Identities and intercultural communication: Thematic map of the 14th Congress of Nordic Network for Intercultural Communication

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The issue of identity in the context of intercultural communication is quite rare in scientific researches. There could be found only several discussions in the field. The aim of the paper is an analysis of a thematic discourse in intercultural communication on the basis of the scientific presentation of the 14th Congress of Nordic Network for Intercultural Communication "Changing Identities in Globalized World" organized in 29 November – 1 December 2007 in Vilnius. The author tries to present the items that are articulated in the analysis of intercultural communication, and lays focuses on the thematic map of the conference, based on the content analysis of abstracts of the presentations made by participants of the conference. The study has showns that the thematic spectrum of intercultural communication is quite stable and reflects the basic aspects of intercultural communication: interpretation of culture, questions of cultural differences and conflicts, intercultural competence in interpersonal communication, international corporate communication, etc. Also, presuppositions are made regarding a qualitative correlation between the topic of the conference and the main items presented in the abstracts. The present investigation could serve as a start-line for a deeper analysis of scientific communication as part of intercultural communication.

In the recent decades, there could be seen a raising interest in the communication among different cultures. The present-day market, society and the world emphasize the importance of the international flow of communication at various levels. People from different cultures, with various cultural, historical and social background have used to live in a multicultural, multilingual, multi-custom environment. Scientists are forced to review existing theories of culture and communicational action in broaching scientific discussions on the problems of identity in the multicultural world.

Communication in contemporary society is not only a channel of information delivery. Communication also fosters and encourages exchange of knowledge, opinions, social identities and values. Communication in the common sense could be defined as a "process of exchange of information among individuals (groups, institutions) by common systems of codes and behaviour" (Webster, 1995). The presented interpretations of communication stress the role of

communication as self-presentation, relationship and instrumental, but as the main purpose of communication could be named interaction and search of belongingness (Dance, 1970; Williams, 1976; Habermas, 1983, 1985; Angus, 1998).

Adopting the general sociological approach based on communication theory and expanding the widely diffused idea in intercultural relationship studies that communication is a central feature in cross-cultural processes (Baraldi, 2006), it is possible to explain the most significant social processes observed in the globalized world, i.e. the most significant intercultural processes.

The field of intercultural communication

In the recent decades, the field of communication and especially of intercultural communication has changed sharply. The impact on the processes of changes in the theoretical and empirical sphere of communication has been made mostly by the expansion of globalization, enhanced by characteristics such as ICT development, opening of states' borders and the growth of migration (the most intensive being the tendency of economic migration related with immigration), etc.

The political, economic, cultural, social changes caused by globalization have made an impact on communication in general and on communication among different groups of people in particular. Nowadays, globalization means openness to cultural changes, to new opportunities for a cultural (and inter-cultural) dialogue. But globalization also threatens the sur-

vival of cultural traditions which should be strengthened with the objective to safeguard national culture and especially the possibility for national culture, national identity to survive in the world of globalization. The closure of culture, on the one hand, fosters the plurality of cultures; on the other hand, it prevents any meaningful dialogue among them. Both "openness and closure create the value of diversity, but at the same time they threaten the source of diversity" (Baraldi, 2006: p. 54).

When we speak about communication among different cultures, we enter the broad and theoretically and empirically multidisciplinary field of intercultural communication, and that multidimensional tendency of intercultural communication is set by the multi-definitional composition of the key words *culture* and *communication*. There could be seen several different approaches to a study of intercultural communication:

- first of all, intercultural communication could be understood in the context of constructivists' perspective (there could be attached the phrase by Hofstede that culture is a *programming of mind* and that shows that first of all culture is defined in the mind of every man and the communication process leads to interpretation of others in schemata defined during *programming of mind*);
- the second way for interpreting intercultural communication could be analysis of culture in social constructivists' perspective with linking an individual to culture as a social system (Johnson, Tuttle, 1989) (in

that perspective culture is defined as a "historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings, and norms" (Collier, 1997) (or in Jameson (2007) systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people, but identified groups in terms of political boundaries between cultures), and communication is used as a process and context for their exchange and sense, – so intercultural communication could be understood and analysed in the context of interpretation of culture by those concepts of meaning and social relations as well (Key…, 1994).;

• the third way – the way the interactionists interpret communication and culture – Yuan (in Jameson, 2007: p. 202) argues that intercultural communication theories should be interaction-based, emphasizing how individuals communicate and not how cultures communicate; or when, according to Baraldi (2006: 68), intercultural communication occurs only "if and when different cultural perspectives prevent the creation of a single, shared culture".

