

The necessity of Intercultural Communication for a peaceful world

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Abstract

Our times are often referred to as the new world order with its new economy. What this means is that capitalism has been restructured on a global scale, and people of widely different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have been thrown into contact more than ever before. Cultural contact may occur in the flows of information and mass media, as well as in the flows of actual people in migration. Given the ubiquity of cultural contact, mergers and hybrids, it is unsurprising that there should be a strong interest in intercultural communication. If intercultural communication is an exchange of stimuli, data and information through an interaction between individuals came from different local communication contexts, we can daily come across this type of communication process. Sociology as a discipline makes an important contribution to the study of intercultural communication: it is the key contribution of discourse analysis to take culture as empirical and cultural identity, difference and similarity as discursive constructions. Moreover, to investigate whether it is possible to avoid any of the problems of intercultural communication, it is suitable to start with the communication situation itself and analyze why misunderstanding and conflict arise. Today a new form of communication is necessary; it should take itself away from the temptation of merging, tolerating and joining together different cultural realities. Intercultural communication today moves towards an horizon much more complex, which offers a new interpretation: in fact it is necessary to promote cultural coordination and cooperation.

Keywords: intercultural communication; social relation; non-verbal communication; interpersonal interaction; interpersonal communication

Introduction

The complexity of contemporary society highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary perspective, social relations and the construction of individual identity. The processes of socialization have acquired a renewed interest becoming an increasingly topic for discussion and reflection. Throughout the history of sociological thought the processes of socialization were widely explored, allowing today to investigate forms probably more interesting than the current social dynamics.

According to Berger and Luckmann, sociologists who have contributed decisively to the analysis of the interpretation of the construction of society, social reality would be realized in a dialectical process, it would be as a product of human activity, but it is important to remember that at the same time social reality continually reacts and influences every individual. So, according to the two sociologists it is fundamental to keep in mind the following topic: individual is not born as a member of society. Each individual is born with a predisposition toward sociality, and only later becomes a member of society¹.

Socialization is a process by which individuals may become part of the society, interacting and integrating into groups and community. In fact, socialization is a real set of processes that allow individual, during social interaction, to develop communication and interpersonal skills.

Therefore, communication would be a very important element of socialization. However, it is essential to remember that thanks to the processes of socialization, cultural elements are transmitted from generation to generation: not only through communication, but also due to imitation, identification and adaptation. Nevertheless, learning of social rules and the acquisition of the meanings of the symbols, roles, forms of representation and interpretation require a reworking that probably cannot ignore to keep in consideration communication forms and ability to use communication tools and styles. Everyone, assuming and internalizing norms and behaviors, actives specific expression and interaction forms, which should be interpreted, understood and adapted to individual situations².

Contemporary society is characterized also by the countless possibilities of contact with others: codes, norms, roles, status, cultural forms are more and more contaminated. Affected by continuing contacts and exchanges, which take place among contexts and individuals, belonging to different social groups. It is under these conditions that becomes interesting to deal of the importance of communication (verbal and nonverbal) in the processes of interaction and socialization. An analysis that could allow not only to understand more broadly the new forms of socialization, but above all could help to avoid misunderstandings and misconceptions, which - when deliberately searched or even in an unconscious way when they take extreme forms - can give rise to marginalization, and exclusion.

Relationships in contemporary society.

Contemporary society is characterized by being complex and highly heterogeneous. The uncertainty experienced by individuals affects social relations and the ways in which they try to make sense of the social order. Many sociologists highlight the

¹ P. Berger, T. Luckmann, 1966, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Garden City, New York.

² K. Scannavini, 2013, *Processi di socializzazione. Relazioni e comunicazioni interculturali*, Liguori, Napoli.

current decline of the functions traditionally performed by the main agencies of socialization, which are primarily family, school and religion. On the contrary, the so-called *socialization experience* has been acquiring a growing importance, i.e. relationships with peer groups and media consumption. The *socialization experience* requires more than a transmission, an interaction between individuals, who do not exchange values, but communications.

