The reconstruction of intercultural discourse: Methodological considerations[☆]

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with a methodology for the study of intercultural communication. We argue that intercultural communication should be regarded and analyzed as ordinary communication. Intercultural communication is often analyzed as a type of communication in which meanings and communicative practices are not shared between the participants, thus leading to miscommunication. Still, intercultural communication, as any type of communication, is only possible when interactants construct a common ground of meanings and practices that are oriented to as shared, and which we have called 'intercultural discourse'. We therefore propose an analysis of intercultural communication which aims at the reconstruction of the 'common ground' and of the process of its construction. This process can, but need not be characterized by misunderstandings. In this paper, we illustrate this reconstruction method with an analysis of the construction of word meaning in Dutch-Surinamese work-meetings of educational specialists in the Netherlands. © 2001 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

In this paper we will be concerned with a methodology for the analysis of intercultural communication. Although our analysis of interactional data starts at the level of discourse, we recognize that calling a communication process 'intercultural'

necessarily contains a deductive or attributive element. An inductive analysis of discourse may produce insights in discourse phenomena, but induction can never be sufficient to characterize these phenomena as intercultural or as belonging to a specific culture.[1] This can only be done on the basis of biographical and ethnographic information on the communicating actors and the groups or communities of which they are members. Also in this paper, we will discuss communication data that we call intercultural, primarily on the basis of biographical and ethnographic information.

In analyzing discourse, however, the qualification of a communication process as intercultural, though justified from an ethnographic perspective, may lend an unwanted methodological direction to the analysis of this process. It may lead the analyst to disregard major characteristics of the discourse and to focus solely on cultural differences. Sarangi (1994: 409) discusses this as 'analytical stereotyping' and Scollon and Scollon (1995: 125) warn against overgeneralization when 'culture' is applied to the analysis of discourse. The discussion in this paper links up with this methodological discussion.

The methodological approach we will present here can be characterized as a reconstruction method (Koole and ten Thije, 1994a). The reconstruction of intercultural discourse phenomena neither restricts itself to a bottom-up movement from utterances to social structures, nor to a top-down movement from social structures to the interpretation of utterances. Reconstruction follows a hermeneutic interpretative strategy that is not unidirectional, but continuously moves from the sequentially ordered utterances to social structures and back (Ehlich, 1991; ten Thije, to appear).

We will present and exemplify a methodology for the analysis of intercultural communication which focuses not only on interactive failure but also on interactive success. It should be understood that with interactive success we mean that interlocutors have succeeded in establishing a mutual basis for their communication. This does not imply that interactive success is also social success. As we shall see, the mutual basis for communication may exhibit the dominance of one cultural group over another. We propose to describe the mutual basis for communication in intercultural communication in terms of a 'discursive interculture'.

The outline of this paper is the following. First, we discuss the methodological problem on which this paper focuses (Section 2). In Section 3, this argument is rephrased in a presentation of the concepts 'intercultural discourse' and 'discursive interculture'. In Section 4, we present and illustrate aspects of the reconstruction method in a single case analysis of the construction of word meaning in the course of nine months of team work in the Netherlands. This case was chosen because it shows an aspect of common ground construction in a multicultural setting that would not have received attention in an analysis which focuses on cultural differences. In Section 5, we discuss the methodological implications of both the theoretical arguments and the empirical analysis we present in this paper.

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[1] This observation on induction is, of course, more generally true. The characterization of discourse phenomena in terms of (macro-sociological) categories such as 'gender', 'culture', or 'institution' cannot rest solely on an inductive analysis of discourse.

2. The methodological problem of avoiding the collision perspective

The communication in the data we discuss below takes place between native and immigrant colleagues who work together as a team of native Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch in the Netherlands. Ethnographic and biographical data picture the members of these teams as having different cultural backgrounds and as belonging to the European-Dutch or Surinamese-Dutch groups within Dutch society. However, the boundaries that constitute these groups cannot simply be derived from the differences between life in for instance the Netherlands and Surinam, nor are these groups and their boundaries static. Being a member of the pluralist society that the Netherlands, like many other Western countries, have come to be, calls for defining and redefining groups and their boundaries; an important aim for the study of the communication between members of such native and immigrant groups is therefore to show how these definitions are constructed in communication.

