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East-West intercultural encounters: A Central European perspective

The guiding idea behind this volume – which has been in preparation for some time – has been to bridge an existing gap in research on communication between East Asia and Central Europe. We originally intended to concentrate on two areas: values viewed in terms of culture, language and discourse, as well as practices defined as ‘doing’ language across genres and cultures. Such was the outline of the issues proposed almost three years ago by Professor Anna Duszak, who passed away in 2015.

Several unexpected events have accompanied, or rather slowed the process of compiling this volume; in consequence, both its publication date and its editorial staff underwent change. The original idea, however, has not been altered. During the editing process we have attempted to preserve the underlying concept of the collection: the intercultural encounter, viewed both as abstract contact between heterogeneous cultures and civilizations and within actual challenges faced by virtually any act of departure from the well-known reality of one’s own culture, perceived as homogeneous.

Encounter is probably the most unbiased term one can apply to acts of communication at the edges of cultures. With the implementation of this term, it should be possible to cover both the conscious and active communication acts, requiring advanced skills in language and culture, as well as almost unintentional instances of abandoning one’s native linguistic and cultural competence in the act of interpreting heterogeneous messages and reality. There is no doubt that the ability to face and manage both types of activities is among those features peculiar to intelligent beings. Research into intercultural communication phenomena, also covered at their most basic level by the term *encounter*, may enable one to better understand one’s own cultural reality. In the set of

papers we provide within the volume, this point of view may be regarded as universally present.

The idea of cross-cultural encounter has been selected as a tentative proposition, with an intention to solve – or at least avoid – multiple and complex terminological dilemmas. At the same time, this notion is connected in an inherent and inevitable manner to numerous concepts and approaches undertaken in the area of applied linguistics and cross-cultural studies, which, for the sake of brevity, shall only be alluded to in the following several paragraphs, without detailed reference to their sources and authors.

Cross-cultural studies cover a varied range of issues related to linguistic studies, in their constant efforts towards achieving a scientific understanding – as defined in optimistic late-20th-century terms – of how people communicate. In the simplest terms, it may be proposed that difficulties in researching and systematizing actual instances of communication, also in terms of homogeneous code(s) and environment(s), originate from the inherent clash between abstract ideas and their concrete encodings, going far beyond the classic dichotomy of *langue* vs. *parole*. In other words, what may be viewed as the post-Babel status quo for purposes of comparison between codes and environments perceived as heterogeneous is also inevitably demonstrated in acts of communication taking place in allegedly homogeneous circumstances. This requires virtually any act of interaction to be viewed as understanding via translation. The scientific purpose of cross-cultural studies is hence, in the first place, to delineate clear-cut categories designed for further analysis. They strive to fulfil this task by defining the range of phenomena related to actual human communication. Accordingly, their purpose is to provide and verify adequate tools of description in action, when approaching actual cross-cultural phenomena.

The formal implementation of logical mapping onto the human communication process can probably be traced back to ancient Greek philosophers, who revealed interest in the rhetorical aspects of communication. In their methodological propositions, this perspective was not intended for use in relation to the languages of barbarians, the later not being perceived as potential communication partners. The echoes of thus-implied homogeneous (one language = one culture) context of reference are present in the medieval quest of post-classic language universals and in the modern dichotomy of *signum* vs. *designatum* (symbol vs. referent). The act of expanding the classical dyad of sign and meaning with the notion of reference, embodied in the semiotic triangle of

symbol, referent and reference, may hence be recognized as a significant step towards an advanced theory and pragmatics of communication, one no longer biased due to claims of its alleged universality.

Another sign of progress towards the theory of non-universality was the emergence of sociolinguistics, with its identification of borders existing within the range of competences in supposedly one homogeneous code. Where acquiring competence in a universal code is not possible, actual performance must differ, as well. However, should peculiar aspects of linguistic competence among communication participants be described as displaying significant differences, their actual conversational performance must be based on certain common grounds. The revisited homogeneity of code competence resulting from this statement sheds new light on aspects of internal translation as essential factors which underlie any act of communication.