Even though contemporary society may be defined as indeterminate and uncertain, an individual needs to be anchored in relationship and in a possible social structure. The study of social relations has changed over time. According to Marx, a social relation is nothing more than the product of the material bases (economic and technical-scientific) of the company, so it might be considered in materialistic, deterministic, evolutionary and collective terms. In other words, according to Marx, a social relation is a relationship between structure and superstructure, usually governed by the laws of evolution, defined among collective actors and resting on the material bases, necessary for individuals to identify a specific historical experience.

Weber's analysis of social relation is different from Marx's point of view. Weber asserts that a social relation is the possibility that individuals have to act. According to Weber, a social relation is an expression of subjective intent of action. However, it is not only subjective, but also probable and not regulated by the rules of evolution. Instead, Durkheim's point of view is less individualistic. In the opinion of the French sociologist, a social relation is an expression of a collective consciousness. Anyhow, it is Simmel to give us a new important interpretation: he underlines that society has no social relations, but is itself the declination of many social relationships. Contemporary theories are influenced by this vision³.

Social relations would be the real key to enter into reality, therefore may not be considered as a mere abstraction, but something concrete, composed of thinking and reality. For that reason social relations should be seen as ambivalent and interdependent. If it is true that the rules would be necessary and inevitable to regulate relationships, it is equally plausible that such rules are not always so strict, or rather it is likely that social relations follow trajectories vague in daily life, and not always so easily identified and accessed by individuals who participate in the interaction.

Social relations may be analyzed dealing with methods used by individuals: so it is possible to have relationships that are established in connection with personal or social ties. However, social relations may stand out compared to territorial membership, social stratification and the family sphere and/or informal.

³ K. Scannavini, 2011, *La comunicazione interculturale nel contesto globale*, in «La Critica Sociologica», n. 179.

In a social context as complex as that of contemporary society it is obvious that all the features that potentially may have social relations are exponentially multiplied, as well as possibilities and difficulties of communication between individuals are extended. We are witnessing a continuous evolution: the chance to meet people and exchange information are continuous and influences the life of every individual. The opportunity to understand how to handle one of the fundamental processes of socialization, that is communication, it becomes a widespread and increasingly issue.

Interpersonal interaction and interpersonal communication

Interpersonal communication is an exchange that constantly occurs in daily life, implies several factors and therefore a precise reflection. Moreover, interpersonal communication becomes a central issue in the analysis and acquisition of skills in intercultural interaction. In fact, a good interpersonal communication must respond to a specific communicative effectiveness and, therefore, to fundamental factors, such as: the awareness of the stakeholders involved in the exchange (respecting their identity construction), the importance of consistent communication and complete content; the attention to communication channel; the attention to a precise congruence between verbal and analogical aspects; an appropriate use of the surrounding context; a communication relevant to set objectives; a style appropriate.

Interpersonal communication may have also different purposes, which define the declination and the participation of individuals. In particular, interpersonal communication may be oriented to: learn something more about ourselves or others; influence or persuade the interlocutor; improve our relations; have fun or be helpful to our speaker⁴.

Among social scientists, Erving Goffman suggests a detailed analysis and articulated relations about *face to face* interaction: he deepens his analysis about human behavior and above all he gives particular attention to communication that he considered not reducible to a simple exchange of words between two or more speakers. In other words, Goffman points out that it is necessary and indispensable to arrive at an integrated understanding of the communicative behavior.

Adam Kendon offers a reinterpretation of Goffman studies, he follows the Canadian sociologist and underlines that social scientists should consider interpersonal relationships study as a specific field of sociology⁵. In fact, Goffman identifies the existence of an order of interaction, that to be deeply understood to be studied as a specific field of analysis. According to Goffman, the study of interaction may not be confused with the study of small groups, may not run out in the analysis of public

⁴ E. Cheli, 2004, *Teorie e tecniche della comunicazione interpersonale*, Franco Angeli, Milano.

⁵ A. Kendon, 1988, *Erving Goffman's approach to the study of face-to-face interaction*, in A. Wootton e P. Drew (ed), *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 14-40.

policy, as an effect of moral norms that govern people's behavior. For this reason, it becomes central to pay attention to the traffic rules of interaction between two or more individuals, which includes the need to be reckoned with all matters relating to non-verbal communication. Goffman is much interested in underlying social organization rather than psychological dimension).