Of course, these approaches to intercultural communication show only a small scope of the possible ways to interpret culture and intercultural communication, but these aspects strengthen the place of communication and communication theory in the analysis of the aspects of intercultural communication, and for that reason "fundamentally, intercultural communication research is a special case of applied intercultural communication theory" (Johnson,

Tuttle, 1989: 463). From this perspective, communication is understood as a contextually determined process where, at the most general level, different cultures represent different contexts for the study of communication (ibid., p. 463), but also knowledge about a culture, though valuable, does not ensure success of communication process with persons from that culture, mostly because of interpreting culture as homogeneous, whereas in fact it is heterogeneous (Jameson, 2007: 202).

Interpretations of culture and communication lead to scientific discussions and analysis of cultural identity which in the most general understanding is defined as a characteristic of group communication that emerges in a particular situation (Collier, 1997: 39).

Identity. Current researches

There are many diverse perspectives in the study of cultural identity maintenance. Most studies on identity formation and interpersonal relationship development across cultures focus on the cultural variability perspective (Ting-Toomey, 1989).

Analysis of identity is actual and typical only of modern culture (Huddy, 2001; Giddens 2000), where every individual has its own character, features that distinguish him from others in the same or different cultural group, possibilities that could be implemented, materialized or not. According to Durkheim (2001), in traditional cultures the "individual" was treated as a member, or representative, of a social group based on such characteristics as gender, social status, family, etc. Individuality was highly recognized, possibilities of each person

were stimulated, enshrined and uphold, but mostly it was sifted in the context of a social group. According to researchers, only in modern societies where division of labour prevails, the individual has become an object for investigation (Durkheim, 2001: 100–101; Giddens, 2000: 100). Interaction among and between individuals is possible only by means of communication, and only communication stresses affinity, intercommunity, and because of that the individuality, exclusive characteristics of a person could come out and could be used for the identification of a person as a unit. Only in interaction the uniqueness of a person could be "localized" and only that – interrelations, communication – could set and define a person's identity; in other words, identity is a phenomenon that stands out from a dialectic interaction between the individual and society (Berger, Luckmann, 1999: 218).

Identity (Latin *identitas*) means individuality, different state (existence), absolute clash (or homogeneity) (Rusu 2003; Tarptautinių... 2001: 310).

The definition of identity stresses the dichotomy that constructs the iniquity of individual: on the one hand, identity is understood as a personality, as a uniqueness of the individual, but on the other hand, definition of the identity of a person is based on the characteristics of the individual that relate (interconnect) him / her with a social group and that indicate his / her belonging to and inclusion into a social group.

While the scope of investigation of personal identity is determined by the cultural context, cultural identity is interpreted as part of a larger concept of individual identity (Jameson, 2007: 207). Two lines of research have accumulated a systemic body of research: one focuses on cross-cultural variations of identity, while the other focuses on inter-group identity within cultures (Ting-Toomey, 1989: 352).

According to Jameson (2007: 207), cultural identity should be analysed in the context of historical perspective where the focus on the transmission of knowledge and values between generations could be most relevant, but also there is seen another aspect of cultural identity, which is related to the interpretation of culture as a social group: cultural identity anchors in a particular moment of time as well.

A thematic map of the 14th Congress of the Nordic Network for Intercultural Communication

On 29 November – 1 December 2007, the Faculty of Communication of Vilnius University and the Nordic Network for Intercultural Communication organized the international conference "Changing Identities in Globalized World". The aim of the conference was to encourage scientists and practitioners from various fields to share understanding, research methodology, vision and analysis of practical aspects related to the identity.

The aim of this paper is to identify the thematic map of the 14th Congress of the Nordic Network for Intercultural Communication.

To present the thematic maps, a quantitative content analysis was carried out (all texts presented to the organizers of the conference (abstracts of presentations)

were analysed amploying *Atlas.ti* software for the coding of texts according to key words presented in the abstracts).

For selection and analysis of thematic maps, the coded texts were sorted according to key words such as *intercultural communication*, *culture*, *identity*, *international business*.

Culture discourse in the presentations of the Congress

Being multi-discursive, culture tends to be a link between a number of different discourses of economy, education, policy, media, etc. In each case, culture's meaning will be determined relationally (Key…, 1994: 64).

Analysis of the discourse of culture in the presentations shows several aspects (Fig. 1).