Where no universal rules exist, systematic properties of communication phenomena are also present, though they are not always visible or consciously used by the participants of a communication exchange. Effective social activities require more than consecutive encoding and decoding of messages, which are accordingly based on predictable patterns of behavior and conversational routines. The fact that it may not always be useful to view them in terms of pure logic and conversational implicatures was alluded to considerably earlier in the notion of phatic communion, which actually preceded the delineation of conversational implicatures. More advanced theories may be related to the emic and etic approach to the phenomena in question, present also in the contemporary studies on artificial intelligence, relying on fuzzy sets and on holistic interpretation of extralinguistic objects as well as their actual features.

Furthermore, the lack of universal rules and the application of fuzzy sets should not be excuses for the practice of describing actual communication events in terms of indefinite sets of exceptions. Fuzzy sets are by no means random. Rules are more important than exceptions. There are no rules without exceptions, though at the same time there are no exceptions without rules. From the pragmatics-related point of view, the conventional character of grammatical rules has to be juxtaposed with the goal-oriented decisions of communication participants. A logical and systematic approach is still useful when researching phenomena of language usage, although the ranges of their applications differ. It is most often an issue of adequate qualifiers and trustworthy evidence to distinguish between the phenomena related to locution, illocution and perlocution,

the last being related to actual changes in the parameters of the external world, achieved only partly through the internally-controlled communication activity undertaken by the speaker. A substantial effort is required in the process of devising effective tools that would enable linking random exceptions to general rules, defined precisely with the use of elaborate metalanguages.

Differences may emerge on the level of codes and the schemes of their usage as well as on the level of speech genres. The latter, consequently, may be altered or switched according to an actual social and individual assignment of a dynamic situation of conversational exchange. Also, on the level of particular genres of speech application, the initiation and execution procedures – as well as their perlocutionary results – may (and do) differ. The labels traditionally and intuitively used for the purposes of classification of speech genres may thus prove deceptive. To put it in the original structural terms, cultural pleremes do not consist in an algebraic manner of respective cenemes. The recognition of this fact is valid in the area of cross-cultural competence as well as in the study and actual application of allegedly homogeneous acts of communication exchange.

Numerous attempts at the formulation of semantic metalanguages seem to prove that a non-biased interpretation of actual cross-cultural events is still one of the most important goals in pragmatic studies. At its present level of development, however, the role of cross-cultural pragmatics in envisioning actual issues related to acts of communication across cultural borders is no less important than constant effort towards defining actual communication issues. As Professor Duszak used to put it, cross-cultural communication, constituting a “field of increased risk” (discussed also in Jabłoński, this volume) of miscommunication, may be considered extremely demanding.

The idea of a cross-cultural encounter may be viewed in generic and tangible metalinguistic terms and parameters of frames, nodes, networks and relations, as well as an outcome of individual competence and expectations. This dichotomy may not be overcome easily. There are linguistic tools and approximations that can serve to neutralize at least selected incompatibilities and miscommunication risks in this sensitive area of extra-linguistic reality. As such, the phenomenon of encounter is inevitably present in the contemporary communication activity of the superficially-globalized world, in which the process of shrinking geographical distance is still faster than the process of fostering mutual understanding.

The term *encounter* alludes in an obvious manner to the idea of an unexpected and new challenge, traditionally present in the idea of cross-cultural studies. As modern descriptions of the idea of cross-cultural studies state, one must abandon the area of one's own culture in order to be able to study another. Such an attitude has long been scarce in multiple narrations on different languages and cultures. It is a fairly new product of recent attempts at a neutral approach to the idea of a cultural stranger. Its orientation is descriptive, not normative. This constitutes another reason to distinguish this point of view, so defined, from the traditionally unilateral accounts on distant and inexplicable cultures, viewed as unpredictable and barbarian. The long tradition of cross-cultural contacts stipulates that the theory and practice of the lay approach to the so-defined cross-cultural experiences may be constructive, although more often it tends to be destructive and discriminatory. In a consistent and hopeful manner, the quest for unity and universality may be linked to universal human properties. Still, also in the history of the 20th-century approaches to different cultures, the traces of orientalism, xenophobia and the colonial/post-colonial attitude towards cultural environments, viewed by their very definition as primitive and inferior, are by no means rare. The reasons for a xenophobic approach to cross-cultural facts have always been present in the background of multi-cultural relations. Having taken for granted what linguistics (and the cross-cultural studies emerging from it) owes the ancient Greeks, it is necessary to discard the notion of 'uncouth barbarians' from the theoretical range of an up-to-date approach.