Goffman suggests that in all situations in which individuals perceive each other a kind of interdependence of actions takes place. In fact, he pays attention to *clusters*, distinguishing between focused and unfocused. Focused clusters are determined by the presence of participants which maintain a focus in common. Instead, participants of unfocused pursue lines of separate interests. Of course, in daily life there is not a clear distinction between the two theoretical models. Goffman proposes an example: if you take into account people walking down a street you would think that it is a typical example of unfocused group. Every person on the street continues in his own way answering to a personal course of action, but at the same time everyone responds to an interactive ritual (Goffman defines *civil inattention*), that he or she communicates to recognize the passage of other individuals. For this reason individual puts in place a momentary series of agreements that allow him or her to respond to specific expectations⁶. Another important issue is the distinction between system and ritual requirements⁷. The first refers to all features that allow exchanges among individuals; while the ritual requirements refer to rules that guide the interaction. In particular, Goffman identifies eight systemic requirements:

1. a shared ability to transmit and receive messages clear and appropriate;
2. a presence of indicators (or signals) that are able to communicate to sender of the exchange that is in place a receipt;
3. some shared signals to announce the search for a channel of communication and to highlight that a channel can be opened or closed;
4. it is important to identify the signals for the turn-taking;
5. specific techniques for repetition, delay and interruption of a message;
6. a way to read the messages of the exchange;
7. a set of rules to regulate the development of message, so that every exchange is consistent with the previous;
8. rules not only for who is actively involved in the exchange, but also for who do not directly participate, although he or she is near by the communicative act.

Goffman's analysis not only has the advantage of anticipating future reflections, but it has the merit of highlighting that in exchanges and interactions nothing is taken for granted. On the contrary there are countless issues that need to be studied more

⁶ E. Goffman, 1963, *Behavior in Public Places*, The Free Press, New York.

⁷ E. Goffman, 1981, *Forms of Talk*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

carefully. Therefore, it is evident how difficult it is to analyze the interaction and the exchange of communication (verbal and non-verbal) between different individuals. Goffman does not elaborate an analysis of cultural practices of the interaction, he indicates crucial elements for understanding interactions and relationships, such as: role, organizations and social relations.

Social roles and social differences

In any group or social context the role of an individual has a central function, which manifests itself in relations and communication exchanges. Nowadays to analyze the concept of role is a daunting task, but it is necessary.

Managing our own role becomes an absolute necessity to be able to extricate ourselves in a complex society, where contacts and comparisons are characterized by their ability to be fulfilled in contracted time and space. It is possible communicate at distance and in instant time (think about the power of technology, the revolution brought by the Internet and its functions); it is possible to reach distant places in a quickly way, to move, to escape or even to migrate from one geographical context to another. Movements and opportunities multiply meetings and communication processes not always immediately sharable or manageable in a shared cognitive and communicative space. It is therefore necessary to keep in mind the construction of the role of an individual, but also understand that the assumption of roles can mean not necessarily shared norms and values. In contrast, role is closely related to a number of dimensions, such as historic period, geographic context and cultural situation.

During a communication exchange the role assumed by individuals is important and defines a part of the same communication flow. Interaction is seen as a possible theater scene: individuals actually taking on roles wear masks. Goffman, even in this case, offers an articulated and punctual reflection, the idea that each role is assigned by structural elements⁸. The margin of autonomy of individual is reduced, while norms, rules, social habits determine assumptions about roles. It therefore reduces and places strong emphasis on the how. However, Goffman points out that although an important part of the role is given by expectations, another part is strictly linked to the expression of each individual. To be more precise, Goffman defines role as functions required by society, while giving expression to role it means to exercise it. From this theoretical premise of symbolic interactionism Goffman expresses his point of view: in short, interactionist view recognizes individuals' roles with regard to behaviors that could be taken⁹. Everyone behaves pursuing a consistency of his or her role and decides how to implement it. This means that everyone may prefer a different use of facial expressions, of body movement; everyone may prefer a different way of dressing, but also to use

⁸ E. Goffman, 1961, *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*, Bobbs-Merril, Indianapolis.