Although it can rightly be argued that cultural differences are an important aspect of group differences, a straightforward projection of cultural differences on this communication would be highly problematic. Such a projection would imply that being in constant contact with other cultural groups has not had any influence on the actors involved. Indeed, many authors have stressed that cultural and ethnic groups are in important ways characterized by the contacts that exist between them and that, therefore, an understanding of these contacts requires dynamic concepts of culture and ethnicity (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982; Redder and Rehbein, 1987; Blommaert and Verschueren, 1991; Roberts and Sarangi, 1993; Clyne, 1994; Günthner, 1994; Rehbein, 1994; Neil, 1996).

Rather than working deductively from culture differences to communication, several authors have called for an inductive analysis of interaction in order to discover whether actors orient to group differences at all, and if so, in what terms these groups and their boundaries are defined. Blommaert (1991) for instance pleads against *a priori* invocations of cultural differences and calls for a situational approach to intercultural communication. Other authors have argued that intercultural contacts are not only characterized by the characteristics of each group but also by the power relations that exist between the groups. Thus, it is argued that many instances of intercultural communication must be regarded as communication between dominant and nondominant groups within one society (Singh et al., 1988; Hinnenkamp, 1989). In close relation to this argument, it is stressed that preexisting images that interactants have of each other, as for instance (racial) prejudice (and frequently also images resulting from intercultural communication training), must also be accounted for in the analysis of intercultural communication (Singh and Martohardjono, 1985; Van Dijk and Wodak, 1988; Hinnenkamp, 1991; Meeuwis, 1994). Finally, it has been observed that increasingly, intercultural communication takes place within societal institutions (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982) and that therefore, an analysis of this communication must take off from the characteristics of institutional communication (Rehbein, 1985; Murray and Sondhi, 1987; Koerfer, 1994; Rost-Roth, 1994; Ehlich, 1996).

The discussion in the present paper links up with the critique formulated by the authors mentioned above of the view of communication in pluralist societies as merely a collision of different cultural systems. Moreover, we consider this collision view to be improper in all instances of intercultural communication, including for instance international business communication. The analysis of the discursive common ground in intercultural communication that we present in Section 4 reveals meanings and practices that are constructed in the communication itself.

One aspect of these meanings and practices is that they are means for constructing group boundaries in face-to-face interaction (cf. Day, 1994). In this respect, we are indebted to the anthropological studies of Barth (1969, 1994), who has shown how ethnic groups vary and change the cultural means by which they constitute the persistence and continuity of their group boundaries.

3. The concept of 'intercultural discourse'

A major problem in the analysis of intercultural communication lies in relating concepts of culture to methods of analysis. Analysts often make use of concepts of culture and ethnicity in which learnability (the reproduction of elements of culture), but above all 'makeability' (the production of elements of culture) are central elements, while their analyses of misunderstandings presuppose concepts of culture and ethnicity which tie the actors to their mutual differences and leave them very little space for 'making' new and shared elements of culture (Koole and ten Thije, 1994a: 63–66).[2] In the methodological discussion we present here, we do not need yet another concept of culture in addition to the many concepts that have been proposed (cf. Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1963). We need to relate culture to communicative action and, therefore, we adopt an understanding of culture as present not only in cognition but also in human action (cf. Ortner, 1984).

This means that we have to design an analytical methodology that is sensitive both to cognitive aspects of the interactional process (participants' orientation to knowledge as shared or not shared) and to the character of the interactional process as an here-and-now accomplishment of the participants: no matter how much (cultural) knowledge or experience participants may share, it can only function as shared

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[2] For instance, when Gumperz (1982, 1992) bases his explanation of miscommunication on the non-English native language of one of the speakers, or on culturally based differences, this suggests that the miscommunication would also have occurred if the two speakers had not been members of one society. Gumperz shows that the context, signaled by the communicating actors as relevant for the interpretation of their utterances, is not the relationship between new indigenous groups, but lies outside the society in which the communication takes place. This does not imply that Gumperz' work neglects the social relationship between natives and non-natives within one society. However, the social relationship between natives and non-natives only enters the analysis to interpret the social outcomes of misunderstanding and not to explain the structure of misunderstandings themselves. Although we share Gumperz' concern with social failure such as discrimination and racism, Gumperz looks for social failure only in instances of interactional failure (misunderstandings), while we propose to analyze also instances of interactional success.

knowledge if it is interactionally established as such (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; Koole, 1997). Therefore, this methodology is one which looks at discourse as an ongoing process of interactional construction, and which incorporates cognitive concepts to capture participants' orientation to prior knowledge, and their construction of knowledge as shared. In the analysis presented in this paper we will use the notion of 'schema' to analyze (shared) word meaning (Section 4).

