Beyond misunderstanding

Introduction

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This volume challenges two tacit presumptions in the field of intercultural communication research. Firstly, misunderstandings can frequently be found in intercultural communication, although, one could not claim that intercultural communication is constituted by misunderstandings alone. The main purpose of the contributions to this volume is to reconstruct intercultural *understanding* linguistically. Secondly, intercultural communication is not solely constituted by the fact that individuals from different cultural groups interact. Each contribution of this volume analyses to what extent instances of discourse are *institutionally* and/or *interculturally* determined.

This volume shows how new perspectives on linguistic analyses of intercultural communication go beyond the analysis of misunderstanding. In fact, the volume documents a shift in the research focus towards the question as to what extent different linguistic means contribute to intercultural understanding.

Edward T. Hall (1959, 1981) is considered to be the first scholar, who used the notion of 'intercultural communication' in order to denote the specific communication constellation that occurs when people from different cultural backgrounds meet. His statement 'culture is communication' inspired many scholars from anthropology, ethnography, cultural psychology and communication studies to attempt to offer causal explanations of communicative failure and success in intercultural contact. In actual fact, these analyses focus on psychological, cultural and communicative differences across cultures (cf. Prosser 1978; Asante 1980; Hofstede 1980; Bochner 1982; Carbaugh 1990).

In the eighties of the last century, John Gumperz and colleagues concentrated the research more intensively on the intercultural encounter itself and analysed intercultural misunderstandings in 'gate keeping situations'. Their

work on contextualisation has been a bench-mark for the discourse analytical approach to intercultural discourse (cf. Thomas 1983; Knapp et al. 1987; Moerman 1988; Scollon & Scollon 1994; Müller 1999). These discourse analyses raised an animated discussion about the static or dynamic relationship between communication and culture and "how much culture can be found in intercultural discourse" (cf. Rehbein 1985; Blommaert 1991; Koole & ten Thije 1994; Ehlich 1996).

Srikant Sarangi's article (1994) "Intercultural or not. Beyond the celebration of cultural differences in miscommunication analysis" exemplifies the beginning of the fore-mentioned shift in focus in intercultural communication research. Gradually, scholars incorporate more linguistic notions in their intercultural analyses and attempt to reconstruct how mutual understanding is being achieved in discourse instead of explaining misunderstanding based on different cultural systems (cf. Clyne 1995; Apfelbaum & Müller 1998; Tzanne 1999; Kotthoff 2002; ten Thije 2002, 2003a, b; Kameyama 2004).

This book documents and summarises this discussion beyond the analyses of misunderstandings in intercultural discourse. The chapters reflect on the question as to whether linguistic involvement in intercultural research has resulted in the extension and enhancement of new linguistic categories and methods. These reflections involve different theoretical frameworks (e.g. functional grammar (Lüdi), systemic functional linguistics (Fontaine), functional pragmatics (Hartog, Rehbein, ten Thije), rhetorical conversational analysis (Liebscher), ethno-methodological conversational analysis (Bubel, Day, Rost Roth), an approach from linguistic anthropology (Kotthoff) and a cultural approach (Shixu)).

Furthermore, interactive approaches to the analysis of intercultural communication are surveyed, by analysing both authentic and elicited data. As the contributions focus on the discourse of counselling or gate-keeping situations, international team cooperation, international business communication, workplace discourse, internet communication, and lamentation discourse, the volume shows that the analysis of intercultural communication is essentially organized in direct response to social needs and, therefore, contributes to the social justification of linguistics.

The volume comprises two parts. Part one discusses basic assumptions. In order to make the shift in linguistic reconstruction from misunderstanding to understanding in intercultural communication, the presumptions of mainstream linguistics – that every language has to be considered as a homogeneous entity – are discussed. Intercultural discourse is analysed as a substantive form of multilingualism and not as a deviation from monolingualism. Multilingual-

ism is accepted as the starting point for the linguistic analysis of intercultural communication. A related basic assumption concerns the issue as to how the relationship between language and culture can be fruitfully conceptualised for the analysis of intercultural communication. Culture is not considered as a static set of norms and values (materialized in artefacts) within or for a specific group or nation state, but as the social or group capacity to find solutions for recurrent societal needs and standard problems. Culture is interactively produced and reproduced in the perception, understanding and formation of reality (ten Thije 2002). Consequently, intercultural communication can be taken as the confrontation, overlap, or competition between, and sometimes as the extension or exclusion of, different pragmatic and cognitive systems. Since culture is interactively accomplished, intercultural communication has the potential to enrich both linguistic systems with new discursive structures or even contribute to the creation of new linguistic systems like discursive intercultures.

The contributions in part two give an account of interactive analyses of intercultural discourse. The question regarding the concurrence of institutional and intercultural discourse structures is discussed here in different institutional constellations. Their linguistic reconstruction enables intercultural discourse beyond misunderstanding.

Contributions

Georges Lüdi discusses the question as to whether the study of phenomena such as like loan words, interferences and code-switching that often constitute intercultural discourse are of peripheral interest for linguistics, or whether the results of research on these so called 'translinguistic markers' are of immediate relevance for linguistic theory. He states that these phenomena of plurilingualism should no longer be interpreted from a monolingual ideology, but be respected as a sign of a rich multilingualism. On the basis of study of the language varieties of Chiac in Acadia and Italoschwyz in Zurich, he reveals how code-switching in these cases can be analysed as a variety of its own. Consequently, he discusses the definition of 'language' and the boundaries between different 'languages'. He concludes that shaping linguistic differences has an important identity function and is often politically determined. He states that we need a language theory that gives special prominence to the ways the interactors exploit all the linguistic resources at their disposal.

