

Preface

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Over the last two decades, cross-cultural communication has increasingly grown as a multidisciplinary field of research that has brought together the research efforts of academics working in many and varied disciplines, namely social anthropology, social psychology, cognitive pragmatics, social pragmatics, literature, language acquisition, foreign language teaching, contrastive rhetoric, linguistic and cultural mediation, etc. As a result of the research findings in each of these disciplines, the multifarious and many sided nature of cross-cultural communication has been gradually brought to light, described, and analyzed in both non linguistic terms at the macro level and linguistically at the micro level.

At present, probably more than ever before, the issue of cross-cultural communication and the significant problems cultural diversity may pose to societies far and wide are considered to be of paramount importance in academic, business and professional contexts. In the information society, new technologies have indeed played a crucial role in uniting people from the four corners of the earth. However, men and women in modern societies still have to face the challenge of living together in ghettos, for it is not always easy to come to know and understand the cultural differences that are behind people's differing linguistic and non linguistic patterns of behaviour in cross-cultural encounters, which have become more and more frequent due to technological advance.

In the last few years the number of Ph.D. dissertations, publications, academic journals, and research groups in the field of cross-cultural communication has proliferated worldwide. Within this scenario, this special volume of *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* (RAEI) on *New Trends in Cross-Cultural Communication* would also like to celebrate the boom cross-cultural studies are currently enjoying by offering

a panoramic view of the type of studies carried out by academics from American and European universities, in the hope that this will give the reader a good example of the wide range of topics, as well as of the old and new trends in this multidisciplinary field of research. In the next few sections, we will try to summarize the most relevant contributions to this volume:

A. Intercultural pragmatics

Since its emergence in the 1970s as a clear reaction against the alleged universalism of certain pragmatic principles and theories formulated by Anglo-Saxon academics, intercultural pragmatics has been devoted to the description and contrastive analysis of the culture-specific pragmalinguistic conventions ruling speech acts, social interaction, and discourse strategies across languages, with special emphasis on Eastern European, Oriental and Asian languages. Iryna Prykarpatska (Jagielloian University in Kraków) in “Why are you late? Cross-cultural pragmatic study of complaints in American English and Ukrainian” illustrates perhaps the most long-established line of research in intercultural pragmatics, represented by the works of some prominent authors such as Wierzbicka, Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper and Matsumoto in the 1980s and 1990s, etc. In line with these previous investigations, the author carries out a contrastive analysis of the culture-specific pragmalinguistic conventions ruling the speech act of “complaint” in American English and Ukrainian. Her study reveals that the different scores of North Americans and Ukrainians on Hofstede’s Individualism Index may provide an explanation to the differing linguistic strategies—namely indirectness vs. directness, implicitness vs. explicitness—the speakers tend to favour when making a complaint in their respective languages. For her part, María de la O Hernández López (Pablo de Olavide University, Seville) in “Rapport management under examination in the context of medical consultations in Spain and Britain” discloses another classical issue in the field of intercultural pragmatics, namely a contrastive analysis of the pragmalinguistic conventions ruling social interaction, but certainly breaks new ground when she decides to focus on how medical consultations may show variation across Spanish and British cultures in the way interlocutors manage rapport (face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals), as well as in the different roles or voices adopted by doctors and patients in these professional communication settings.

Ignacio Vázquez and Diana Giner (University of Zaragoza/San Jorge University) in “Beyond mood and modality: epistemic modality markers as hedges in research articles. A cross-disciplinary study” draw the reader’s attention to a third important issue in intercultural pragmatics, namely the culture-specific conventions ruling discourse strategies, with special reference to the academic genre of research articles. The authors carry out a cross-disciplinary study of the use of epistemic markers as hedging rhetorical strategies in research articles in English, extracted from three main disciplines: Marketing, Biology and Mechanical Engineering. Their study comes to the main conclusion that the differences found in the research articles analyzed depend to a

large extent on the sociological features of each discipline and the different social functions they perform.