The word meanings that we analyze in this paper are produced as methods that relate, in a reflexive manner, the communicative actions to the situation of team work in which they are used. This means that our principal interest is not to find out the amount of 'Dutchness' or 'Surinameseness' that is present in the actions performed by individual actors and to see where this leads to misunderstandings. Our analysis is directed at the communicative practices which the teams construct or have constructed to handle the possible differences and contradictions between the cultural groups involved.

These communicative practices can be characterized both as 'intercultural discourse' and as 'discursive interculture'. 'Intercultural discourse' is the discourse in which the practices are constructed and enacted by participants in the interaction; the concept stresses the character of the interactional process as an here-and-now accomplishment of the participants. As 'discursive interculture', it is characterized by participants' orientation to the sharedness of these practices and stresses the cognitive aspects of the interactional process.

In general, an interculture is characterized by the properties of culture that recur in the major definitions of culture (cf. Koole and ten Thije, 1994a), namely (1) it is human-made and can be learned, (2) it is related to human groups, and (3) it can be attributed a locus with respect to a human activity (either as the activity itself, or as the knowledge presupposed by it, or as the artifacts resulting from this activity). The notion of 'interculture' has been used before in relation to the analysis of intercultural communication. Ekstrand et al. (1981) (cited in Sarangi, 1994) propose a concept of 'interculture' in order to be able: "[T]o refer to an intermediate culture which shares properties of both home culture and host culture, independent of whether those properties are shared between the cultures-in-contact" (1994: 423). We include in the concept also those discourse elements and structures that result from the culture contact, but which *cannot* be traced back to one of the cultures in contact. In this respect, interculture is concerned with the dynamics of culture contact *par excellence*.

4. The construction of word meaning: The 'intercultural approach'

The discourse fragments analyzed below are taken from a corpus of sixty-three hours of team discussions in educational advisory institutes in the Netherlands. Two teams consisted of Turkish, Moroccan, and Dutch members; another two teams consisted of members of Surinamese-Dutch (Afro-Americans, in Dutch called *Creool*) and European-Dutch origin. These teams had the task to advise teachers on the form and content of language education. We have recorded the regular (weekly,

monthly, etc.) meetings of the teams and conducted ethnographic interviews with the participants. In this paper, we have chosen to confine our discussion to examples from one of the Surinamese-Dutch teams (see Koole and ten Thije, 1994a,b for further examples).

Surinam is a former Dutch colony in South America. In the process of decolonization, the Surinamese acquired Dutch citizenship in 1954 before the country became independent in 1975. Thus, a substantial part of the people who were to become a target group of Dutch minority policy have been Dutch citizens for a long time. The four Surinamese-Dutch members of the two investigated advisory teams arrived in the Netherlands prior to 1975. They are among the estimated 100 to 150 Surinamese-Dutch educational professionals, non-teaching educational experts, in the Netherlands.[3] They are all first-generation immigrants whose plans to return to Surinam have been postponed or canceled, following the political developments after independence in 1975 and the military coup in 1980. To express the permanency of their stay, we will use in this paper the general terms of 'immigrant' and 'immigrant group(s)' when speaking of non-Dutch team members.

An ethnographic analysis of the advisory institutes showed that it is not a coincidence that teams that advise on education to immigrants should employ (immigrant) Surinamese-Dutch members. Surinamese-Dutch educational workers have often been the initiators of special education for immigrants since the early seventies and have thus become specialists on these matters. However, in contrast to the Turks and Moroccans in our corpus, they are not assigned specific tasks on the basis of their linguistic and cultural knowledge – something which would differentiate them institutionally from their native Dutch colleagues.