Last but not least, it is no coincidence that this volume, edited and published in Warsaw, Poland, Central Europe – due to purely political reasons erroneously viewed as Eastern Europe for the larger part of 20th century – is devoted to encounters between East Asia and Central Europe. Although it would probably not be justified to generalize that Central Europe has experienced more drastic political, historic and economic changes than the proverbial "rest of the world", the Central European point of view is by no means popular in the contemporary discourse on cross-cultural communication. In addition, common generalizations related to the notions of *us* vs. *them*, coined in the English and American terms, surprisingly often tend to miss the point when it comes to East Asian culture compared to the seemingly heterogeneous cultural events and customs of the so-called Western part of the world. Just as the world is not bipolar, nor tripolar, it is not reasonable to view it in terms of universal and 'obvious' values. The nature of relations is multi-layered, which makes it possible to search for comparisons and analogies on further levels of sophistication.

Multiple points of view do not make the analyses and generalizations easier, though they may serve to achieve conclusions of a better quality. A set of images generated by this approach to cross-cultural facts, partial by definition, though at the same time placed in carefully designed frames, open to further discussion and potential amendments, is what we would like to offer to the reader of the volume.

Although it goes beyond the scope of the objectives for this small volume, it may be good to mention that cultural labels are deeply rooted in the practice of intuitional classification, performed probably by all intelligent beings. As such, they rely on subsequent mapping of objects onto categories, the latter not necessarily revealing linguistic properties in an immediate and easily accessible manner. Also the geographically-supported concept of Asia, and the politically-justified notions of China and Japan, referring to the region and countries represented throughout the papers included in this volume, are no more than labels. We are not going to analyze in detail, for example, the languages and cultures of China or the linguistic and cultural entities classified in more thorough approaches as Japonic. Nor are we going to provide detailed documentation to undermine the popular view asserting the relations of mother vs. child between the geographical and political units of higher and lower order.

Modern synchronic studies may be based on the theories and artifacts already affected by complex diachronic changes, impossible to be rendered with contemporary categorization techniques. It should be clear, however, for a careful reader of this volume, that the very act of implementation of labels such as Asia, China or Japan is another simplification, which may be objected to by those whose existence is thereby denied or diminished. Cross-cultural studies, similarly as other acts of classification, inevitably rely on simplifications. Whenever simplifications cannot be avoided, they should at least be clear. This is what probably happens due to successful and stimulating acts of encounter, whether located in homogeneous or heterogeneous cultural settings. We agree with the assumption made elsewhere that things should be as simple as possible, though never simpler than that.

The volume consists of seven papers, each focusing on a selected aspect of East-Asian and Central-European – or more generally Western – encounters, either in more general terms of contact between heterogeneous cultural and linguistic codes or in specific communicative situations. Six of the seven papers were authored by researchers with predominantly Central European – and

more specifically Polish – background. The issues discussed by the authors embark on the problems undertaken by Discourse Analysis, and Translation Studies. Even if these topics pertain to encounters broader than those on the lines between Poland and East-Asia, it can be argued that the interpretations of these encounters are influenced by the authors' Central European perspective stemming from their local experiences. The volume has been divided into three sections, each approaching the topic of encounter from a different perspective.

The first part of the volume, entitled **Frameworks**, aims at laying theoretical foundations for the subsequent analyses of contact between languages and cultures tackled in the remaining papers of this collection. It consists of two papers by Leszek Korporowicz and Arkadiusz Jabłoński; both articles look at the challenges of intercultural and multi-modal communication, whose growing prevalence only seemingly closes the gap between the East and the West.