B. Cognitive pragmatics

Cross-cultural communication has also gained increasing importance as a research object in cognitive pragmatics in the last few years. This relatively new trend in the field is illustrated by Jonathan P.A. Sell (University of Alcalá de Henares). In his article “Towards a rhetoric of cross-cultural identity”, he explores the role played by metaphor and allusion in the discursive construction of cross-cultural identity in an attempt to show how rhetorical analysis may provide a useful tool for a better understanding of how cross-cultural communication may actually work. Regina Gutiérrez Pérez (Pablo de Olavide University, Seville) in “A cross-cultural analysis of heart metaphors” focuses on the way the heart is conceptualized in five languages, namely English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Her investigation discloses both the conceptual similarities between the languages under study deriving from universal aspects of the human body and the differences which are mainly due to the idiomaticity of the languages explored, and the way they reflect an individual way of thinking, behaving and conceptualizing reality and experience. Last but not least, Luis Silva-Villar (Mesa State College) in “Manufacturing Racial Humour” compares the scathing content of “Cómo se dice X en (language) Y?” jokes with the cultural use of American mock Spanish expressions. Interestingly, his study shows that the ability to laugh at our own idiosyncratic weaknesses is therapeutic and should be taught in general education as a way to develop cultural awareness and a better understanding of racial humour.

C. Language acquisition and foreign language teaching

Two articles in this volume are devoted to another key issue in cross-cultural communication research, namely language acquisition and foreign language teaching. On the one hand, Lucía Fernández Amaya (Pablo de Olavide University, Seville) in “Teaching culture: Is it possible to avoid pragmatic failure?” highlights the importance of pragmatic competence when learning a second language. The author explores the consequences of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication, namely misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and ultimately the breakdown of communication, with special reference to the differing orientations Britons and Spaniards may have towards politeness, which may lead to sociopragmatic failure in cross-cultural encounters. The article provides useful practical guidance to integrate cultural and pragmatic aspects in foreign language teaching and learning practices.

On the other hand, Esther Usó-Juan and Alicia Martínez-Flor (Jaume I University) in “Teaching intercultural competence through the four skills” also concentrate on the importance of developing communicative competence in foreign language teaching and provide practical guidance as to the ways in which intercultural communicative

competence may be enhanced through a cultural project involving the teaching of the four language skills.

D. Linguistic and cultural mediation in cross-cultural settings

The mediating role played by literature and language in cross-cultural communities is also addressed in two articles. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, Gricean pragmatics and cognitive linguistics, Carmen Sancho Guinda (Polytechnic University of Madrid) in “An ethnological approach to Sister Nations’ verse: New insights into Native American de-colonial discourse” explores in great detail the recently coined concept of *Sister Nations*. Her research provides an insight into the poetic production of Native American women as a multidimensional anthropological practice performing cognitive, mediating and dialogical functions between societies in conflict.

Ana Carolina Walczuk Beltrão (Warsaw University, Poland) in “*Aquí no se habla Spanglish: The issue of language in U.S. Hispanic media*” deals with the barriers posed by Hispanic American media to the use of Spanglish, a language generated by Latinos in the USA in their search for identity and a visible means of self expression. The author stresses the wide use Spanglish has among Latinos, for whom the “unspotted” Spanish propagated in the media does not correspond to the language they speak at home and within their speech community.

Two book reviews complete this volume. Isabel Balteiro (University of Alicante, Spain) writes on Jaime Beswick’s (2007) *Regional Nationalism in Spain. Language Use and Ethnic Identity in Galicia*, by Jaime Beswick (2007), a book exploring the connections between language, culture and identity in Galicia. And María Teresa González Minguez (Manuel E. Patarroyo High School, Spain) examines *Family Reflections. The Contemporary American Family in the Arts* by Carmen Flys Junquera and Maurice A. Lee (eds.) (2007), a book dealing with the family unit as a reflection of cultural differences and social evolution over the last century.

The editors of this volume hope that the reader will enjoy the selection of articles, gain an insight into the nuances of cross-cultural communication in literary, academic and professional types of discourse, and ultimately grasp the challenges posed in this field, namely the significance of crossing disciplines to make real advances in cross-cultural communication research.