Discourse Analysis for Intercultural Competence Development

Phyllis Bo-yuen Ngai, University of Montana, USA

ABSTRACT

This article aims to explicate the connection between discourse analysis and interculturality in intercultural-communication education. Although communication researchers and students have been using discourse analysis as a method to investigate conversations in intercultural situations for decades, interculturality as a concept has been largely untapped in analysis and applications. Drawing from interdisciplinary insights, this article will discuss how the concept of interculturality and the lens of discourse analysis contribute to the study and teaching of intercultural communication. As examples, two different types of intercultural-communication courses serve to illustrate how educators can apply discourse analysis to facilitate development of intercultural competence. Learning outcomes of the two tested courses indicate that cultural discourse analysis, along with critical discourse analysis and ethnography of speaking, promises to be a useful pedagogical approach for facilitating the development of the competence required for dealing with interculturality.

KEYWORDS

Communicative Competence, Conversation Analysis, Ethnographic Approach, Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Education

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to explicate the connection between discourse analysis and interculturality in intercultural-communication education. Although communication researchers and students have been using discourse analysis as a method to investigate conversations in intercultural situations for decades, interculturality as a concept has been largely untapped in analysis and applications. Drawing from interdisciplinary insights, this article will discuss how the concept of interculturality and the lens of discourse analysis contribute to the study and teaching of intercultural communication.

Post-colonialism, globalization, and transnationalism have brought about the unprecedented dense co-existence of heterogeneity within and without national borders (Piller, 2011). To set out to equip the current and future generations to live and work in a new reality that "culture is in a constant state of flux and cross-fertilisation" (Piller, 2011, p. 70) amidst all kinds of diversities at the interpersonal, communal, societal, and international levels, watchful educators are modifying the focus of intercultural education. Academics in a number of fields of study, namely, intercultural-communication studies, multicultural education, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, and anthropology, have challenged the notion of "culture" as a fixed boundary, a static environment, or a constraining force. The emerging vision of "the social and cultural mutations linked to the increasing complexity and heterogenization of the social fabric" is urging a "rethinking of cultural knowledge beyond the form of a knowledge of cultures" (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, p. 478). In order to remain relevant, intercultural-communication education is shifting away from drilling on "banal

nationalism" (Piller, 2011, p. 72) and moving toward nurturing competencies required for the "sphere of interculturality" (Kramsch, 1996, p. 205).

Interculturality is a concept particularly helpful for instructors and learners of intercultural communication. It concerns "the encounter of people from different countries, bearing in mind that they do not just represent a 'culture' but also different social classes, genders, generations, and religions that intersect" (Dervin, 2016, p. 58). In terms of communication, interculturality is "a situationally emergent and co-constructed phenomenon that relies both on relatively definable cultural norms and models as well as continually evolving features" (Keckskes, 2011, p. 67). In other words, interculturality entails interactions between two or more participants of different backgrounds and each has an influence on how the other(s) think, behave, perform, and communicate (Dervin, 2016). It is an evolving, transactional intercultural communication process that involves gives and takes from all interactants.

The notion of interculturality has shifted our attention from the cultural to the intercultural, from the national to the situational. Such a shift is derived from the line of thinking that "it is not possible to fix the nature of particular 'cultures' and then work out how best to help people to communicate between them" (Holliday, 2011, p. 15). Each of us belongs to many cultures, and the combinations of cultural influences vary from person to person. In other words, "cultural realities are individually constructed around individual circumstances, and can transcend national culture description and boundaries" (Holliday 2011, p. 61).

Thus, the goal of intercultural education in today's world of endless and limitless cultural mixing is shifting from communicative competence (Canale and Swain, 1980) to intercultural communicative competence (Bryam, 2009), which denotes the ability "to mediate/interpret the values, beliefs and behaviors" of oneself and of others and to "stand on the bridge or indeed be the bridge" among individuals in intercultural encounters (p.12). To be the bridge in spheres of interculturality, we should no longer drill on the use of pragmatics norms in a particular language, a particular culture, or a particular country. Rather, "intercultures are ad hoc creations" (Keckskes, 2011, p. 67). They are created in a communicative process in which cultural norms and models brought into the interaction from prior experience of interlocutors blend with features created ad hoc in a synergetic way.

Competencies Required For Spheres of Interculturality

From an education point of view, we need to figure out what specific competencies are required for our students to participate successfully in spheres of interculturality. Scholars in various fields have proposed a range of ideas. One insight shared across disciplines is the importance of *critical awareness* that allows for comparisons between self and another so as to bring about mutual respect, empathy, and effective intercultural communication in familiar and unfamiliar situations. Holliday (2011) explains that a critical cultural awareness guides one to "put aside established descriptions, seek a broader picture, look for the hidden and the unexpressed" (p. 27). To develop such an awareness, Abdallah-Pretceille (2006) recommends "learning to discriminate between the essential and the accidental, the universality of the processes and the singularity of their actualization" (p. 479).

For the purpose of developing intercultural competence, analysis is not so much about the abstract cultures, nor about the people as products of the cultures they belong to. Rather, as Scollon et al. (2012) advise, the focus should be on what people are doing and the kinds of discursive tools they use to accomplish the tasks at hand. Along the same line, Abdallah-Pretceille (2006) suggests "less emphasis … [be] placed on form and culture and more on speech acts in interactions…, less on culture as a determinant of behavior than on the manner in which individuals use cultural traits in order to speak, to express themselves verbally, bodily, socially and personally" (p. 480). Baker (2016) emphasizes the need to develop "a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context-specific manner in communication" (p. 81). In applied linguistics terms, Yates (2010) explains that to be interculturally competent is to be able to

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