The Transition from Misunderstanding to Understanding in Intercultural Communication [i]

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1. Introduction

This paper challenges two tacit assumptions in the field of intercultural communication research. Firstly, misunderstandings can frequently be found in intercultural communication, although one cannot claim that intercultural communication is characterised by misunderstandings alone. The main analytical task should be to linguistically reconstruct intercultural understanding. Secondly, intercultural communication is not solely constituted by the fact that interactors from different cultural groups interact. Each analysis should detect to what extent instances of discourse are institutionally and/or interculturally determined. This paper discusses how some analyses of intercultural communication go beyond the analysis of misunderstanding. Consequently, a shift can be observed in the research focus towards the question as to what extent different linguistic means contribute to intercultural understanding.

The paper begins with an introduction to the historical background to the interest in intercultural communication and presents the main approaches to the study of culture in discourse. Subsequently, two analyses of beyond misunderstanding are discussed: Clyne's (1994) revision of the Gricean conversational implicature and its maxims, and ten Thije's (2002b) three-step strategy for intercultural understanding including *generalising, perspectivising* and *contrasting* cultural standards in discourse. The data consists of narratives by East and West Germans about the famous East German car *the Trabant*. The system change from socialist to market economy has influenced everyday life deeply in Germany and the Trabi stories document how new solutions were found for everyday needs, and old and new cultural identities are constructed.

2. Intercultural communication in times of social transition in Europe

Edward T. Hall's The Silent Language (1959) counts as classic in the field of intercultural communication and is generally regarded as the book in which the notion of *intercultural communication* was introduced. A paperback edition of this book from the beginning of the sixties exemplifies the historical constellation in which Americans reflected upon their international relations in those days. The cover text asks the question *Why are we ugly Americans?* and gives the following answer:

> *Our tendency to regard the nationals of other countries as "underdeveloped Americans" and to insist that everyone else do things our way is extremely dangerous, stated Dr Hall. "We have to learn to take foreign culture seriously. The British are ahead of us on this, and the Russians are so far ahead it isn't funny. We, in the United States, are in the stone age of human relations in the overseas field." (Hall s.a.)*

The text displays the American interest in increasing their intercultural competence as they were engaged in severe international competition. In fact, any allusion to anti-communism appeared to be a good advertisement in cold war time.

Nowadays, the notion of *cross-cultural* or *intercultural communication* is no longer connected to anti-communism, but indicates the development towards a *global village* (Asante & Gudykunst, 1989; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Ehlich, 1996a; Bolten, 1997). Technological developments in times of globalisation facilitate an economic flourish that is based on direct access to worldwide communication. Müller-Jacquier & ten Thije (2000) discuss five – partly European-specific – characteristics of intercultural communicative developments.

Firstly, the *internationalisation of business* correlates to supranational changes in property, management and production structures. These innovations involve internal and external communication on every organisational level. Apart from examples of conflicting joint ventures, one finds productive synergy effects in multicultural teams, in which cultural diversity is no longer considered an obstacle but innovative potential. However, citizens (consumers) increasingly condemn the lack of participation on global decision making processes and fight for access to the international scene.

Secondly, *workers' mobility* has increased enormously. On the one hand, expatriates need to be prepared for temporary stays abroad (Kühlmann, 1995). For instance, their culture shock has to be evaluated and taken care of. On the other hand, the migration of workers and their families to European industrial centres is a constant need in times of economic expansion, whereas mobility is impeded by economic depression (Ehlich, 1996b). Multilingualism and multiculturalism determine everyday life in most European cities. Natives are confronted on a daily basis with other languages and cultures when shopping, in school, in administration and at work.

The increasing importance of intercultural communication emerges, furthermore, in the growing willingness and necessity of European nation states to refrain from national and consent to supra-national legislation. After economic co-operation in the fifties, *European unification* nowadays determines all social institutions. Moreover, Europe's Eastern expansion increases the number of cultures involved. Consequently, 19th century standards regarding nation state, national language and national culture are no longer ultimately determinative for social organisation. For example, one has to reflect on the question as to how the European regulations on opening hours determine the various concepts of *Sonntag, Sunday, Domenica* or *le weekend* in respective cultures (Müller, 1998).