⁹ T.R. Sarbin, 1966, *Role Theory*, in B. J. Biddle e E. J. Thomas, *Role Theory: Concepts and Research*, pp. 233-249.

in different way words and how to relate with others. Cultural factor is a key element in defining roles: custom and common sense lead some objective characteristics of role, to which it is possible to add subjective dimension. In particular, interaction leads individuals to find a kind of silent agreement to respect mutual expectations. It is evident as it could be happen to be in front of responses not entirely expected and immediately recognizable, that put interlocutors in a state of confusion or surprise, which may mark communication flow and mutual understanding. Individuals who interact with each other put into practice specific influences of role; they define and re-shape role's characteristics of each.

Contemporary reality is declinable in a plural way¹⁰; it breaks down in infinite possible of distinguishing groups, individuals and different actions. Inequalities may be different; there are of gender, opinion, development, biographical and cultural. Current debate raises more clearly these differences; sociologists (but not only them) discuss mainly about cultural diversity and political pluralism, in particular to investigate collective imagination and social relationships. It is certain that to understand various expressions of social world individuals should not always apply their own ways of understanding themselves and others. Intercultural communication needs a careful attention in responses formulation, which, in turn, to be relevant and appropriate, need a deep interpretation adhering to messages of a communicative process. Difference in intercultural communication is given by the ability to deal with the diversity of cultural perspectives of each individual. So it is essential to keep in mind that when we exchange messages and information we are more often than imagined in condition of having in front of us different cultural orientations and thus different systems of symbols and signs, which although seemingly similar, may have unusual meanings for those accustomed to own context. Verbal and nonverbal coding are not so easy or obvious: every aspect of communication process should be considered which takes part in the exchange does not necessarily have knowledge or share same cultural background. Today occidental societies are characterized by individualism, which imbued each sector and area of social life. Cognitive skills of each individual are not so important, what really matters is how an individual adapts himself (or herself) to social rules and how he (or she) vehicles them to the other members of society. Thus individual's intelligence and skills are not central, but rather they are fundamental to adapt to main group in order to minimize the possibility of differentiation¹¹. More often differences become inequalities. This is what happens when diversity creates disparities in communication due to the value that is attributed to the different cultural forms. In Western societies, difference, or inequality, is determined by evaluating the access that an individual has if we analyze his (or her) wealth, power and prestige. Social visibility or invisibility cause value attributed to

¹⁰ K. Scannavini, 2010, Abuja/Londra solo andata, Liguori, Napoli.

¹¹ C. Baraldi, 2003, *Comunicazione interculturale e diversità*, Carocci, Roma.

the exchange of communication and access to information. A condition that occurs in interpersonal communication exchanges through preconceptions that determine a distance even before communication process is realized. The use of preconceptions and interpretative models can greatly reduce the complexity of reality: the purpose is to reduce the complexity in a manageable number of categories, which are based on similarities and differences. In this way, differences within a group are narrow, but simultaneously the distances between a social group and another are amplify. So, a lot of people live believing in stereotypes and prejudices.

Intercultural communication theories

To know reality, it should be investigated taking into account expressive-symbolic form of human life. Culture is inseparably linked to social life and does not constitute a separate space or even secondary.

The contemporary world, then, is not fragmented into cultures and societies, but it is subjected to contact and cultural hybridization, it is one big region, where interaction and cultural exchange persist¹². In such situation, societies tend to build relationships based on intense dialogue, influence, but also conflict. Societies and cultures *unterritorialized* develop exchanges, but also generate various types of fundamentalism and identity claims, which act as factors of cohesion before the threat of a loss of identity. Issues considered very important if we take into account, for example, migration phenomenon. One of the fundamental issues concerns manifest forms of culture, taken into account in social relations, but in fact they represent only a tip of a much more articulated situation. If we imagine, in fact, culture like an iceberg, emerged part represents forms and observable behaviors (age, gender, manner of dress, language, etc.). While cognitive and emotional levels are partly hidden, or rather deeper, which requires an higher effort of understanding, which facilitates knowledge and communication processes¹³.

