

## THE RELATION EGO-ALTER IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Adrian LESENCIUC\*, Daniela NAGY\*

\*“Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy, Braşov, Romania

**Abstract:** *In the current paper the relation ego-alter is analyzed, based on the impositions of social and cultural norms. The contemporary society, characterized both by an unstructured mixture of values and elements pertaining to diverse cultural media, and by melting the references, offers ideal circumstances for manifestation mainly to success-oriented actions, and to the detriment of understanding-oriented actions, as Habermas perceives it. This relation type favors the enclosing of the ego, related to the alter, and the double alienation: from the self and from the other. In order to pass beyond the estrangement generated by success-oriented actions, the individual is obliged to resort to understanding-oriented actions, which engage communication through accepting diversity and differentiation.*

**Keywords:** *liquid society, ego-alter, estrangement, cultural pluralism, success-oriented actions, understanding-oriented actions.*

### 1. THE SOCIAL NORM IMPOSITIONS

Zygmunt Bauman described the contemporary society as liquid, meaning that it changes recurrently, in accordance with the cultural crucible [1]. Liquids, which cannot hold a tangential or interaction force while still, characterize a society of liberalization, flexibility, reference melting, mixture of values and representatives of dissimilar cultures. Liquefaction is characteristic to transition periods and the horizons of an informational society have begun to melt old references. Currently a new rigidifying period shapes up and the appearance of force lines will constitute the future society's references.

A cultural mixture, within a liquefied society, doubles the unstructured mixture of values. Confronted face to face, either as a result of modeling economic forces (multinational organizations, labor migration), or as a result of some political pressure, we meet, in most unusual venues, representatives of diverse cultural media, because, should we consider Dilthey, social problems and phenomena need to be studied carefully from the cultural perspective.

In addition, the profound mutations perspective, meaning the liquefaction of the social system, may not have a different answer, but at the interaction level. This means that, individuals belonging to diverse cultures – modeled into different value systems - are confronted face to face and face to living norms dictated by society/civilization. These individuals, whose cultural patterns have been deeply imprinted within the beliefs and convictions system, have their own “brand”, their own manner of relating to the social scale. The beliefs and convictions substratum, deeply structured and constricted by the “society's thinking”, imposed through opinions when related to the civilization's norms, is not the object of sociology.

When meeting the *other*, beyond values, norms and symbols, the interaction is also achieved by “confronting” the rigid systems, of cultural origin. Still, the path toward communication is represented, according to parsons and Shils [2], by the imposition of the social system upon the frame of cultural pattern, so as to regulate a system of values, beliefs or meaningful symbols. Nevertheless, should the relation ego-alter rely on plain

behavior and on the other one's expectations, at the social system level, at the cultural system level, both the ego and the alter relate to the same norms system. Thus, on the one side, the cultural system presupposes relating to the norms system, as well as the regulating reverse flux. Consequently, the individual's thoughts transmitted via language, directly influence the cultural matrix, modifying/fluidizing the relating to the others as long as the cultural patterns become norms.

On the other hand, the relation ego-alter may not be adequate for either of them, even though reciprocity / complementarity is intended. Each of the two will relate to a closure, each will be the beneficiary of a normative transfer that will enclose it in the self, assimilating the "regulating symbols" and becoming the estranged of the crowded society, the stranger near the other, isolated from the malleability of relating to the cultural system and dependent on "others' thinking", imposed though opinions.

In contact with the other, a stable equilibrium is only achieved within the cultural norm but not within the social one, where the instable equilibrium is the actors' characteristic: the *ego* and the *alter*, close to internal collapse, fighting the "stranger nearby" and the stranger inside themselves. Adherence to the social norm, as an apparently immutable reference point, is possible via mass media and it regards strictly the opinions subsystem. To the postmodern individual, the beliefs-convictions-opinions system functions as a tire that becomes flat easily while inside it pressure is automatically regulated by connecting to the informational pump (via television, internet etc.).

Confronted face to face, individuals who relate themselves only to the social norm do not judge the other's values. An external force crushes both their values by the very social system, through informational transfer. A different system of values and norms imposes, estranging the representatives of the multicultural society, who, on the one side, become the prisoners of the net-connected habitat (while being themselves individuals connected to a net), on the other side, fight for the information "dose", once dependence has

been created. Nonetheless, within a medium formed through cultural patterns, "the plurality of actions of individuals that hold common values constitutes, in a way, a sort of defense against attacks to those values" [3].

## 2. THE CULTURAL NORM IMPOSITIONS

Should the social norm represent the path to closure, the language, as manifestation of the langue, is considered a path to an opening toward the other. And should the language, with Saussure, constitute the added sum between *langue* and *parole*, with Beneviste, it constitutes the expression of what "we intend to say", the social convention over what represents the expressing manner of the thinking contents: „*il reçoit forme de la langue et dans la langue, qui est le moule de toute expression possible; il ne peut s'en dissocier et il ne peut la transcender*" [4].