In reaction to such convergence processes with respect to migration and mobility, one also detects the *emergence of a regional and national consciousness* as well as the need to express local cultural and linguistic identities. These phenomena manifest themselves in different forms of regional and national folklore, in initiatives to safeguard and maintain national and minority languages and cultures, but also in aggression to foreigners and foreignness. Xenophobia and racism require constant social and legislative action. The development of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices (that may result from international exchange programmes), as well as the construction of multiple identities, determines the relevance of intercultural communication.

Finally, the interest for intercultural communication depends on worldwide *political developments*. Decolonisation and the system change in Eastern Europe have enabled a new quality in the contacts between the classical poles of North/South and East/West. Traditional political and cultural borders have changed and new forms of migration and mobility (cf. the German *Spätaussiedler* and *Green-Card-Asian*) have determined all sectors of trade and industry. However, new (ethnic) borders are also fought for as the Balkan war and *the war against terrorism* have shown. In sum, international and national institutions - like the UN, the army, police, politics, unions, and schools - acknowledge that they can no longer function properly without taking account of multiculturalism in society.

In sum, these developments show that social transition creates qualitative new cultural constellations, which means that the everyday lives of masses of people are deeply

interculturally determined. Moreover, various *intercultures* emerge from cultural contact (ten Thije, 2002a). The management of multiculturalism asks for complex communicative competencies that go beyond ordinary foreign language skills and knowledge about other cultures (Knapp-Potthoff, 1997). The relevance of the *soft skill referred to as intercultural competence* has brought about various research traditions in several disciplines that emphasise different aspects of intercultural communication.

3. Approaches to the study of culture in discourse

Clyne (1994) distinguishes three approaches to studying the role of culture in discourse. The first research tradition concerns the C*ontrastive Approach.* These studies compare native discourse across cultures (c.f. Fisiak, 1983; Wierzbicka, 1991). Their main purpose is to develop universal categories to describe the correspondence and differences between cultures and their languages. On the one hand, the studies aim at fundamental typological linguistic theories; on the other hand, findings are applied in various methods for language teaching. The fundamental issue that has engaged this tradition for a long time concerns the problem of a *tertium comparationis,* namely the question – in which dimensions can the discourse of two languages be considered equivalent?

     The second approach concerns the *Interlanguage Approach,* which examines the discourse of non-natives in a second language. In the sixties and seventies, analyses focussed on phonological, morpho-syntactical and semantic interference (cf. Lado, 1957; Selinker, 1972). More recently, the trans- and interference of pragmatic and discourse phenomena have been analysed (cf. Blum-Kulka et all, 1989).

     This paper focuses on the third tradition in particular, the *Interactive Inter-cultural Approach.* These studies concentrate on the discourse of people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting either in a lingua franca or in the language of one of the interactors (Clyne, 1994, 3). Müller-Jacquier & ten Thije (2000) state that the term *intercultural communication* should be reserved for this specified field of interest. In fact, intercultural communication should refer to *face-to-face communication in intercultural situations.* The research in this field of interest initially focused on the reconstruction of misunderstanding and communication breakdown (cf. Gumperz, 1982; Asante & Gudy-kunst1989; Gudykunst & Kim, 1992). Recently, the focus of attention has shifted to *beyond misunderstanding* (Clyne, 1994; Sarangi, 1994; Koole & ten Thije, 1994, 2001; ten Thije 2002). The latter analyses not only focus on the determination of cultural and linguistic differences, but also on the detection of the interactive impact of linguistic contrasts. They pursue the question as to how people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds react to unexpected (re)actions in intercultural discourse. In fact, the research reconstructs how common ground in intercultural discourse or intercultural understanding is brought about and what new discourse structures result from intercultural communication.

4. Misunderstanding in intercultural communication

In order to clarify the initial focus on misunderstandings, four assumptions of the mentalistic concept of culture (Goudenough, 1964) that underlie many of the socio-psychological studies (c.f. Asante & Gudykunst, 1989) are commented upon (see Streeck, 1985; Koole & ten Thije, 1994; Auer, 1999, 209). The mentalistic concept of culture leads to a static view of culture as the content of people's heads.

     The first assumption concerns the statement that intercultural communication takes place the very moment people from different cultures/ethnic groups meet. In contrast to this,

one should reflect on the question as to whether the gathering of people from different cultural backgrounds automatically results in intercultural communication. For instance, Sarangi (1994) shows that discourse in intercultural situations could be intercultural, but does not always necessarily have to be so. In fact, each analysis should detect to what extent discourse in intercultural situations is institutionally and/or interculturally determined (cf. Schmitt & Keim, 1995). Rehbein (forthcoming) distinguishes *one-sided* from *two-sided intercultural communication,* depending on whether interactors reflect upon and change their *cultural apparatus*.

