Beyond Factual Knowledge and Symbolic Competence: Interculturality as Transcultural Intersubjectivity*

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ABSTRACT

The trend of globalization has sharpened the debate on interculturality, which scholars examine from different and often conflicting points of view ('content' vs. 'practice', 'culture-specific' vs. 'universal', 'communication (meta)theory' vs. 'communication practice', 'individual' vs. 'collective', etc.). Whereas all these approaches are necessary to describe the multiple dimensions of interculturality, their dichotomous nature does not help to account for its internal complexity, which cannot be dissociated from the connections that exist among all these dimensions. The difficulty posed by the essentialist interpretations that tend to result from these dichotomies is compounded by the fact that in postmodern debates priority has been given to approaches that emphasize individual or collective agency over structural constraints which have to do with political economy or with cultural and linguistic codes and traditions.

This paper aims mainly at suggesting that the dissolution of the boundaries that exist between these approaches should be pursued in order to get a fuller

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and richer approach to their common object of study. After discussing, by way of illustration, content-based and practice-based perspectives, we suggest that one way of getting beyond these dichotomies consists in focusing on the 'interactional' dimension of interculturality, which means laying emphasis on intersubjectivity and, particularly, on the individual subjects considered as members of different cultural communities who strive to transcend their sociocultural boundaries in order to reach harmonious interactions in a world in which inequality and the de-territorialization of people and cultures are central features.

Key Words
interculturality, intersubjectivity, content-based approaches, interaction-based approaches, centricity.

1. Introduction

As one of the effects of globalization, the sharp increase in the de-territorialization of individuals and cultures has sharpened the debate on interculturality, a notion that scholars examine from different points of view ('content' vs. 'practice', 'culture-specific' vs. 'universal', 'communication (meta)theory' vs. 'communication practice', 'individual' vs. 'collective', etc.) which, very often, cannot be dissociated from often conflicting ethno-cultural traditions (Asante 2007, Chen 2009 and Miike 2010). We contend that whereas the dimensions examined in such approaches are necessary to describe the internal heterogeneity of interculturality, their dichotomous nature does not help to account for its complexity, in part because it blurs the multiple connections that exist among all those dimensions. The partiality of the resulting characterizations, consistent with essentialist interpretations of culture, is compounded by the relevance in postmodern debates of approaches that emphasize individual or group initiative or voice over structural constraints which have to do

with political economy or with cultural and linguistic codes and traditions (Collins 2009).

We suggest that the dissolution of the boundaries that exist between these approaches is necessary in order to get a fuller and richer picture of their common object of study, as our discussion of 'content' vs. 'practice' perspectives, particularly the 'content' bias, illustrates. One way of getting beyond these dichotomies consists in an interaction-based view of interculturality. This means laying emphasis on intersubjective communication and, particularly, on the individual subjects, considered as members of different cultural communities who have to transcend their sociocultural boundaries in order to reach more or less harmonious interactions in a world whose main features are inequality among individuals and the de-territorialization of persons, cultures and languages.

2. Dimensions of interculturality

2.1. Interculturality as knowledge

Interculturality has been conceptualized from different perspectives, each of which tends to reduce it to only one of its many dimensions and thus to simplify it as an object of study. Some approaches examine it from the point of view of the cultural contents involved in the learning or interactional process, whereas other focus on practice, or privilege culture-specific or individual -as opposed to universal and collective- perspectives. Central to our discussion here are content-based approaches, which associate interculturality with diverse kinds of information, observable or not. Intended as intercultural competence, interculturality has been considered in these approaches as knowledge, generally of a declarative nature, which clusters around *savoirs* associated with contents or facts (*savoir tout court*), and skills which have much to do with knowledge, as the French terms (*savoir faire, savoir être,* etc.) suggest (cf. Guilherme

2000). Byram, Lengel and Talkington (2004), for instance, define intercultural competence as "the ability to interact in complex cultural contexts among people who embody more than one cultural identity and language". Moreover, they oppose what they consider an intuitive and a reflexive version of intercultural competence. The former obtains through either everyday experience in multicultural settings from the earliest age, or immersion in a *milieu* culturally different from one's own (e.g. a stay abroad). Because it is acquired unconsciously and effortlessly "outside the classroom and beyond the pedagogical influence of the teacher", it is unreflecting and, therefore, may not imply more than mere adaptation. Hence the following dismissal:

> Intercultural competence however is not the ability to adjust, to adapt, to disappear in a new situation among new people. Nor is it an intuitive state [..].