The birth of theoretical reflections about intercultural communication is controversial. Literature is divided between who think that it should coincide with the United States' statement in the global context, on the contrary who think we should refer to the studies of the Chicago School, which although not analyze dynamics of intercultural communication processes, promote accurate reflections about diversity and relationship among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In the first case, Roger and Steinfatt are among the scholars who most support the idea that the first analysis about intercultural communication can be attributed to the Foreign Service Institute, which - after the Second World War - prepared materials and lectures on

¹² U. Fabetti, 2000, *Dal tribale al globale*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano.

¹³ It is a metaphor already used by Eduard T. Hall, who wrote - in 1976 - *Beyond the cultures*, published by Anchor Books in New York.

different cultural forms and different kinds of communication to teach U.S. diplomats how to relate with citizens of nations to which they were assigned¹⁴. Many other experts believe in the importance of post-colonial era, which has allowed to consider a number of fundamental issues. However, as mentioned, the Chicago School for many remains the first theoretical reference. Authors such as William Thomas, Floran Znaniecki, Robert E. Park, Georg Simmel have addressed issues such as the theory of marginal man, social distance and ethnocentrism: all fundamental analysis for the subsequent study relating to intercultural communication. Anyhow, there is no doubt that more concrete attention to the discipline occurred in the first half of the last century. The approval of the Foreign Service Act (1946) and then the establishment of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in the United States have made possible to have the first analysis proposed by linguists and anthropologists, who pay attention also to communication and macro-cultural forms of each countries. Among anthropologists contacted by the FSI there is E.T. Hall, who proposed a new vision, which aims to give relief to micro-cultural aspects of society. He is interested in a particular non-verbal communication of individuals, such as tone of voice, gestures, posture and proxemics. In other words, he applies linguistic relativity to non-verbal communication and thus defines a set of concepts and categories essential for those who want to think about theories and practices of intercultural communication. Hall is the first to analyze communicative use of space and time and propose an initial distinction between high and low context¹⁵. Hall:

- Proposes a comparative approach, focusing on interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds;
- Facilitates a micro perspective, so he pays attention to individual in specific contexts;
- Recalls the importance of an interdisciplinary analysis, combining anthropological dimension with communication theories;
- Highlights the importance of considering communication as a behavior determined by rules;
- Emphasizes the recognition of non-verbal communication, as a characteristic element of all cultures;
- Emphasizes the importance of experiences and practices to understand the forms of intercultural communication processes;
- Develops a specialized language still used today.

¹⁴ E.M. Roger, T.M. Steinfatt, 1999, *Intercultural Communication*, Waveland Press, Prospect Heights (Ill.).

¹⁵ E.T. Hall, 1966, *The Hidden Dimension*, Doubleday, New York; E.T. Hall, 1976, *Beyond Culture*, Garden City, New York; E.T. Hall, 1984, *The Dance of Life: the Other Dimension of Time*, Doubleday, New York; E.T. Hall e M. Reed Hall, 1990, *Understanding Cultural Differences*, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth.

However, it is true that an academic discipline institutionalizes its birth when a University opens courses or when someone writes interesting books. Well, in 1966 opened the first course of intercultural communication at the University of Pittsburgh and a few years later two major studies were published: *American Cultural Patterns. A Cross-Cultural Perspective* of E.C. Stewart¹⁶ and *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* by L. Samovar and R. Porter¹⁷, surveys that actually certify the autonomy of the discipline.

In the Eighties of the last century, three major institutions were born, which through their published studies will further define the issues of intercultural communication, they are: the International and Intercultural Communication Annual, the International Speech Communication Association and the International Association. Then, it was born the SIETAR (Society for Intercultural Training and Research), which still represents an inexhaustible source of ideas and reflection about intercultural communication.

The next decade was published an important volume (*Theories in Intercultural Communication*) by the International and Intercultural Communication Annual. This book contains the two main theoretical approaches about intercultural communication: the first is based on communication theories and quantitative approach; the second is more interpretive, it puts emphasis on interpersonal communication and qualitative methodological approach. To these two perspectives is added later a critical view, based on the questioning of inequality relations born in the colonial period and that are highlighted by globalization dynamics.