The second assumption indicates that culture is a collection of propositions about *do and don't* that can be listed out of context. The vast literature on intercultural business communication illustrates this assumption (cf. Hill, 1995; Richmond, 1995). On the other hand, culture should not only be substantiated in the mind or the heart of the interactors, but also in their interaction. Consequently, analyses of intercultural communication should detect how culture is being actualised in a cultural contact situation.

The third assumption states that when people from different cultures meet, they expect that *the other* will act as a member of the speaker's own culture. At the same time, they assume that they are unable to adapt to the other's culture, and, therefore, misunderstanding is inevitable. However, people's assumptions regarding cultural sameness are as important as ethnic or cultural prejudgements respecting cultures' foreignness. In fact, people expect foreigners to act foreign and, as Auer (1999, 210) argues, core cultural values regarding face work can be switched off in intercultural communication, since these cultural patterns are thought to be irrelevant for intercultural communication. For instance, Germans often perceive Japanese, contrary to the cultural stereotype, to be impolite.

The last assumption respecting the mentalistic concept states that knowledge transfer about other cultures guarantees successful intercultural communication. This assumption can be traced back in many intercultural training programs, for example, in cultural assimilation programs (e.g. Müller & Thomas, 1991). However, discourse analysis has shown convincingly that even intra-cultural understanding is not automatic and interactors can misunderstand each other on purpose. Therefore, analyses of intercultural discourse should consider the social and institutional constellations and analyse how the so-called 'power' relations between the participants hinder intercultural understanding or cause deliberate misunderstandings.

As well as the mentalistic, a number of other concepts have been elaborated in intercultural communication research, e.g. the behaviouristic (e.g. Boas, 1911), semiotic (e.g. Geertz, 1973) and pragmatic concepts of culture (Rehbein, fc.; for an overview see Sarangi, 1995). Koole & ten Thije (1994) summarise the common characteristics of these concepts as follows: (1) culture is man-made and can be learned, (2) culture is related to human groups instead of to individuals, and (3) culture can be attributed a locus with respect to human activity (either as the activity itself, or as the knowledge presupposed to it, or as the artefacts resulting from this activity). The concepts vary according to the categories they use to denote a collective or human group. Next to the traditional category of *nation state* one finds notions such as *discourse community* (Knapp Potthoff, 1997), *ethnic group* (Gumperz 1982; Hinnenkamp, 1989), *Kommunikationsbund* (Clyne, 1994) or *discursive interculture* (Koole & ten Thije 1994; ten Thije 2002a). All these notions focus the member-specific interactive practices of inclusion and exclusion that characterise forms of intercultural discourse under specific social constellations.

As an example of a study that summarises many items of potential intercultural misunderstandings, one could mention Müller-Jacquier (2000). The author presents the framework *Linguistic awareness of culture* in order to analyse intercultural communicative events. Linguistic awareness of culture implies that people are able to *reconstruct original intended actions from the uses of concrete linguistic utterances* (Müller-Jacquier, 2000). This framework refers to languages and cultures in different nation states. The items summarise

relevant analytical categories that result from research in many disciplines, especially ethno-methodology and communication theory. According to Müller-Jacquier (ibid.) misunderstanding may occur in the following items:

- Social Meaning / Lexicon
- Speech Acts / Speech Act Sequences
- Organisation of Conversation: Conventions of Discourse
- Choice of Topic
- Directness / Indirectness
- Register
- Paraverbal Factors
- Non-verbal Means of Expression
- Culture-specific Values / Attitudes
- Culture-specific Behaviour (including Rituals) and Behaviour Sequences

Beginning with the categories from cognitive and social psychology about the cultural specificity of social meaning and lexicon, the framework denotes contrastive pragmatic analyses of speech acts and discourse structure conventions from the first research tradition mentioned above. Subsequently, the framework contains the item of directness versus indirectness from politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), ending up with insights from the communication research conducted by Hofstede (1991) on different dimensions for comparing cultures, such as *power distance* and *insecurity avoidance.*

Although the framework contains an interesting survey on important items of inter-cultural misunderstanding, it has the weakness of an eclectic model, since categories overlap and do not fit together, as they originate from different theoretical backgrounds. Moreover, the impact that contrasts between communicative conventions in different languages have on the structure of face-to-face interaction in intercultural situations cannot be determined on the basis of this model. In analysing face-to-face interaction in intercultural situations one has to consider that the interactors do not always act as pure representatives of their cultures, but react to the reactions of other actors who speak another language. In fact, analyses within the Contrastive Approach are an important precondition for interactive intercultural research, but do not provide insights into the intercultural discourse structures of face-to-face communication itself.

