

Review of Koutny, Stria, Farris, Michael (eds.) 2020: *The role of languages in intercultural communication / Rolo de lingvoj en interkultura komunikado / Rola języków w komunikacji międzykulturowej*. Poznań: Rys

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Intercultural exchange is undoubtedly a fact of our time. Over the last few decades, globalisation has enabled people from various parts of the world to interact for various purposes, from tourism to business, from education to international politics, from people working abroad to war refugees finding a new home. This trend was further accentuated after the 2020 pandemic, which made distance on-line communication popular and accessible on a very large scale. Despite the bright side of this phenomenon, language remains an issue (not to say a barrier) for intercultural communication.

Indeed, intercultural communication still requires a common language ground. The question of which language to choose for intercultural communication has many aspects and can hardly be comprehended at a first glance. Furthermore, the science of intercultural and international communication has a long history of research in the field of Interlinguistics. It involves, for instance, the investigation on the historical role of prestigious European languages for international communication (such as English today, French and Latin at different times in the past), on the language qualities and properties necessary for a better learning, on the development and applicability of planned languages for international communication (of which Esperanto is the most successful example), among many others. In addition, it touches on an even more difficult subject to address – language policy. The book *The role of languages in intercultural communication / Rolo de lingvoj en interkultura komunikado / Rola języków w komunikacji międzykulturowej*, henceforth *RLIC*, edited by Ilona Koutny,

Ida Stria and Michael Farris (Rys, 2020), constitutes a further step in this long but necessary debate.

The book was published after the Fifth Interlinguistics Symposium, a conference held in the Institute of Ethnolinguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poland, bringing together scholars from many different countries. Twenty contributions from 7 countries (Germany, Spain, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and the USA) were chosen for publication in this volume organised around five different main topics, namely theoretical approaches of intercultural communication; practical approaches of intercultural communication; language policy; language teaching in intercultural contexts and sign languages, each of which represents a different chapter in the book, comprised of three to five contributions. The plan of *RLIC* reflects its collective nature in that it contains articles written by 24 specialists from different cultural backgrounds and with different research experience and expertise – from veteran linguists to PhD candidates, from researchers specialising in specific languages to cultural analysts, pedagogues and language teachers. Thus, the result is an approach to the theme from a very diverse and heterogenous perspective.

Diversity stands out not only in the organisation of the book, but also by the number of languages involved since nearly half of the contributions are written in English, half in Esperanto and a few in Polish. They deal with language and communication problems in Esperanto, English, Japanese, Catalan, Assyrian, Mazandaranian, Spanish and Sign Languages. Despite being of immediate benefit to those interested in Esperanto, *RLIC* is not particularly aimed at this group. In fact, linguists, cultural analysts, specialists in Political Sciences and Language Teaching may benefit from the discussions held throughout this book, which, by the way, is the first volume of the series *Cross-linguistic and Cross-cultural Studies* (the second volume in this series *The international role of Esperanto* came out in 2021).

Chapter 1 Intercultural communication: theoretical approaches proposes a discussion of the very concept of intercultural communication. In the first section, Ilona Koutny presents some concepts on culture, intercultural communication, and intercultural competence. Koutny assesses the disadvantages related to the use of an ethnic language, such as English, as a means of international communication. Then, she discusses the potential advantages of using a culturally inclusive and politically neutral

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language, such as Esperanto. In the following section, Kimura Goro Christoph proposes a comparative study of the use of Esperanto for intercultural exchanges and other different forms of interlinguistic communication (the adoption of the language of one participant in the conversation, receptive multilingualism, mutual intelligibility, English as a *lingua franca*, Latin and interlingual translation). While each of these communication strategies may be useful to some extent, Kimura's study emphasises the unique place of Esperanto as a language for intercultural communication.

The last two sections of this chapter look at other aspects of intercultural communication. Jan Van Steenberg reflects on some zonal constructed languages, that is to say, designed for communication between speakers of typologically close languages (such as *interslavic*, *folkspraak* and *neolatino*). The author provides an overview of zonal constructed languages, discusses their typology and history and, finally, analyses several examples, some of them still existing and promising. Closing the chapter, Vera Barandovská-Frank takes up the concept of *lingua franca*, showing the connections of this concept with the *Lingua Franca of the Levant*. This language often regarded as a pidgin effectively served as an interlanguage between speakers of Romance languages, Greek, Arabic and other languages in the Mediterranean region for a long period of time (between the 11th to the early 19th centuries). Barandovská-Frank also provides some details on the grammar, vocabulary and usage of this language.

Chapter 2 Intercultural communication: practical approaches refers to practical experiences using natural languages for intercultural communication. In the first section, Agnieszka Pawłowska-Balcerska describes the German-Polish Project “Intercultural meetings – Poznań-Bielefeld”, which consists in developing the intercultural competence of university students from these two cities. Jason Shern Ern Fan discusses the problems concerning the use of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by Japanese speakers in Singapore. The study highlights the diversity of English in the world and the inadequacy of teaching EFL based solely on the American or British standards. The author makes interesting contrasts between EFL and Singaporean English both from a grammatical and a sociolinguistic point of view.