The conceptual stages and issues that lead to intercultural communication definition can be summarized in five key moments. As it turns out, at the beginning intercultural communication rests on a practical view: to prepare U.S. diplomats in their work. This approach is still very important to all intercultural communication scholars. A second decisive moment is the one devoted to the attention given to interpersonal relationships, followed by the most important study of Hall, his book *The Silent Language*, which places the basics of the discipline through an interdisciplinary approach, involving: linguistics, anthropology, psychology and communication (only later it will be clear the importance of including the sociological dimension). Another important issue was the choice of giving relief to non-verbal communication, recognizing that it is through the knowledge of everything that is communicated outside of words that you can reduce misunderstandings between people from different backgrounds. Finally, it is given a central role to experience: in fact, it is not possible acquire practical and effective skills only through theory, on the contrary it is necessary also practice.

¹⁶ E.C. Stewart, 1972, *American Cultural Patterns. A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Intercultural Network, LaGarge Park, Ill.

¹⁷ L. Samovar, R. Porter, 1973 [2000], *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, Wadsworth, Belmont Ca.

Nowadays theories on intercultural communication are different and mostly born in the American academic context. Gudykunst and Mody have recently developed an overview of contemporary theories, highlighting potential and peculiarities¹⁸. A first line of research refers to theories about communication effectiveness, which are divided into different theoretical approaches. First of all, we have the theory of *cultural convergence*, according to which interaction allows individuals or groups to approach (or indeed to *converge*) a mutual understanding, although they can never really conquer it. This theory is followed by theories about management of anxiety and uncertainty, which place emphasis on fear and anxiety state in which there is who knows that he or she should be able to interpret communication among individuals or groups in some way distant from him or her. Finally, one last vision is given by theories on the effectiveness of decision-making processes in intercultural groups: in this case it is important to understand if a group tends more to an idea of individualism or collectivism reality. Another theoretical current is composed of all those visions belonging to *mutual adaptation* between individuals and social groups: a) theory on communication-accommodation (they give importance to how individuals use language strategies to stand out from the others); b) the theory of intercultural adaptation (adaptation by those who are involved in an interaction fosters change and new perspectives), c) co-cultural theory (minorities, in this perspective, may be found possibility of assimilation, accommodation or separation).

Another theoretical approach regards the theories on negotiation, which are not so distant from the previous ones, in fact they emphasize identity adaptation. So we have the theory of *management* identity (based on Goffman's idea of self-expression through assumption of roles within a reality as representation); the theory of *negotiation* identity (individual negotiates and chooses his or her membership); the theory of *cultural* identity (interprets the way in which cultural identities arising in connection with intercultural interactions).

Then, we have theories focused on communications networks, based on the idea that behavior is influenced by interactions between individuals and groups, rather than by the rules. Again, there are three distinct perspectives: a) the theory of communicative competence about *outgroup* (to learn patterns of behavior and communication of *outgroup* members of our network of relationships is to be considered as an added value to improve our results in interaction with different cultural groups); b) the theory of *intra-cultural versus inter-cultural network* (differences are considered most important when comparing individuals from different cultural groups rather than of the same group); c) the theory of *networks and acculturation* (it specifically investigates relationship between network and migrant people).

¹⁸ W.B. Gudykunst, B. Mody, 2002, *International and Intercultural Communication*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Ca.

A final group of theories focuses on acculturation and adjustment and on cultural dynamics related to migration processes. So we have: a) the theory of *communication-acculturation* (foreigners and the host society were subjected to a stress of acculturation and enculturation in order to arrive at a communicative balance); b) the theory of *management of anxiety and uncertainty* (it gives great importance to living conditions experienced by a foreigner; c) the theory of *assimilation, deviance and states of alienation* (host society is analyzed, which usually responds absorbing, isolating or giving negative feedback to assimilation, deviance or separation aliens attempts).

So, it is evident that nowadays theories on intercultural communication must always consider some fundamental aspects: the fact that individuals need a relationship of reciprocity; they should always ask themselves what is the point of view of their stakeholders; that cannot be neglected the question of power asymmetries; that social importance should be given to multicultural contexts rather than individual communications. Moreover, it is necessary to keep in mind the main four levels of culture: behavior, values, assumptions and concrete cultural generalized forms¹⁹.