5. Analyses beyond misunderstanding

Linguistic research on intercultural discourse that focuses on *beyond misunderstanding* reflects on the question as to what extent different linguistic means contribute to intercultural understanding. Within the framework of this paper, two examples will be discussed (for an overview see Bührig & ten Thije, forthcoming). The first example concerns the controversy as to whether Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) needs to be applied differently across cultures or whether it is culture-bound and 'mono-centric'. In a second example, the linguistic reconstruction of a specific cultural contact phenomenon, namely perspectivising intercultural discourse, will be discussed (ten Thije, forthcoming).

5.1 Grice revisited

The Gricean cooperative implicature counts as an important attempt within the framework of sentence oriented linguistics to take account of the fact that speech acts imply complex and flexible worlds and language knowledge and that their understanding is in fact interactively accomplished. The universality of the conversation implicature and its maxims has been

discussed extensively (Keenan, 1976). On the basis of a large interactive intercultural study of spontaneous workplace communication of immigrants from diverse backgrounds using English as a lingua franca in Australia, Clyne (1994, 192f) discusses the Gricean theory and reformulates the Gricean maxims in order to assign them a more universal suitability. As Clyne attempts to analyse the role of culture in discourse beyond misunderstanding his reformulations are quoted in full:

The Gricean maxim of Quantity:

> *Make yourself as informative as is required.*
> *Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (ibid.)*

reads as follows in Clyne's revision:

> *Make your contribution as informative for the purpose of the discourse, within the bounds of the discourse parameters of the given culture parameters (e.g. form/content, oral/literate, rhythm, directionality, concreteness/abstractness). (ibid.)*

The maxim of Quality:

> *Do not say what you believe to be false.*
> *Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. (ibid.)*

sounds in Clyne's revision:

> *Do not say what you believe to be in opposition to your cultural norms of truth, harmony, charity and/or respect. (ibid.)*

The Maxim of Manner *Avoid obscurity of expression* sounds in Clyne's revision:

> *Do not make it any more difficult to understand than may be dedicated by question of face and authority. (ibid.)*

and the sub maxim, *Avoid ambiguity,* is reformulated to:

> *Make clear your communicative intent unless this is against the interests of politeness or of maintaining a dignity-driven cultural core value, such as harmony, charity or respect. (ibid.)*

The sub maxim *Be brief* is revised to:

> *Make your contribution the appropriate length required by the nature and purpose of the exchange and the discourse parameters of your culture. (ibid.)*

The sub maxim *Be orderly* is revised to:

> *Structure your discourse according to the requirements of your culture. (ibid.)*

Clyne (1994, 194) hopes that these revised maxims will be adaptable for use within any culture. In fact, this revision does not account for intercultural discourse, as Clyne (ibid.)

emphasises. Consequently, his revision should be considered to be results within the Contrastive Approach (see above).

With respect to the application of the maxims to the analysis of intercultural discourse, Clyne (ibid.) asks the question as to whether the speaker's or hearer's culture should be the determiner of the communication pattern in intercultural discourse. He claims that the dominant culture in the intercultural situation will eventually be accepted as the norm and concludes: *"Successful inter-cultural communication is achieved by making the communicative intent very clear and, where possible, being aware of the interlocutor's cultural expectations."* (ibid., 195). Therefore, for the sake of intercultural discourse he formulates an additional Maxim of Manner that reads as follows:

> *In your contribution, take into account anything you know or can predict about the interlocutor's communication expectations. (ibid.)*

Although this maxim could be interpreted from the speaker's as well as from the hearer's position, the overall model stays speaker-oriented and, in fact, Clyne's revision collides with the restraints of the single utterance analysis. When the analysis has to detect the responses to reaction in intercultural discourse, one has to analyse stretches of discourse and one needs analytical categories that go beyond the unit of a sentence or an utterance. Furthermore, the revision implies that intercultural understanding can be described on the basis of a homogenous language concept and, consequently, intercultural competence is an addition to the monolingual competence. It is just for these assumptions that Clyne's study marks the boundary between the analyses of misunderstanding and going beyond this.