Leszek Korporowicz raises the idea of extended cultures in search of a discursive theory of hybrid space. The concept of intercultural encounter is viewed in terms of different ontological status of spaces in which communication occurs. The author analyses macro-structural factors of creating the hybrid space, including such issues as mobility of cultures, deterritorialisation of space and multiplication of space. The review of subsequent convergences and interactions, as well as metamorphoses of space, leads to a visualisation of a hybrid space, in which interaction is viewed as revitalization of cultural values. Intercultural relations are perceived as a process of mutual development and learning. Hybrid spaces created by such relations, with their potential and challenges, foster the necessity of adaptation, revaluation and re-composition of the old pattern of thinking and acting. Dynamically changing relationships between the regions of the world, as the author points out in the conclusion, require the creation of new anthropology with a major component of the studies on intercultural discourse, for the description of a new reality emerging as a consequence of the changes, making it possible to interact, exchange values and mutually learn in the new hybrid space of coexistence.

The paper by **Arkadiusz Jabłoński** embodies an attempt to unite several concepts related to the patterns of intercultural encounter, defined in terms of courtesy, adequacy and procedure, as viewed within the frameworks of intercultural translatability/interpretability and intercultural honorifics. The author analyses the notions of translatability/interpretability and presents numerous dilemmas related to the up-to-date concepts of metalanguages applied in the

analysis of actual intercultural communication events. As the author asserts, it may be stimulating to think of the process of explaining intercultural meanings in terms of the effectiveness of the metalanguages. The examples presented throughout the paper focus on Japanese-Polish and Polish-Japanese communication instances and sequences, but the general framework is intended for use in any communication environment. The author also presents his own set of postulates and a proposal that metalanguage be used to interpret interaction events viewed as typical of the Polish-Japanese communication environment.

The focus of the second part of the volume, entitled **Angles**, pertains to analyses of concrete instances of culturally-determined concepts. Such concepts are very difficult to render in another language, which is accompanied by its own pattern of social behaviors and which shapes – at least to a certain extent – its users' perceptions of objective reality. The two papers in this section by Paweł Kornacki and by Yiqing Liao and Rong Xiao approach this issue from the cultural/ethnopragmatic and psycholinguistic/cognitive perspectives, respectively.

Paweł Kornacki's paper can be classified as belonging to the field of ethnopragmatics, with its analysis of the Chinese notion of *rènao*, related to 'having a good time'. By means of an original and stimulating enquiry, based on the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), the concept of *rènao* is presented as a cultural keyword. Cultural keywords have tended to be overestimated in the relatively short history of this idea, also to serve as complete descriptions of cultural setting – that is, to fulfil a function that probably no wordlist is capable of achieving. Still, comparing simple dictionary definitions and complex usage of cultural concepts requires advanced methodology, bringing about multi-layered explanations on phenomena deeply rooted in a cultural setting – and this is precisely what has been attempted in this paper. Starting with several definitions of the concept quoted from Chinese sources, the author proceeds to examine two actual Chinese scenes with the use of the concept, supplemented by a comprehensive analysis of original Chinese expressions utilizing the concept and necessary comments. The projected reader's successful and stimulating encounter with the concept of *rènao* is facilitated by an expert explanation of its multi-layered contexts, including also immediate physical interaction of the referents involved, as can be concluded at least from the comments on the practices of drinking and eating, such as communal meals. The analysis is concluded by a six-factor NSM definition of the *rènao* concept, which refers in a clear-cut manner both to the physical requirements for its implementation, and to the

broader notion of the mood generated by the 'rènao atmosphere', the feeling of 'togetherness' and a certain loosening of social behavioural norms.

In their paper on spatio-temporal association in Mandarin and English, **Yiqing Liao and Rong Xiao** provide a critical review of research by Lera Boroditsky and her colleagues, which focuses on fairly technical details of spacio-temporal association and mental conceptualization of space and time in both languages. The idea of cross-cultural encounter is present already in the idea of linguistic determinism in its initial version attributed traditionally to Sapir and Whorf. However, more important than asking whether language shapes thought or vice versa is the fact that mental conceptualizations differ to the extent that it may not be possible to render them, even in a series of approximations. In the paper, the first (2001), the second (2010), the third (2011) and the fourth (2014) attempts at generalizing on the perception of time and space in Mandarin and English by Boroditsky and her team are carefully reviewed. It is worth noting that the methodology they adopted is a strict scientific tool, enabling the researchers to analyse tangible physical parameters of perception, such as participants' response time or binary values assigned to their decisions (such as vertical or horizontal concept of time). Accordingly, the issue of inevitable bias related to the fact that at least in some aspects the applied tests might be English-oriented seems to require further insight. The final conclusion points to continuing methodological improvements in examining the temporal-spatial association in the reviewed studies. At the same time, the authors point to several methodological weaknesses of the present research in this area and highlight the need for further exemplification of the proposition that language has an immediate effect on temporal perception.