The Dutch-Surinamese team we will be looking at is concerned with setting up courses called 'Dutch in the workplace' for immigrant workers in various types of companies and organizations (the courses are comparable to the Industrial Language Training courses reported on in Roberts et al., 1992; for information on the Dutch language courses, see Snoeken and Verhallen, 1992). The team consists of four European-Dutch and two Surinamese-Dutch members. In contrast to the other three teams, who have worked together for several years, this team was formed just before it was recorded and its activities lasted no longer than the nine months we have documented. The courses are offered to companies that employ immigrant workers. For these courses, the team is developing a so-called 'intercultural approach'. To characterize expressions such as these we use the term 'institutional key word': words (or word groups) that have a complex, often institution-specific, meaning. In an analysis of a number of these key words, Koole and ten Thije (1994a) have shown that the complex meaning of the institutional key word can be characterized as a cognitive schema with different slots (see also Li and Koole, 1998).

In the following, we will discuss the origin and development of the institutional key word. With respect to key words, 'origin' means that a word is given a specific

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[3] The data have been collected in the period between 1989–1992. The figures on the number of immigrant experts in the Dutch advisory institutes concern that period of time.

institutional meaning, while 'development' refers to the elaboration (or: reformulation) of that meaning in the discussions of the key word. In these discussions, sometimes the content of slots of the cognitive schema is changed, at other times slots are added to the schema. Our analysis documents written texts and interaction fragments produced in the course of the nine months in which writers and speakers used different means of giving meaning to the key word.

The first mention of 'intercultural' is found in a team document of September 11, 1989 (Excerpt 1) which speaks of 'intercultural teacher pairs' who are to 'develop and implement the courses' (Schema 1).

Excerpt 1: Document 1; B110989
1   De voorwaarden voor deze cursusaanpak worden geschapen
    The conditions for this course approach are created
2   door de cursussen te ontwikkelen en geven in
    by developing and teaching the courses in
3   intercultureel samengestelde begeleiderskoppels
    interculturally composed teacher pairs
4   (bijvoorbeeld Nederlander/Creool, Nederlander/Hindostaan,
    (for instance Dutch/'Creole'; Dutch/Indian;
5   Nederlander/Turk).
    Dutch/Turkish).

Schema 1:

   intercultural
   ⌐ *actors*: intercultural teacher pairs
   ⌐ *actions*: developing and implementing the courses

One month later (October 10, 1989), team document 2 shows a rephrasing of this formulation, using the term 'intercultural approach' (Excerpt 2):

Excerpt 2: Document 2; B101089
1   In het project staat een interculturele werkwijze centraal.
    The intercultural approach is central to the project.
2   Zowel organisatorisch als inhoudelijk
    Both organizationally, and in matters of content
3   werken allochtonen en autochtonen samen.
    allochthonic and autochthonic [individuals] cooperate.

The document specifies the overall action of the intercultural approach as 'cooperative' and the respective actors as 'allochthonic' and 'autochthonic', the current terms in the Netherlands referring to immigrants and native Dutch. As compared to Document 1, this means an extension of the actor slot from 'allochthonic' and 'autochthonic' teachers to 'allochthonic' and 'autochthonic' individuals in general. It also turns 'developing' and 'teaching' into constitutive actions of the overall 'cooperation' (Schema 2).

Schema 2
    intercultural approach
    ├ *actors*: 'allochthonic' and 'autochthonic'
    │   └ teacher pairs
    └ *actions*: cooperation
                        └ developing and teaching the courses

The intercultural teacher pairs remain a constant feature of the key word 'intercultural approach'. From the very first document (Excerpt 1), discussed in the team, until the team's concluding meeting nine months later, the teacher pair is mentioned, thus allowing the key word to be used as referring to shared knowledge.

The team documents also supply a limited number of formulations of the goal of this intercultural aspect, which means that the schema structure contains three slots (Schema 3). The goal formulations are underlined.