As stated before, the understanding of culture is highly impacted by the context in which word culture appears. In the con-

text of meaning, analysis of research items related with culture is determined by the title and the problematic area of the conference – *identity*: there could be stated a close relation of the key word *culture* with the topic – *identity* and, vice versa, the presentation of identity is related to the items that analyse various aspects of culture. Almost one third of all items of the topics presented at the Congress deal with cultural identity.

The aspects of cultural identity that were presented in the researches of the Congress stressed the meaning and significance of context, which weight on the understanding and interpretation of cultural identity: in some presentations there were indicated cultural environment (in 14.7% of topics discussed on the congress), globalization (7.4%) and the media (5.5%). This shows that almost in 1/3 of all the topics that analysed culture discussed the aspects of a context in which culture exists and with which it clashes.
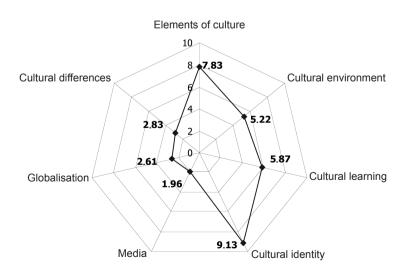

Fig. 1. **Topics related to culture**

The presentations intended to analyse culture dealt with cultural differences (8% of all topics presented at the Congress) and cultural learning (16.6%). This implies that in the scientific understanding of cultural identity still exist also substantial items of otherness.

Analysis of the items related with culture and presented at the Congress revealed also one more important, even compulsory, aspect – analysis of the definition of culture, investigation of traditional aspects of culture still exist as research areas in the field of intercultural communication, This supposition based on the data that 22.1% of all items related to word culture were related to the description, in some cases a review, of elements of culture as well.

Identity in the context of presentations at the Congress

Analysis of the topics of studies presented at the Congress showed that most of the topics were intended to define identity (Fig. 2) or to present a scientific study related to the subject of the Congress: almost in 33.5% of all presentations various aspects of identity were discussed.

Identity in most cases was analysed in relation with national (1.52% of all topics) or cultural (9.13%) aspects, indicating that the presentations submitted to the Congress relate to the topic of the network that organizes the Congress rather than to the topic of the Congress as such.

Also, analysis of the thematic map of identity shows that there were several presentations in which scientific study of identity is presented within the study of international context: almost 15% of all items related with identity stress various aspects of the context in which identity is formed or exists, and half of those presentations were directed to the analysis of the changing international environment, education and media. The media and communication in most of the presentations are stressed as the most influential means that describe, create, and affect identities (almost 7% of all topics analysed at the Congress).
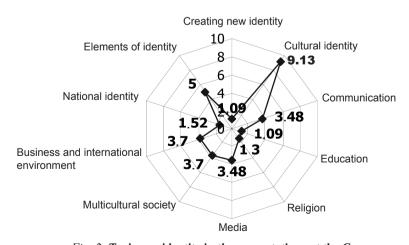

Fig. 2. **Topics on identity in the presentations at the Congress**

In the works presented at the Congress, the item of cultural identity prevailed: it covered around 1/3 of all issues related to identity. This shows that the cultural aspects of the preservation of cultural specificity are more actual in comparison with the retention of national identity (to that topic were related only 4.5% of all items discussed at the Congress). This means that national identity is not so important, mainly because of the free and broad movement of Europeans, and for that reason cultural identity is far more important and requires preservation in contacts with different cultures.

A thematic map of intercultural communication topic at the Congress

Scientific studies presented at the Congress were mostly related to intercultural communication issues (41% of all topics) (Fig. 3), cultural identity and diversity issues making 14% and presentations that analysed cultural contexts 6%. These numbers could be strengthened by mentioning that "understanding one's own cultural background does not reduce the need to understand others' cultural backgrounds" (Jameson, 2007: 202).

Also, analysis of the items mentioned in line with the key words *intercultural communication* show the value of communication competence as such (6.3% of all topics), which could be accompanied by the culture learning process (1.09%) and aspects of teaching intercultural communication (2.17%). These topics, if counted in the context of items related only to intercultural communication, comprise more than 1/5 of all items discussed at the Congress.