Intercultural communication elements

The main element of intercultural communication refers to relationships between individuals. According to Hofstede, without any doubt one of the most important communication experts, it is important to highlight as the acquisition of skills related to intercultural communication passes through three stages: awareness, knowledge and skills. It all begins with awareness: to recognition that each brings with him or her a particular *mental software* - which comes from the way in which he or she grew up²⁰.

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that when individuals communicate not only exchange words. The message is a complex structure made up not only of all that is verbal, but also from what is non-verbal: gestures, indicators of role, icons, objects in general. In addition, the communication cannot be achieved except through events that take shape in a situational context. These elements must be declined into their variables to understand in which way can strongly determine intercultural communication. Balboni recalls how Malinowski and Fishman spotted four major variables of communicative situation²¹:

- Place: to distinguish between physical setting and cultural scene;
- Time: even though it seems a constant variable, it is actually changing in relation to its cultural context and may create difficulties of communication and exchange;

¹⁹ E.C. Stewart, J. Danielian, R. Foster, 2007, *Assunti culturali e valori*, in M.J. Bennett, *Principi di comunicazione interculturale* (a cura di), Franco Angeli, Milano.

²⁰ G. Hofstede, 1991, *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind*, McGraw-Hill England, London.

²¹ B. Malinowski, 1966, *Il problema del significato nei linguaggi primitivi*, in C.K. Ogden e I.A. Richards, *Il significato*, Il Saggiatore Milano, pp. 333-383 (titolo originale, *The Meaning of Meaning*); J.A. Fishman, 1972, *Who speaks what language to whom and when*, in J.B. Pride, J. Holmes J. (a cura di), *Sociolinguistics*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, pp. 15-32. Cit. in P.E. Balboni, 1999, *Parole comuni, culture diverse. Guida alla comunicazione interculturale*, Marsilio Editore, Venezia, p. 26.

- Argument: it may happen, in fact, that partners take for granted the subject of which is shared talk, forgetting that it could actually happen that values underlying are different;
- Role of the participants: status of interlocutors is closely connected to values and rules of specific cultural contexts, so as to be able to become not only distant, but even conflicting.

In the Seventies of the last century, new elements were added, research dimensions of sociolinguistics, pragmatics and communication ethnomethodology. So they add:

- Linguistic text;
- Linguistic messages (gestures, facial expressions, distance between interlocutors, tone of voice, etc.).
- Stated purposes and not;
- Psychological attitudes (especially as regards the attitudes that stakeholders have towards each other or to exchange topic: sarcasm, irony, admiration, respect, etc.);
- Contextual grammar.

These additional elements show even better as verbal communication does not run out entirely communication exchange. In fact, linguistic communication is only 10-15% of what is transmitted to ears of listener, remaining 75-80% pass for view and is characterized by non-verbal exchanges.

Non-verbal communication

Since Hall period, non-verbal communication has been recognized a central role in intercultural exchanges analysis. In 1999, Rogers and Steinfatt list some important reasons for this centrality:

- Non-verbal communication is inevitable. Even when we decide not to speak or not to make gestures. Non-verbal communication is not intentional, it is not possible to be constantly aware of all messages that we send with our body;
- Non-verbal communication anticipates verbal one. Before communicating with words, individuals have already sent a series of messages (through their clothes, movements, using of space and distance);
- Non-verbal communication is usually considered extremely reliable. It is believed that because it is not always controllable.
- Non-verbal communication can lead many misunderstandings, especially when verbal message is not quite enough.

- Non-verbal communication is very important in situations involving intercultural exchanges. Where, in fact, lack of a good knowledge of language may prevent a fluid exchange of communication, anything that is not verbal assumes a special importance, although it is necessary to know ways and meanings of each different cultural contexts. In fact, cultures establish standards of non-verbal behavior, as well as terms and expressions of individual's emotions.

To sum up it is possible assert that non verbal messages fall into seven main categories: a) body language or kinesics (facial expressions, eye gaze and eye contact, posture and gestures); b) clothing and artifactual communication; c) voice or paralanguage (including pitch, volume, rate and pauses); d) space and distance, or proxemic factors (including both the space that exists between us when we talk to each other and the way we organize space in our homes, offices, and communities); e) color; f) time, or chronemics; and g) touch, or haptics.