Yet, Beneviste draws attention upon the fact that language develops within a langue, the langue being a culture's product. Moreover, language consolidates culture by building a mutual inter-determination structure, such as:

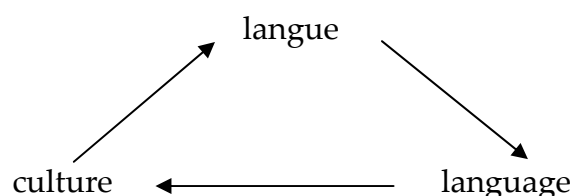


Fig. 1 The Beneviste's model

There is no viable possibility for isolating a term: language, or for constructing it while coagulating some extra-cultural social norms. And this is due to the fact that language is merely the expression of: what we intend to say", and thinking (the flux that regulates the langue relations with the system of representations, namely, the relation language-langue) is the genuine bearer of an individual's identity.

The incapacity of approaching certain codifying rules, certain agreement with regard to language, without relating to specific structures – langue and thinking, determined

by the cultural frame, constitutes the failure of a *lingua franca* imposition, once the internal cultural regulating norms are not shared through it. This happens because there is no similar symmetry relation between langue and language, as well as there is no similar relation between the contents of thinking and language. On the one side, the linguistic convention is static as long as there are no interventions upon it, the denoted meanings are static, while thinking and langue relate to the context. There is no accurate translation of a message analogically expressed through a digitally expressed equivalent (despite the “resolution” degree of the latter), nor can we start from imagining the thinking as lacking contents or the contents of thinking as being independent from the mechanism that brings it to life. This explains, once more, that the relation thinking-language is, in fact, a relation between dynamic and static, the language achieving only the digital “reproduction” of a dense, expanding area, more specifically the image of that area, a simplified temporal decoupage.

In face-to-face circumstances, members of diverse cultures interact through language and by activating their individual experience and own culture. Meanings may vary and any moving away from the denoted meaning may be interpreted fallaciously, such as Umberto Eco predicted.

In such a context, decoding the message implies either applying a mental scheme, acquired as an experience within the cultural medium to which language belongs, or simply “guessing” the intended meanings.

Likewise, the road to the universal is achieved through the national. Lack of experience within the cultural medium, conditioned by language and equally conditioning the language (through the langue), makes communication among individuals impossible. Not only the linguistic opacity of cultures toward one another is activated, but also the individual opacity of those coming into contact, as a result of their own experiences within their original cultural medium, respectively, within a common reference cultural medium.

“Untranslatability”, distinguished either as a phenomenon studied from the literary

perspective (Benedetto Croce), or as a phenomenon perceived from the logic perspective (W. von Orman Quine) determines the impossibility of communication between two linguistic communities, not because of a real untranslatability of the message, but because of the lack of correspondence between the conceptual gaps of the langue.

The only manner of expressing common experience is the acceptance of diversity and differentiation (tolerance also) as modalities of enriching the cultural context. The social norm has to derive from the cultural norm, and the *concordia discors* political system has to exist whenever there is contact between representatives of dissimilar cultures. Giovanni Sartori limits the aberrant decoding of pluralism through social norms imposed by the intended cultural pluralism: “*Pluralism does not equal the plural existence. Mixing the two concepts is similar to placing together, on a Hegelian night, when all cows are black, an African tribe, a system of Indian castes and why not, the lifestyle of the Middle Ages. This is a typical process, which I name the concepts evaporation, in other words, the destruction of clear and distinct ideas*” [5]. The path of communicative consensus is not yet beaten; it has to be instituted through pluralist culture principles, able to create the premises for multiculturalism and not through social or political pluralism that may lead to the individual’s enclosing within his own habitat, such as within a hard shell of hyper-reality, where he interacts with the external world by means of nets.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The liquid society offers ideal conditions mainly for success-oriented actions manifestation, for rational actions related to finalities (*zweckrational*), to the detriment of understanding-oriented actions, in accordance with Habermas’s classification.

Accordingly, the communicative action, under the dialogue logic and within the already mentioned context of teleological dimension prevalence, makes room for an approach to the instrumental action, following the monologue logic.

The social norm guides the action of the individual belonging to a multicultural society toward success-oriented actions, while the cultural norm creates the premises for interaction through the assuming, by the ego and the alter, of identities and roles and through their promotion.

The outcome of this interaction is genuine, non-dissimulated communication, which presupposes aiming at understanding confirmed by real consensus and does not represent a real and complete understanding. *“Competent speakers are aware that each of the consensuses met can be deceiving, however, they suppose, through the deceiving consensus concept, that this consensus may be replaced by a real consensus (which means, in fact, that it needs to be replaced), if understanding must be achieved”* [6].

In order to pass beyond the estrangement toward which individuals torn from their social context are pushed, there is need for a face-to-face confrontation between an individual and the other by appealing to the communicative

action and the social norm that derives from the cultural norm.

#### REFERENCES

1. Bauman, Z., *Modernitatea lichidă*, Bucharest, Antet, 2007, pp. 6-8;
2. Parsons, T., Edward, S., *Valori și sisteme sociale*, in Jeffrey C. Alexander, Steven Seidman, *Cultură și societate. Dezbateri contemporane*, Iași, Institutul European, 2001, pp. 41-42;
3. Parsons, T., Edward, S., *ibid.*, pp. 44;
4. Beneviste, É., *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, I, Paris, Galimard, col. Tel, 1966, pp. 63;
5. Giovanni, S., *Ce facem cu străinii? Pluralism vs. multiculturalism: Eseu despre o societate multi-etnică*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2007, pp. 25;
6. Habermas, J., *Preliminarii la o teorie a competenței comunicative*, in *Cunoaștere și comunicare*, Bucharest, Ed. Politică, Idei contemporane collection, 1983, pp. 208.