According to Byram, Lengel and Talkington, what crucially lacks in this version of intercultural competence is (critical) cultural awareness, intended as "a conscious capacity and willingness to interact, to mediate, to reflect on the ways in which one is interacting with new people in a new situation". This is, therefore, one crucial feature of (genuine) intercultural competence as intended by these scholars.[1)]

Whereas the characterization of interculturality alluded to above has two parts whose relationship and interaction(s) are seldom discussed, the

1) Reflexive and unreflecting intercultural competence may actually be far from showing so neatly differentiated properties as claimed by Byram, Lengel and Talkington. Thus, unreflecting interculturality is more than the mere "ability to adjust, to adapt" in that it may involve conscious (though not necessarily reflexive) processes, whereas adaptation to a new situation does not mean to "disappear [..] among new people". On the other hand, reflexive interculturality does not necessarily result in an "ability to adjust", and adaptation is not always a conscious process.

reflexive and unreflecting versions of interculturality may be compared only if the cognitive dimension (and thus factual contents as we argue below) is not taken into account. However, insofar as reflexive interculturality is by necessity a result of formal learning, it is rather difficult while defining it to lose sight of contents and, more specifically, of the essentially declarative nature of formal culture teaching and learning. The emphasis on contents has two further consequences. On the one hand, it suggests that between contents and skills there exists a direct link, and indeed, a determinist relation between cultural knowledge and intercultural behaviour. This does not obtain empirically, however, at least if a parallelism is to be drawn with foreign or L2 language learning. On the other hand, the very notion of 'contents' implies a finite and solid interpretation of culture and cultural knowledge (thematic contents), as well as of the ability or skills associated with the culture considered with, as a consequence, an essentialist conceptualization of cultures.[2] From this point of view, cultures are considered as fixed entities ("entités stabilisées et globalisées» (Coste 2009: 168; Zarate, Lévy & Kramsch 2008) and thus impossible to connect otherwise than through the intercultural speaker who supposedly bridges the gap between (any two of) them. This contradicts current approaches which characteristically see cultures as dynamic and complex. Moreover, as will be shown in more detail below, the asymmetry between the two cultures considered in each case affects the process of mediation and the power of the intercultural speaker more generally.

Overall, content-based approaches favour a local interpretation of interculturality, as they necessarily link competence to a given culture and the language associated with it. In this sense, the knowledge and skills subsumed under formally acquired intercultural competence are far

2) Altmayer's (2004) definition of culture as a shared repertoire of knowledge fragments seems to have similar implications (cf. Maringer's abstract at the Arizona Conference on Interculturality 2010).

from sufficient to cope with the demands of a globalizing society in which face-to-face interactions among people from very different and changing social, ethnic, cultural, religious and even political backgrounds are increasingly frequent. In the same vein, the cultural contents have the effect of constraining the range of the other components of intercultural competence, as are skills for instance, by making them less universal and more local than they might be without the influence of cultural contents.

2.2. Interculturality as a symbolic 'space'

Metaphors of space tend to privilege the 'actor' and 'agent' within the intercultural individual. Thus, for instance, Kramsch interprets intercultural competence in terms of symbolic competence and, furthermore, identifies the latter with the notion of 'third place' (cf. also 'third culture' and 'thirdness'). The symbolic component includes, besides the linguistic dimension, systems of thought together with their symbolic power, whereas 'third culture' is a symbolic place defined on the basis of the relation between the poles of the dichotomies that cover language and culture learning and of the heteroglossia within each of the poles (2009: 238). This implies that Kramsch privileges an interpretation of such a place as multiple, subject to change and to tensions, rather than stable, permanent and homogeneous. Furthermore, Kramsch (2009) seems to distinguish two notions of 'third place'. The first focuses on the non-native speaker and, more specifically, on the privileges he may obtain from such a place, whereas the latter concerns the relationship between native and non-native speakers. According to Kramsch (2009: 238), 'third place' is an essentially oppositional place from where the learner of a non-native language may create "meaning on the margins or the interstices of official meanings" by means of a subversive use of that language, question the "social categorization of experience as expressed through [its] vocabulary and grammar" and, more generally, attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct

the signs of that language. When interpreted with reference to the relation of native and non-native speakers of a language, the third space is conceived of as a place of contact or encounter between speakers from different cultures (2009: 244; cf. also Kramsch 2003). In other words, it is a space in which subjects deal with different socio-cultural systems reflected in linguistic signs in their intent to make or negotiate meaning in their daily practice.