Excerpt 3: Document 1; B110989
1   Voor de <u>ontwikkeling en geven van cursussen</u>
    For <u>developing and teaching courses</u> [in]
2   <u>NT2</u> is het noodzakelijk [   ]
    <u>Dutch as a second language</u>, it is necessary [   ]
3   [   ] voor <u>het leren van dit register</u> is aandacht [   ]
    [   ] in order <u>to master this register</u> attention [   ] is
4   noodzakelijk
    required

Excerpt 4: Document 13; B080190
1   Twee docenten geven les aan één groep cursisten,
    Two teachers teach one student group,
2   nl. één allochtone en één autochtone docent
    namely one allochthonic and one autochthonic teacher
3   <u>om taal- en cultuurproblemen van elkaar te kunnen onderscheiden.</u>
    in order <u>to be able to distinguish between linguistic and</u>
    <u>cultural problems</u>.

Schema 3
    intercultural approach
    ├ *actors*:   allochthonic and autochthonic
    │   [   ] teacher pairs
    ├ *actions*: cooperation
    │   developing and teaching the courses
    └ *goals*:   – the development and teaching of courses in Dutch as a second lan-
                          guage
                      – to master a particular register [of Dutch]
                      – to be able to distinguish between linguistic and cultural problems

Both the formulations of Document 1 (Excerpt 1) and those of Document 13 (Excerpt 4) are repeated (sometimes with slight variations) in various subsequent documents of the team.

The 'intercultural approach' appears to have a primarily educational goal: it is a means for developing courses in which a specific register of Dutch will be taught. In this view, the intercultural aspect of the approach concerns the cooperation of persons with different cultural backgrounds, while its goal is to achieve an educational end. Between September 11 (Document 1) and January 18 (Document 15), the meaning of the key word 'intercultural approach' seems to have developed from the practice of having paired teachers to a much broader notion of intercultural cooperation with a specific educational goal.

Still, this stress on the educational purpose is not shared by all team members. An examination of the use of the key word shows that it is only used in this educational sense by the four European-Dutch team members. They are the authors of the documents that we have discussed so far. Moreover, a chronology of the key word's use in the discourse of the team meetings shows that it takes seven months, from the introduction of the key word, for the two Surinamese-Dutch team members to start using it, and in doing so, to challenge the meaning established so far.

In their contributions, the Surinamese-Dutch team members are able to give meanings to the intercultural approach that were not present in the discussion of the key word so far (recall that only users of a key word can contribute to the construction of its meaning). This is especially apparent in the document prepared by Edwin (Surinamese-Dutch) for the team on March 26, 1990. He states (Excerpt 5):

Excerpt 5: Document 29; B260390:
1 Als je spreekt over interculturele samenwerking, wordt door
   When we speak of intercultural cooperation, it is
2 velen verondersteld dat zoiets al bestaat.
   supposed by many that such a thing already exists.
3 Maar het probleem is dat er zoiets nog niet bestaat.
   But the problem is that such a thing does not exist yet.
4 [ ] In feite gaat het er om dat datgene wat als resultaat eruit groeit,
   [ ] In fact, the point is that whatever results from it [the cooperation]
5 intercultureel genoemd zou kunnen worden.
   should be such that it could be called intercultural.
6 [Wij willen] niet anders dan een optimale conditie creëren waardoor
   [We want to] merely create optimal conditions for
7 deze verschillende culturen aan het woord kunnen komen,
   these different cultures to be able to contribute,
8 elkaar kunnen ontmoeten waardoor
   to be able to meet in order to
9 een nieuwe structuur een nieuwe samenwerking kan groeien
   achieve a new structure, a new cooperation
10 die intercultureel genoemd kan worden.
   that can be called intercultural.

The difference between Edwin's view and the view of his European-Dutch colleagues can be analyzed in terms of the underlying schema structure (Schema 3). The European-Dutch team members have used the actor slot as a criterion for interculturality: the approach is intercultural when the actions are performed by actors with different cultural backgrounds. Edwin, on the other hand, uses the goal slot of the schema as a criterion: the approach is intercultural when the resulting state of affairs is intercultural. The cooperation in teacher pairs that was labeled intercultural by the European-Dutch team members represents is, as far as Edwin is concerned, no more than the 'optimal conditions' (Excerpt 5) for interculturality.