The three papers comprising the third and last part of the volume – by Katarzyna Sonnenberg, Maciej Stanaszek and Elżbieta Gajek – analyse instances of actual **Encounters** between the West and East. These encounters occur both in the more prominent realm of literary translations as well as in a more particular context of communication between students participating in a project whose aim is to raise their intercultural awareness. Such contacts inevitably give rise to problems in conveying intended meanings, but at the same time create opportunities for learning about another culture, reflection on one's own culture, and the mutual infiltration of cultural elements.

The paper by **Katarzyna Sonnenberg** presents an example of a distant but interesting encounter of Japanese novelists with foreign works of fiction in

the Meiji period (1868-1912). The reader is offered a glimpse of the process of modernization that Japan underwent in the late 19th century along with changes in Japanese literature. The author focuses mainly on the changes occurring in the language and the techniques of Japanese novels from the viewpoint of the dynamics between the written and the spoken styles. Sonnenberg explores whether it is possible to trace in the analyzed texts a “sense of discontinuity” or a “sense of dislocation” resulting from attempts to grasp the meaning of modernity and respond to its demands. The novelists of the Meiji era were under pressure to develop a new style of literary expression, which included both attempts to render properly foreign fiction translated to Japanese, and to overcome the limitations of the old literary style, viewed as unsuitable for the new literary challenges. The contemporary reader may indeed be impressed by the swiftness and the diversity of the changes. As such, the picture of the already-complete process of invention of the new Japanese literary style of expression may reveal actuality of social and ideological tensions comparable with the contemporary processes of cultural encounter which are still in progress.

The paper by **Maciej Stanaszek** is devoted to the subject of numerous existing translations into several languages of books by one author, the 2012 Nobel Prize Winner Mo Yan. Stanaszek focuses on the translations of titles, considered the most representative fragments of texts from the point of view of their future reader. In his review, the author meticulously outlines his methodology and defines in a very precise manner the corpus of titles to be examined and compared further. Even though Stanaszek remains aware that analysis of the text titles cannot answer questions regarding the nature of the translation process, the reader is presented with valuable information regarding intercultural dilemmas faced by translators of literature. The list of projected motivations governing translators’ choices, while disputable, may be interesting to a reader who may not have had insight into intricacies of the intercultural translation process and its multi-layered structure. Title-based contact with a piece of literature does not have to be a superficial encounter with foreign – and one’s own – culture.

In her paper on foreign language education with the implementation of Internet-based communication in Polish-Chinese tandems, **Elżbieta Gajek** raises the issues of distant (online) interactions within the process of language learning. While only limited conclusions can be drawn from the data collected during a 10-week project and based solely on the content of students’ reports and evaluation, the analyses of the compiled corpora make it possible to generalize

on more general issues, such as the broader social context of interaction, tandem work between participants and new information gained in the encounter with members of a different culture. The author observes that the Polish students had a chance to revise their opinions about China, viewed thus far mainly as a supplier of popular goods. They also had an opportunity to rethink stereotypes about the Chinese and Chinese culture which they might have had encountered and acquired earlier. Although it would certainly be too much to generalize that the use of English – the *lingua franca* in contemporary intercultural contacts – makes it easy to overcome any difficulties in communication and any cultural differences, the study demonstrates that satisfactory communication does not have to involve immediate contact between interlocutors. The project also contributes to the study of discourse phenomena in the broadly defined European-Asian perspective and the hybrid space introduced and defined in the first chapter of this book.

The seven papers allude to the main idea of cross-cultural encounter in various ways, though in a fairly consistent manner. As editors, we hope that this collection of texts makes a modest contribution by providing a snapshot of the status quo of research in communication between East Asia and Central Europe. We would also like to pay tribute to Professor Anna Duszak, who actively attended to the earliest stage of compilation of this volume, but could not see its completion.