5.2 Perspectivising intercultural discourse

Bührig & ten Thije (forthcoming) contains an overview of analyses beyond misunderstanding that show how linguistic means, especially reformulation, repair and perspectivising, facilitate intercultural understanding as they enable the interlocutors to reflect on ongoing intercultural discourse and to deal with potential conflicts or to benefit from the synergy of the language and cultural contact.

As an example from this survey, an analysis of ten Thije (2002b) will be presented that can be related to Clyne's addition to the Gricean maxims. Clyne proposes that interactors should display their consideration respecting the communicative expectations of the *cultural other* in their contributions. It is this process of taking into account the communicative expectations in intercultural discourse that is analysed by ten Thije (2002b). In this respect ten Thije (ibid.) proposes a so-called three-step strategy with the following structure: *generalising, perspectivising* and *contrasting cultures* (ibid.). In short, these steps can be determined as follows: by *generalising,* an interactor considers his utterance as a cultural standard solution; by *perspectivising,* he locates his utterance in the actual speech situation taking into account cultural standards of *the other*. By *contrasting cultures,* the speaker enables the hearer to compare the speaker's cultural standards with his own and attain an adequate interpretation of the discourse.

The example below originates from a research project on biographical stories about the famous East German car the *TRABI*. The Trabant was, and for some people still is, the symbol of the GDR; it was proclaimed *the car of the year 1989* and, after German reunification, it evolved into a cult object which it remains even now. The different names given to this car express various cultural identities, as becomes clear from the names: *Wunderwerk, Objekt der Begierde, fahrbarer Untersatz, Stinkkiste, Pappe, Rundgelutschter, Mülltrabi,* and *Camouflage-Auto*. The biographical stories give a very detailed insight into the development of German society, and the East in particular, in the last decades. The system change from socialist to market economy has influenced everyday life deeply and the Trabi stories document how new solutions were found for everyday needs.

On the basis of the Trabi stories one can compare the constitution of common ground in intra-cultural and inter-cultural discourse and, consequently, the reproduction of group boundaries (Barth, 1969). In order to reconstruct these discursive processes, the constellations of the narrative interview were varied according to the following scheme: an East German storyteller told an East German interviewer about his Trabi experiences. A West German told a West German, and a West German was interviewed by an East German. Finally, both East and West German informants told an outsider, a Dutchman, about their experiences. In short, the research is based on a corpus of about fifty interviews, divided into five groups: East-East, East-West, West-West, East-Dutch and West-Dutch. In each group, young people, adults and old people were interviewed. Consequently, it was possible to document how stories are told within one's own cultural group, presupposing common communicative expectations, and how stories are told in intercultural discourse to an outsider with whom it was presupposed there was not so much common knowledge and to whom one had to explain and clarify (cultural) fore knowledge. The following themes were discussed: 'my first Trabi-experience', 'my first Trabi-trip', 'the use of the Trabant in every day life', 'the Trabant in the time of reunification' and 'my last Trabi-trip'. The analysis of the corpus gave the opportunity to examine the processes of the three-step strategy of generalising, perspectivising and contrasting in detail.

In the discourse fragment below, a West German adolescent tells a Dutch adult how she experienced a Trabant for the first time in her youth. East German relatives showed her a photograph with a green Trabant, which was said to be very special and a thing to be very

proud of, but for her, as a West German, this was totally suspect and strange and she could not understand why they liked the colour that she found simply awful.

It strikes us that her story contains four reformulations on the central assertion about the green colour. On the basis of these four reformulations, the three-step strategy to understand intercultural discourse can be illustrated. This strategy has also been reconstructed in other stories.

Discourse fragment (WNJFM1-N1): a green Trabant (ten Thije 2002b.)