Using his criterion, Edwin introduces a goal of the intercultural approach that goes beyond the educational goal formulated by his European-Dutch colleagues. In the meeting following the discussion of his Document 29 (Excerpt 5), he sketches part of the resulting state of affairs, stating that the intercultural approach (Excerpt 6):

Excerpt 6: BH/15.55
SE: Edwin (Surinamese-Dutch)
1 SE: diep ingrijpende consequenties heeft voor dat bedrijf
       has far-reaching consequences [ ] for that company[4]
2   Wil je intercultureel opstellen   [ ]
       If you want to take an intercultural position [ ]
3   dat betekent dat de top het beleid moet gaan uitmaken
       that means that the company board has to decide on a policy
4   dat mijn bedrijf intercultureel veranderd zal moeten worden
       that will require my company to change interculturally

This goal represents more than teaching a 'specific register of Dutch'; it is concerned with societal change and the emancipation of immigrants.

A third position with respect to the intercultural approach is taken by Carola, the other Surinamese-Dutch team member. While Edwin refers to the 'new structure' that must result from the intercultural approach, she stresses the problematic state of affairs for which the approach is supposed to be a solution. As she puts it in one of the meetings (Excerpt 7):

Excerpt 7: BF
SC: Carola (Surinamese-Dutch)
1 SC: op een gegeven ogenblik en dan moet je,
       at a certain point and then you have to,
2   je moet gewoon andere dingen (van huis uit hebben).
       you just need (to bring in) other things.
3   Dan moet je echt gaan vechten
       Then you really have to fight

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[4] I.e., the company where the course will be given.

4   En dan kijkt niemand meer naar mijn interculturele achtergrond
and then nobody looks at my intercultural background anymore,

5   maar het is gewoon prestatie en weet ik wat allemaal veel.
but it's just achievements and what have you.

And in a later meeting, in which she initiates a discussion of the dangers of an intercultural approach (Excerpts 8 and 9):

Excerpt 8: BG/12.18
SC: Carola (Surinamese-Dutch)
1 SC: naarmate je in hogere functie terecht zal komen,
as you climb the professional ladder,

2   dan valt hele interculturele denken en alles [   ]
then the attention for intercultural issues and all that [ ]

3   af, weg.
drops away, gone.

Excerpt 9: BG/12.21
SC: Carola (Surinamese-Dutch)
1 SC: Ik ben zelf ook zwart,
I am black myself as well,

2   maar ik weet dat een andere aanpak voor mij nodig
but I know that for me a different approach is required

3   dan tot nu toe.
than so far.

Carola sketches a current state of affairs in which professional achievements are valued more than cultural background. With this example, she alludes to the discussion of the negative effects of 'affirmative action'. She claims that especially with regard to higher positions, one is assessed on the basis of 'achievements' rather than with reference to to cultural background. She concludes (Excerpt 9) that if immigrants (like herself) are to reach these positions, an approach is needed that does not take the cultural background as its starting point (as does the 'intercultural approach'). Conversely, an intercultural approach will not stimulate the upward mobility of immigrant workers.

The preliminary conclusion of the team's activities after nine months shows how the different positions with respect to the intercultural approach have found their way into the meaning of the key word. Carola's warnings have not led her colleagues to leave the intercultural approach, but to incorporate it into the meaning of the key word. As one of the European-Dutch team members says in the meeting of May 29, 1990, which concludes the team's activities (Excerpt 10):

Excerpt 10: BL/11.07
NO: Otto (European-Dutch)
1 NO: De interculturele aanpak vanuit allochtonen geredeneerd
The intercultural approach as figured by the allochthonic

2   plaatst onderwijs in de hele [ ] maatschappelijke context
         places education in the whole [ ] societal context
3   van: het gaat ons niet alleen om een lesje,
         of: we're not interested in just a lesson,
4   maar het gaat ons om positieverbetering, doorstroming [ ].
         but we're interested in promotion, upward mobility [ ].
5   Als ik zelf zeg van
         When I ask myself, like
6   hoe zou je nu die interculturele aanpak omschrijven, ja,
         how would you want to describe this intercultural approach, well,
7   dan doe je- dat is natuurlijk veel breder
         then you do- that reaches of course much further
8   dan die docentenkoppels.
         than those teacher pairs.

