approach. First, the socio-cultural view puts emphasis on the actual situational experience of the students but does not mention how important their prior experience is. Second, the socio-cultural view has led to a plurilingual view of language proficiency that deemphasizes languages as separable and discrete entities, and instead focuses attention on the individual's ability to move between and across languages in contextually appropriate ways.³

Unlike the socio-cultural approach, the socio-cognitive approach emphasizes that both the actual situational experience (and context) and prior experience (and context) are equally important in meaning construction and com-

3 It would also be a mistake to deemphasize languages as separate and discrete entities. Vygotsky (1978) never promoted any idea like that. His followers did. Vygotsky said that when we enter school language becomes the main regulator of thinking. So the weak version of the Whorfian principle is at place. It says that linguistic categories and usage influence thought and certain kinds of non-linguistic behavior.

prehension but in a varying degree. This helps us to make better sense of the differences between intracultural and intercultural communication.

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