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  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥ >∨                               _
   ≥D ℵ Also daß es die gibt, war schon klar, aber . ähm d/ da ähm
   ≥    Okay that they exist, that was already clear, but . eh th/ eh
 19ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥ >∨                                        _
   ≥D ℵ hab ich mich das erste Mal irgendwie so . bewußt oder
   ≥    then I have for the first time somehow or
 20ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥ >∨                                    _
   ≥D ℵ wie/ wie soll man das sagen halt wahrgenommen oder das
   ≥  how/ how should one say became aware or that
   ≥ >∨                                      /\
   ≥N ℵ                                      Hmm.
 21ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥D ∨ dann auch/ naja weiß ich nich, das war halt so'n/ Der
   ≥  ℵ then also/ yeah I don't know, that was just such a/ It
 22ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
 →►≥D ∨ war halt irgendwie grün, und die fanden das halt ganz
   ≥  ℵ was just somehow green, and they just considered it
 23ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
 →►≥D ∨ besonders, daß der Großvater da eben 'n grünen
   ≥  ℵ very special, that Grandfather simply had a green
 24ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥ >∨
   ≥D ≥ Trabi hatte, das muß was [1 Besonderes 1] gewesen sein,
   ≥  ℵ Trabi there, that must have been something special,
 25ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
       1 Laughing
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥ >∨
   ≥D ≥ von der Farbe her einfach, weil das wohl nich [2 normal
   ≥  ℵ simply because of the colour, because that was probably
 26ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
       2 Laughing
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥D ∨ war. 2]     Also hier/ Ich weiß das (noch)        Haha
   ≥  ≥ not normal. Thus here/ I do (still) remember it
   ≥  ℵ                                                  Laughs
 27ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥ >∨
   ≥D ≥ [3 das is (sozusagen/) alles so Sachen, die mir so
   ≥  ℵ that is (so to say/)    all such things, that were
 28ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
       3 Laughing and raising her voice
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥ >∨              !
   ≥D ≥ völlig suspekt/ 3]            un mir als/ als West-
   ≥  ℵ completely suspicious for me/ and for me as/ just as a West
 29ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥D ∨ deutschem halt, völlig fremd war'n, weil . die so stolz
   ≥  ℵ german,  that were completely strange because . they were
 30ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
   ≥ >∨
 →►≥D ≥ war'n, daß der diese [4 komische grüne Farbe, 4]  die
   ≥  ℵ so proud, that it had this funny green colour,    that
 31ℵ⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
       4 laughing
```

```
∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ≥  >∨
  ≥D ≥ ich einfach [5 furchtbar häßlich fand 5]  Hh hh hh haha
  ≥  ≥ I simply found terribly ugly
  ≥   א                                            Laughs
  ≥N ∨                                  Ha hahaha
  ≥   א                                            Laughs
32א⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
      5 Laughing
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ≥  >∨
→►≥D ≥ [6 So'n bißchen/ 6] also dieses komische Grün hatten,
  ≥   א   A little/       well had this funny green,
33א⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
      6 Still laughing
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ≥  >∨                                        !
  ≥D א und die fanden das ganz klasse und
  ≥    and they liked that very much and
33א⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ≥  >∨
  ≥D א ich konnt das gar nich so/ so nachvollziehn. Das is so
  ≥    I could not understand that at all. That is
34א⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ∨⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
  ≥  >∨
  ≥D א mein erstes . bewußtes Erlebnis irgendwie so,
  ≥    my first experience I somehow can recall
35א⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗
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The fragment displays the main characteristics of biographical story telling. According to criteria put forward by Rehbein (1982) the discourse is a story since it contains a series of assertions with a steering evaluation process ending up in a final judgement (*point*). The complete analysis cannot be discussed in detail in this paper but the focus will be on the four reformulations of the core assertion about the green colour that shows the three-step strategy for intercultural understanding.

The storyteller begins the story by introducing the persons, the car and the birthday party. Then she mentions the central event by saying:

> *Der war grün und die fanden das besonders, daß der Großvater 'n grünen Trabi hatte.*
> *It was green, and they considered it very special that Grandfather had a green Trabi*

Subsequently, she generalises this event within the culture of her East German relatives. Thereby, she realises the first step of the three-step strategy by saying:

> *Das muß was Besonderes gewesen sein von der Farbe her, weil das nicht normal war.*
> *That must have been something special because of the colour, because that was not normal.*

In the second step she considers the whole event from her own position as she judges it to be strange. In addition, she indicates her own position with means of the formulation *mir als Westdeutscher.* She says:

> *Alles Sachen, die mir suspekt und mir als Westdeutsch*er *fremd waren.*
> *All things that were completely suspicious for me and strange for me as West German.*