While talking about the main items related to the investigation of intercultural area, several aspects could be mentioned:
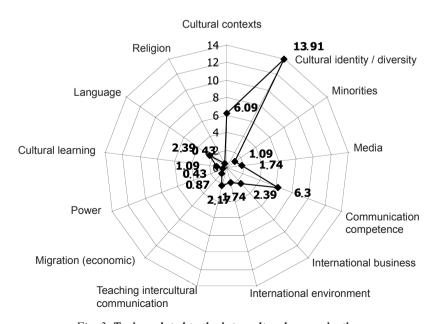

Fig. 3. *Topics related to the intercultural comunication*

- first of all, items related to traditional analysis of power problems in intercultural communication are quite low – only 1% of all items related to the topic of intercultural communication (or 0.43% of all items discussed at the Congress);
- second, this may be explained by quite a high number of topics related with investigations of media and the Internet and their relation with the studies of intercultural communication (4.3% of all items);
- and the third aspect is related to quite a big number of presentations in which problems of international business and globalization were discussed: if to include the percentage of mentioning this aspect at the Congress, there should be almost 1/8 of all topics.

Conclusions

Analysis of the thematic network of the 14th Congress organized by the Nordic Network of Intercultural Communication has shown several aspects that could be used as trends for further investigations: first of all, the growing importance of the media, Internet, and their possible impact on intercultural communication; second, organizational cultures in the international context are quite high and have a potential to grow; third, the growing number of investigations whose results could be applied to practice; in many cases these investigations are related to teaching intercultural communication, languages, etc., but these investigations could be related also to researches of the international aspects of organizational reputation, corporate communication.

Investigation of the thematic network shows also some tendencies related to the membership of the network: the scientists that participate in the network for several years tend to present more traditional aspects of analysis of intercultural communication, but those who have entered the network for the first or second time tend to rise more innovative ideas and topics for the analysis of various aspects of intercultural communication. Of course, there could be made contradictory presuppositions about the correlation between presentations and the topic of the Congress and a correlation between the thematic map of the field of interest between members and non-members of the scientific network. These aspects could be analysed in the context of social network and scientific communication.

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TAPATYBĖS IR TARPKULTŪRINĖ KOMUNIKACIJA: 14-OSIOS ŠIAURĖS ŠALIŲ TARPKULTŪRINĖS KOMUNIKACIJOS TINKLO KONFERENCIJOS TEMATINIS ŽEMĖLAPIS

Renata Matkevičienė

S a n t r a u k a

Pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais vis labiau kyla susidomėjimas skirtingų kultūrų komunikacija. Tą iš dalies verčia daryti kintanti visuomenė, rinka, pasaulis. Šios tendencijos suveda skirtingą kultūrinį pagrindą turinčius žmones, verčia pavienius individus įsigyventi į jiems nepažįstamą kalbos, papročių ir elgsenos terpę. Ši kaita skatina mokslininkus peržiūrėti šių dienų kultūrų komunikacijos specifiką ir problematiką: multikultūrinės visuomenės tapatumo paieškas, kultūrų komunikacijos ir nacionalinio tapatumo sankirčius, globalios ir lokalios komunikacijos ypatumus, multikultūrinės visuomenės vertybes, tarpkultūrinius konfliktus, kultūrų komunikaciją internete, kultūrų komunikacijos mokymo (-si), skirtingų kultūrų ir lyčių komunikacijos ypatumus ir kt.

Tapatybės klausimai tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos kontekste gana reti, – galima rasti tik keletą diskusinių darbų. Šio straipsnio tikslas – pristatyti tematinio tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos diskurso analizę, remiantis mokslininkų pranešimų, rengtų 14-ajam moksliniam Šiaurės šalių tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos tinklo kongresui, vykusiam 2007 m. lapkričio 29–gruodžio 1 dienomis Vilniuje, pagrindu. Straipsnio autorė siekia pristatyti egzistuojančias temas tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos mokslininkų diskurse, taip pat išryškinti tematinius žemėlapius, atskleidžiančius mokslininkų tyrinėjimų, konferencijos temos koreliacijas.

Tyrimas atskleidė, kad konferencijai pristatytuose pranešimuose vyrauja tradicinės tarpkultūrinės ko-

munikacijos temos, tokios kaip kultūros suvokimas ir interpretavimas, kultūrų skirtumai ir konfliktai, tarpkultūrinė kompetencija ir švietimas, tarpasmeniniai santykiai tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos kontekste, tarptautinė bendrovių komunikacija ir kt.

Įteikta 2008 m. vasario 29 d.

Straipsnyje taip pat keliamos prielaidos galimiems tyrimams, jungiantiems mokslinės komunikacijos, socialinių tinklų ir tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos temas.