This utterance is accepted as the expression of a final team consensus. It confirms that the initial focus of the intercultural approach was on the actor slot (teacher pairs) and shows at the same time that the goal slot has gained relative weight: the approach is described as much more far-reaching than that embodied in the teacher pairs. We also see that this Dutch team member constructs an opposition between the perspective of the 'allochthonic' (line 1) and his own perspective (line 5: 'When I ask myself').

As we have seen, the construction of word meaning in an interactional process does not always happen face-to-face, but takes place in the course of writing and reading documents and in discussions over a period of nine months. In this process, there was a debate on the question of whether the intercultural aspect of the approach should be related to the actors or to the goal of the approach. Also, there was disagreement as to whether it was advisable to pursue an intercultural approach.

Since the team did not continue its activities (for lack of financial support), our analysis is limited to the process of constructing word meaning. Excerpt 10 is a meta-statement in which one of the team members formulates his interpretation of the discussions and of the key word's meaning; as such, it reveals that by the end of the team's work, the key word is still not used with a relatively fixed meaning. The process of constructing a meaning that team members can orient to as shared was still under way, when it was interrupted.

Even so, the process shows how shared word meaning is constructed in a process of formulating and reformulating. It also shows how contributions to this process can be incorporated (as in the case of the teacher pairs, or of Edwin's focus on the societal context), respectively excluded (as in the case of Carola's rejection of the key word and its meaning).

In this process, we have observed at least two lines of argumentation. The first one starts from an educational problem and defines the solution to that problem as intercultural since it involves actors from different cultural groups. The second line of argumentation starts from a societal problem and defines the solution to that problem as intercultural since it involves understanding between different cultural

groups. In addition, there is a third line of argumentation, according to which it is ill-advised, in general, to stress interculturality, as this will block the societal goal of emancipation.

The first of these lines is shared by the four European-Dutch team members, while the other two are taken by the two Surinamese-Dutch members. It may be argued that the three lines contribute to the construction of ethnic positions of European-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch in the Netherlands, respectively, since the latter two perspectives are more explicitly concerned with the societal emancipation of immigrants. Actually, it is important to note that in this construction process, the two Surinamese-Dutch team members are not so much considered as representatives of the Surinamese-Dutch group, as they are taken to represent a segment of the immigrant population in the Netherlands. As Excerpt (10) shows, one of the European-Dutch team members orients to the lines of argumentation construed on the basis of the division between allochthonic and autochthonic. He makes it explicit that the notion of a societal context of upward mobility was contributed by the allochthonic members. Thus, a distinction is reciprocally constructed (i.e. a group boundary is defined) with respect to the intercultural approach between allochthonic (Surinamese-Dutch) and autochthonic (European-Dutch), by which part of the resulting word meaning is explicitly attributed to the allochthonic.

In terms of constructing a discursive interculture, what we have observed in this section is the process of the construction of shared word meaning. We have seen how this process starts from differences in key word meaning. The repeated discussions on the meaning of this key word point up the team members' need of shared meaning. The nine months long process of constructing the meaning of the 'intercultural approach', as it has been analyzed in this section, has remained incomplete: different positions have been taken in the discussion, but (while a final team consensus was reached) a possible subsequent use of this meaning as 'self-evident' to the team members could not be documented. It even remains an open question whether this meaning, as formulated in Excerpt (10), could ever be used in such a self-evident manner by all the team members, since it clearly excludes the position taken by Carola in Excerpt (9).

5. The reconstruction of discursive interculture

Leaving the analysis of key word meaning, we now return to the methodology used in the analysis of intercultural communication. Too often, this type of communication is analytically treated as a collision of static cultural systems, even in cases where the analysts explicitly reject such a static view of culture. The alternative method we propose focuses on the actors' interactive construction of a discursive common ground, as well as on aspects of the common ground already constructed. An example of this construction process was given in the previous section. We propose to call this discursive common ground in intercultural communication a 'discursive interculture', shared by the communicating actors.