In the third step, she contrasts the judgement from her own and from the foreign culture. This foreign judgement contains the central point of the story which, according to Rehbein (1982), could be considered as the *scandalon* of the story. By formulating the *scandalon* the hearer understands why the story is actually being told (Bührig, 1996, 137). The storyteller says:

> *Weil die stolz waren, daß der diese komische grüne Farbe hatte, die ich furchtbar häß-lich fand.*
> *Because they were proud that it had this funny green colour that I found terribly ugly.*

So far, the interviewer has not reacted verbally. Now he joins in by laughing and realises the hearer part of story telling. He thereby shows that he likes the story. Subsequently, the teller finishes the story by summarising the result and by returning to the initial question. She says:

> *Die fanden das klasse und ich konnte das nicht nachvollziehen. Das ist mein erstes bewußtes Erlebnis.*
> *They liked it very much and I could not understand it at all. That is the first experience I can recall*

In sum, this reconstruction shows how the storyteller *generalises*, subsequently *perspectivises* the event and finally *contrasts* both judgements on the event. By so doing, she enables the hearer to understand the story properly. The function of this three-step strategy in this example could be summarised as follows: the point of the story contains a very negative judgement on Trabants. As a consequence, the storyteller runs the risk that this negative judgement will be transferred to her East German relatives and in the end to the entire GDR. That means that she could be regarded as someone who transmits negative East German images. On the contrary, she does not transmit this image as overall image, but only as a judgement from a certain historical position, that is from the position of a West German adolescent before German unification.

The second step in the strategy of perspectivising is decisive in this respect. From other analyses on perspectivising it is known that formulations as *"Also hier / ich weiß das noch"* (*Thus here/ I do (still) remember it*) and *"sozusagen"* (*so to say*), and laughing contribute to perspectivising (Bredel, 1999). In the execution of the three-step strategy the storyteller ensures the hearer gains an adequate interpretation by generalising, perspectivising and contrasting the included cultural standards. As a result, the thread of negative self-presentation by the storyteller is minimised. In fact, she presents herself as a good storyteller as well as an interculturally competent person.

In conclusion, this fragment contains an example of perspectivising: the negative judgement about the colour is not an absolute one, but its validity is decreased by specifying the speaker's cultural position, that means as a West German. From other stories, it is known that the East German excitement about the colour had to do with the fact that this green colour was not available in the GDR and that the car was painted with, as they called it, *west paint*.

6. Conclusion

The field of interest of intercultural communication research should be limited to face-to-face communication in intercultural situations. Clearly, studies within the Contrastive and Inter-language Approach on the role of culture in discourse contribute to the analysis of inter-cultural communication. However, in order to develop a clear description of the coherent research subject these studies should not be called intercultural research. It would be more suitable to name them *research on discourse in culture contact* or, as Clyne (1994) proposes, *studies on the role of culture in discourse*.

Within the limitation of the field of interest of face-to-face interaction in intercultural situations the following topics can be and need to be studied, if the linguistic consequences of the social transition in Europe are to be taken seriously:
- interactional constitution of cultural / ethnic identity
- the structure of non-professional interpreting
- international lingua franca communication
- interaction between 'intercultural couples'
- structures of code switching and code mixing
- receptive multilingualism
- perspectivising intercultural communication
- the emergence of intercultures
- intercultural communication in virtual space (intercultural *netiquette*)

In conclusion, this paper has documented a shift of focus within the Interactive Intercultural Approach going beyond misunderstanding. The revision of the Gricean maxims by Clyne (1994) marks the transition which leads from the analysis of *mis*understandings towards the analysis of intercultural understanding. The analysis of the three-step strategy of ten Thije (2002b) exemplifies how various linguistic means can be functionalised for intercultural understanding.

This change has important theoretical consequences for the focus and purposes of future linguistic research. According to theories on code switching and multilingualism, one should no longer assume that the monolingual speaker in a homogeneous speech community is the unmarked case, but replace this additive conception with the idea of an integrated bi- or multilingual competency (Lüdi & Py, 1984; Milroy & Muysken, 1995). Consequently, one should take the bilingual interlocutor in intercultural discourse as the starting point and consider various stages in the development of bilingual competence. For instance, one could transfer the theory of a *dual focus model* from code switching research (Franceschini, 1998) to an analysis of intercultural understanding and, consequently, contribute to a functional language theory concerning bi- and multilingual competencies.

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