Jochen Rehbein elaborates on the concept of cultural apparatus that was proposed by Redder and Rehbein (1987). The cultural apparatus is a repro-

ductive and creative aggregate with an historical dimension. This contribution offers a concrete model of the structure of the cultural apparatus and looks for new forms of intercultural communication. He states that intercultural communication is a cultural act performed in multilingual constellations. On the basis of his cultural apparatus theory, it is possible to differentiate between *one-sided* and *two-sided* intercultural communication, depending on whether the interactors change their action system in discourse. This theory enables the creation of a concept and analysis of intercultural discourse beyond misunderstanding.

Jan D. ten Thije discusses the special attraction of the notion of *perspective* in the field of intercultural research. Disciplines such as Psychology and Sociology have taken the lead in the analysis of perspective phenomena and linguists are trying to integrate these findings. In a review of various studies on *perspectivity* in intercultural discourse, ten Thije discusses the epistemological and interactional concepts of *perspectivity*, as identified by Graumann and Kallmeyer (2002: 2). In actual fact, studies on intercultural discourse integrate these concepts in order to comprehend the interculturality of such discourse. Subsequently, ten Thije proposes the *communicative apparatus of perspectivising*. This apparatus operates on the basis of the prerequisites for the verbalization of the propositional content of an utterance. By means of this apparatus, the propositional content is generalized and, subsequently, perspectivized in order to enable the hearer to make a comparison between the speaker's cultural standards and his own. This communicative apparatus is a discursive means that exemplifies intercultural discourse going beyond misunderstanding.

The second part gives account of interactive analyses of intercultural discourse. **Grit Liebscher** reveals how speakers construct intercultural discourse through the management of cultural perspectives. Speakers manage perspectives through rhetorical devices, which include the selection of words and the use of interactional devices (e.g. pauses and gestures). The examples discussed in this chapter provide evidence that interculturality is a matter of negotiation between participants in the interaction rather than a concept that can be defined *a priori*. The analysis reveals that, though there may not be a unified cultural belief or value system, speakers use lexical items to express cultural perspectives. She shows that interactants select strategically from among linguistic alternatives.

Jennifer Hartog reconstructs the concept of Rehbein's cultural apparatus (Rehbein, this volume) in genetic counselling discourse between two Turkish clients, a Turkish mediator and a German doctor. Her analysis confirms that discourse between persons of different cultures is not intercultural at all times.

With the concept of cultural apparatus she is able to reconstruct exactly where interculturality actually takes place. Moreover, the analysis disentangles the role of the institution and that of culture. She shows that although the mediator was a native speaker of Turkish, his speech actions were more steered by the goals of the institution than by the desire to help bridge the gap between cultures.

Martina Rost Roth analyses counselling interviews in intercultural and intracultural settings, with a special focus on findings relating to miscommunication and problems in understanding. Her analyses concentrate on central stages of counselling interviews: the presentation of problems and the formulation of requests on the one hand, and the processing of proposed solutions on the other. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the potential for problems in understanding, and asks the question as to whether this is inherent in intercultural communication in institutional settings.

As noted before, the contributions in this volume aspire to reflect upon what studies of intercultural communication may contribute to more general concerns within linguistics. In this regard, **Dennis Day** analyses expressions referring to collectives of people, in particular, expressions, which have the potential to refer to people as members of social groups generally, and ethnic or cultural groups specifically. By comparing a referential semantic with a conversational analysis, he reconstructs the interactive dimensions of ethnic group categorization. He concludes that taking into account how actors interact in their workplaces and the social activities in which they participate can successfully identify further studies into membership categorization devices.

Claudia Bubel analyses British-German business communication that yields indications of potential intercultural mismatches. Her corpus of telephone conversations shows, however, that these mismatches do not result in misunderstandings and disorder. She shows in detail how cultural knowledge is retrieved and adjusted cooperatively through the application of basic conversational mechanisms for the sake of institutional order. Consequently, intercultural misunderstandings do not surface in these sequences; instead a discursive interculture, as described by Koole and ten Thije (1994), is created.

Lise Fontaine explores inclusion and exclusion in the construction of a virtual community that is also considered to be a discursive interculture. The primary goal of her contribution is to describe how members of the Internet community position themselves with respect to group identity and cohesion, through an examination of the uses of inclusive and exclusive 'we'. Her taxonomy of 'we' shows the range available to speakers in negotiating their own self-reference with respect to others and their virtual community.

Helga Kotthoff inquires about the consequences resulting from the fact that in Georgia, regional lamentation styles and other cultural differences are given expression in the ritual mourning process. She takes a social constructionist perspective, which attempts to understand social life as a steady stream of interactive performances based on a describable complex of dramaturgical accomplishments. Comparisons between the expressions of grief in different cultures reveal both similarities and differences. She discusses how semiotic universals and culture specific practices together form emotive display conventions, which are interpreted as 'natural' expression. Despite the ideology of the natural expression of emotion, lamenters are able to adapt their style and their language to an intercultural audience if the situation demands it.

Shixu formulates a cultural approach that emphasises the importance of analysing culturally oppressive relations and practices in and through intercultural communication. In the practical analysis of empirical print media data, he highlights the discursive (i.e. textual and contextual) structures and strategies through which forms of cultural confrontation, domination and repression are produced. He shows that representations (of the cultural Other) can be a powerful tool to achieve particular intercultural purposes.

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