Our approach starts out by considering interethnic and intercultural communication first of all as ordinary communication. In interethnic and intercultural communication, as in other communicative processes, communication can only happen if the participating actors share some knowledge of the world to which they refer, and some knowledge of the linguistic conventions used. Moreover, from the fact that these types of communication are very frequent, we can infer that such knowledge is indeed often shared. Despite the many cases of intercultural misunderstanding attested in the literature, in intercultural and interethnic communication, one is more often understood than one is misunderstood. Treating intercultural and interethnic communication as ordinary communication thus implies that information can be communicated and that actors can learn from each other.

Still, many authors rightly argue that intercultural and interethnic communication harbor many pitfalls for those engaged in them. Culturally different linguistic conventions may be involved, such as the different contextualization cues studied by Gumperz. Also, there are the societal oppositions and the preexisting images of the other, referred to in Section 1, potentially endangering the communication by leading actors to communicate from different, sometimes mutually exclusive, perspectives. Still, these dangers and misunderstandings must be overcome in some way or other, or else communication would be (partially or totally) blocked, especially between actors whose contacts are more than purely incidental. The ways in which these difficulties are overcome, and the resulting meanings and practices which are mutually oriented to as shared, are the focus of an analysis of discursive interculture.

In this methodological perspective, the research aim of intercultural and interethnic communication is not primarily to explain discursive phenomena in terms of culture or ethnicity, but to describe the discursive process and its results in terms of mutually taken-for-shared, communicative practices. While the bulk of existing research on intercultural misunderstandings has chosen to explain misunderstandings as caused by culturally different conventions, in the methodological perspective proposed here, the main goal is to consider misunderstanding as part of the process of the construction of a discursive interculture. Misunderstandings are analyzed as manifesting a lack of common ground; however, the analysis does not just backtrack to identify the causes of misunderstanding in the construction of a common ground, but looks ahead towards its effects; it specifically raises the question of how interactors deal with this lack of sharedness. For instance, an actor may adapt to another actor; or the lack of common ground may be retained as a strategy, defining a group boundary (cf. Barth, 1969, 1994).

The analysis of the construction of the meaning of the key word 'intercultural approach' (Section 4) is an example of the process of construction of an element (here: a key word) that can be oriented to by participants as shared knowledge. We have seen how participants in this process oriented to it as a term in which European-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch meanings either had to be reconciled or unified, or turned out to be incompatible. Should this process lead to the term being used with a selfevident meaning, team members may be said to share a discursive interculture of which this word meaning is a part. The use of the key word 'intercultural

approach' and the meaning of this key word can then be considered to be specific of the interculture of this team.

The notions of 'expectation' (cf. Tannen, 1993) and 'adaptation' are central to discursive intercultures. In Section 1, we mentioned the preformed images actors have of each other, and we focused on their respective relations of dominance. These images and relations constitute expectations on the part of one or several actors; such expectations can be challenged in interaction by other actors, but the other actors can also adapt to them. The study of the construction of discursive interculture reveals how the relationship between dominant and dominated groups, and the images actors have of each other, become part of their discursive practices. In the analysis of the key word 'intercultural approach', for instance, we have seen how the perspective of Surinamese-Dutch Carola on the dangers of an intercultural approach is not validated in the use of this key word by her European-Dutch colleague.

Moreover, culturally different communicative practices enter into discourse as pragmatic expectations of actors. This may cause miscommunication, but in the end can lead to some form of adaptation by one or more actors. As has become clear from our key word example, such adaptations are not always based on mutual compromise. (The choice of language, for instance, often is not.) Even though discursive intercultural practices are based on consensus, they will often exhibit asymmetrical relationships between members of different communities, rather than representing the ultimate form of intercultural cooperation. The processes of constructing an interculture reflect the processes of cultural change. Intercultures do not necessarily remain 'inter'-cultures, but may end up being incorporated into the dominant culture. Intercultures reflect the dynamics of culture.

The method we have proposed thus involves a reorientation of the analytic focus. Instead of focusing on how cultural differences shape discourse in specific ways, the redirected focus is on how participants mutually shape discourse. Using this focus, analysts can move from the perspective of communicative actions as *being shaped* by culture to seeing them as *shaping culture*. The concept of discursive interculture attempts to capture the dynamic nature of intercultural communication. The proposed method incorporates into the analysis of intercultural communication the insight that culture and language, rather than being static and homogeneous, are dynamic, constantly moving, and therefore inherently heterogeneous.

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