A new important figure: the intercultural communicator for a peaceful word

If intercultural communication is an exchange of stimuli, data and information through an interaction between individuals came from different local communication contexts, we can daily come across this type of communication process.

At this point, it should be clear that the access to information is dealing with quality aspect: it is not enough to have an adequate number of information to interact, as it is also necessary to know what the most efficient modes for their transmission are. Moreover, it is important to know what the special relationship that binds every single part of information to the others is, so that it is immediately understandable to all potential stakeholders of communication process. It follows that interculturality can be characterized as an interactive situation in which both or all parties are in presence of quite a large number of new and/or unforeseen circumstances. In fact, in this situation individuals not have access to a code of exchange, nor a universe of meanings that can be assumed as mutually shared, so it become very difficult processing information.

The skills of an intercultural communicator have to deal not only with individual effectiveness and appropriateness in intercultural relations, but also especially with their ability to progressively increase abilities to understand reality, and thus the experience of difference. A communicator dealing with any intercultural encounter must be equipped to²²:

- a *mindset* (a set of attitudes and worldviews);
- a *skillset* (or the combination of skills and practical knowledge).

²² I Castiglioni, 2005, *La comunicazione interculturale: competenze e pratiche*, Carocci, Roma.

Experiencing the possibility to communicate in cross-cultural terms empathy process is crucial. In addition, it must be said that to be a good communicator must have intercultural knowledge and practical experience in order to implement communicative behaviors defined in terms of competence and ability. So, it is possible to define at least six essential characteristics, therefore a good communicator intercultural:

- Should have interest, curiosity about different world vision;
- Should have the ability to track his or her own cognitive stereotypes and arising prejudices; and should have the ability to identify stereotypes and prejudices of others both as individuals and members of (different) social groups;
- Should have the ability to overcome his or her inner discomfort induced by the experience of diversity (*culture shock*²³);
- Should be understanding (comprehension is a cognitive act, to distinguish acceptance).
- Should be continuously available to modify his or her stereotypes from perceived differences in interactions;
- Should have the ability to accept rejection of communication as a possible outcome of the interaction.

To reach a good intercultural communicative competence does not necessarily make individuals better people, but at least they may have the opportunity to become capable people - wherever they want - to take responsibility for collective creation of meaning and for a peaceful social coexistence.

Today a new form of communication is necessary; it should take itself away from the temptation of merging, tolerating and joining together different cultural realities. Intercultural communication today moves towards an horizon much more complex, which offers a new interpretation: in fact it is necessary to promote cultural coordination and cooperation. If it is true that from an encounter between cultures and different individuals may be born conflicts and misunderstandings, it is also realistic that a communication which takes into account the perspective of others is able to build a new social space, a *third context*. Such perspective is opposed to the idea of coherence, on the other hand is aimed at overcoming contradictions through acceptance of conflicts between cultural forms, proposing in this way a new form of management. In fact, it is necessary to transform conflict into comparisons: comparisons should not be evaluative, otherwise we risk creating an ethnocentrism based on difference in value between the best and the worst forms of culture. We should avoid statements of what could be considered fair or unfair, true and false, right and wrong. The new approach asks to pay attention to communication performance. Moving from communication

²³ J.M. Bennett, 1977, *Transition shock: Putting culture shock in perspective*, in «International and Intercultural Communication Annual», 4, 45-52.

performance means to give importance to cultural forms that reflect it. The intent is to grow them and not to put them in opposition.

In this context the idea of *respect* is particularly significant. Respect is an active suspension of cultural form assessment. After such learning, the new cultural form - created by the encounter between different backgrounds - is no longer evaluated in negative terms, as it becomes a new source of shared meaning. Respect is a closer look, participatory and empathetic; it determines a deconstruction of concepts, a disposition to suspend evaluation and to activate a communication process aimed at learning and then at mutual understanding²⁴.

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²⁴ K.Scannavini, 2009, *Pensieri migranti*, L'Harmattan, Torino.

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