Still on the use of English as a *lingua franca*, Elżbieta Pawlas and Michał B. Paradowski analyse the misunderstandings and miscommunications that occur in

intercultural use of English. Basing on the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English, the authors discuss some causes for the frequent communication breakdowns between different speakers of English as well as the strategies they utilize for effective communication. Next, intercultural communication in Esperanto is the subject of the contribution by Sabine Fiedler and Cyril Robert Brosch. The authors describe the main characteristics of the use of Esperanto in an intercultural context, describing some problems that can arise in the use of this language (such as the difference in the level of proficiency of speakers, the influence of L1, the understanding of metaphors, accent and so on) and showing some specific traits of intercultural communication in Esperanto such as the use of metacommunication, repairs and codeswitching. Finally in this chapter, Vicent Manzano-Arrondo raises the debate whether an international language (such as English, used for scientific communication) is more necessary than an intercultural language (such as Esperanto). Based on interviews with speakers of many languages (at least of English and Esperanto), the author problematizes the bias of scientific communication in English and opens up the possibility of more egalitarian and intercultural communication through the use of Esperanto.

Chapter 3 Language policy deals with the complex (and not always conflict-free) relationships between the establishment and use of minority languages in multilingual contexts and the promotion of language policies on a national scale. Nicolau Dols Salas presents the case of Catalan. He examines how this speech community, somewhat oppressed by the prevalence of the majority language in Spain, needs to make a major effort to standardise and normalise its own language so that it can be used in media and in other official contexts. Maciej Paweł Jaskot focuses on the Andalusian variety of Spanish, showing the stereotypes and negative attitudes associated with speakers of this variety. Such attitudes require speakers to fight against language prejudice and a proper policy for language diversity.

Homeira Moradi addresses the issue of the Christian Assyrian and Shia Mazandaranian minorities in Iran. In a multi-ethnic country such as Iran, the survival of many minority languages and cultural identities depends on the language policy undertaken by the state. However, as the text shows, the promotion of Persian as the main language of Iran, for the sake of uniting the entire country, may be threatening these culturally rich minority cultures. Finally, Bengt-Arne Wickström proposes a discussion on language rights, with special emphasis on minority speech communities.

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The author shows that any policy to guarantee language rights must take into account the equation between costs/efficiency and social justice/equity.

Chapter 4 Interculturalism in language teaching looks into the role of intercultural competence for second language teaching. In their article, Maria Coady, Hyunjim Jinna Kim and Nidza Marichal consider the status of the teaching of Spanish in the United States (US). It reveals that Spanish plays a major role in the US language landscape, although there is no unified language policy for its instruction. The result is that Spanish tends to be confined to the native speakers, whereas non-native learners can hardly develop sufficient levels of proficiency. Magdalena Sztencel argues for the need for intercultural strategies for the teaching of English as a *lingua franca*. She shows that approaching global communication in English teaching provides a valuable insight into the types of interactional strategies and intercultural knowledge of students, a competence that help them efficiently communicate in global contexts.

Mónika Molnár underlines the need for intercultural education for children, in order to increase their awareness of their cultural identity and encourage openness toward other peoples and cultures. By recounting her teaching experience with elementary school children, she reveals how Esperanto can become a valuable tool for fostering an intercultural experience in the classroom. Closing this chapter, Jerzy Leyk uses the concept of “plurilingual capital of society” to examine the different models of foreign language instruction in Europe. As a result of this study, it is possible to conclude that while the competence in foreign language is considered a cultural asset, in practice only two major European languages are learnt with relative success in Europe.

Chapter 5 Sign languages approaches an issue that has been little considered in discussions of intercultural communication – Sign Languages as a vehicle for different cultures. Timothy Reagan explores some common difficulties faced by users of sign languages, such as the uniqueness of the deaf community, the extensive diversity of sign languages in the world (*versus* the relatively small number of users of each one), and the struggle for universal recognition of their language rights. The author shows how these problems reinforce the cultural gaps between deaf and hearing language communities. Michael Farris examines three different sign languages aimed to become

languages for international communication – *Plains Indian Sign Language* (PISL), used as an interlanguage by native American tribes until the beginning of the 20th century as well as *Signuno*, an attempt to translate Esperanto into gestures and *International Sign* (IS), a pidgin used by different deaf users of different sign languages. Farris shows that each of these three languages has a particular history and use. While Signuno has not yet managed to bring together a language community and PISL is no longer used, IS remains a promising vehicle of cross-cultural communication for deaf people. The last contribution brings the results of research carried out by Małgorzata Talipska at the Institute of Deaf Studies at Charles University in Prague. The author shows the problems and results of her attempt to create a preliminary prototype of a sentence reproduction test for International Sign.

The editors and contributors to *RLIC* were very successful in approaching the major issue of intercultural communication from different angles and, for this reason, the work is an effective contribution to the debate on the role of different languages for intercultural communication. Through the theoretical discussion on intercultural communication and the empirical evidence put forward in the book, we may be convinced that the use of an ethnic language such as English seems to bring more difficulties than the practicality of its adoption may suppose at first sight. In addition, the book seems to demonstrate that the issue of intercultural communication goes beyond the discussion of the use of English as a *lingua franca*, but brings up some other related discussions on minority languages and cultures and even on sign languages. A third point to be highlighted is the outstanding role that Esperanto, an interlanguage with over one hundred years of history and a small, but stable, linguistic community, can play in fostering more efficient and egalitarian intercultural exchanges.

However, the work seems to lack one facet of the phenomenon, yet to be explored – the role of contemporary forms of digital communication both for the development of language skills and for the acquisition of intercultural competence. In fact, especially after the popularisation of tools for distance on-line conversations, it would be interesting (although perhaps still too soon) to examine their impact on the use and propagation of different languages for intercultural communication, such as Esperanto or English. Do the new forms of intercultural communication mediated by computer have any impact on the use and spread of new alternative languages for intercultural

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communication? This lack, however, does not detract from the work's brilliance and utility, whether for understanding the theoretical framework of intercultural language communication, or as a reference work for the development of further research in the field.