Kramsch's characterization of intercultural competence improves on that propounded in strictly content-based approaches in that it is more faithful to the complexity of interculturality. As an illustration of the latter, the fact of considering interculturality situated from the discursive, historical, cognitive as well as symbolic point of view gives much relevance to the communicative processes through which it unfolds and, in consequence, to interaction. However, the two interpretations she proposes of 'third place' raise problems which have to do essentially with issues of power differential and pedagogy, as well as with the heterogeneity inherent in cultural groups. From a pedagogical point of view, Kramsch makes the interesting suggestion that culture can be taught as "a system of signs that has a logic of its own" (2009: 235), although she does not specify what is intended under her notion of culture and how its eventual components may be articulated for such a system to obtain.[3] It is to be noted in this respect that, all of the many dimensions of culture do not seem to allow such adjustments easily. In this sense, culture learning -also required in Kramsch´s approach- may not escape many of the limitations commented on earlier in relation to content-based approaches. Another interesting feature of Kramsch's proposal has to do with the agency of the language learner, which may be linked to what she calls "the privilege of the intercultural speaker" (Kramsch 1998). As observed

3) This, despite in Kramsch's terms, "language teachers can benefit from teaching culture not as a collection of objects, facts and events, but as a system of signs that has a logic of its own."

above, her characterization of the 'third place' locates learners' agency at the margins of native speakers' discourse, and even when she describes it as a space of encounter between native and non-native speakers, she does not deal with the asymmetrical relations of power typical of such encounters, which accounts in part for the marginality of non-native speakers' discourse. [4]This is apparent in the following observation quoted from Bhabha (Kramsch 2009: 237; cf. also 1998).

> Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself,…constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same sign can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.

The presence of native and non-native speakers in Kramsch's approach does not thus prevent the onus of interculturality from being upon the latter, whose behaviour does not seem to alter the status and routines of native speakers.[5] One interesting consequence of the absence of native speakers from the discussion has to do with the cultural spaces between which the non-native speaker is supposed to mediate. The asymmetry between these spaces, due to the power differential between native and non-native speakers, makes mediation difficult and even impossible, since the space associated with the former is a place 'by default' in the sense that the influence of the native speakers and their role in the unfolding of the interaction are not taken into account. Seen in this light, the interstices

4) With respect to issues of power relations, Kramsch (2009: 244, 248) underlines that "[..] because interculturality gives little attention to issues of power differential and conflict within and between cultures, the notion of Third Place risks being seen by some language educators as a romantic excuse for immigrant L2 learners to escape from long-term commitment and social integration into the host society, and for mainstream L2 learners as an opportunity to colonize the other."

5) Thus, the effects of appropriation or rehistoricization processes are not discussed from the point of view of power relations.

or 'third place' to which Kramsch alludes with reference to the intercultural speaker may have much more of a non-place or an illusion of place than suggested by Kramsch. Absence or illusion of place and the fact that intercultural competence is never achieved completely by non-native subjects, as is also the case with linguistic competence, tend to hinder the mediation process, which -at least apparently- makes their work have much more of "making do" (or *bricolage*) than of the expert's craft implied in Byram's model, for instance. From this point of view, the non-native speaker cannot play the role of mediator, nor be self-reflecting, in the unproblematic way suggested by Byram and Kramsch. Thus, against the illusion of the finite nature of cultural contents and skills, Jaeger (2001:53) pointedly notes that "There will not come a time in the life of foreign-language learners when they can consider themselves fully qualified intercultural speakers". In this sense, the discursive empowerment of Kramsch's non-native subjects aside, the implications of her analysis are rather similar to those of the content-based approaches discussed above. Lastly, sight is lost of interlocutors from different cultures who communicate by means of a shared non-native language, and of the strategies they bring to the communicative process in order to solve the cultural problems that arise in the course of their interaction (Canagarajah 2007). In so doing they not only draw on their cultural knowledge and skills, but also make present their personality traits, i.e., their emotions and their affection, besides cognition (McAdams et alii 2010). Such factors are given more importance in interaction-based approaches, as shown below (cf. also Ambadiang & García Parejo Ms.).

2.3. Interculturality as an interactional space

Kramsch's metaphor includes as essential components of interculturality 'third place', skills and knowledge. Her analysis suggests, furthermore, the separation of a linguistic and a cultural component, the former being

a resource by means of which acts of cultural subversion take place in a space whose main property consists precisely in allowing those acts to specific subjects, generally endowed with the status of intercultural speakers. In so far as 'third place' can be seen as resulting from the other two components, Kramsch's analysis does not differ much from content-based proposals, such as Byram's, which typically tend to take culture as a self-contained system, fail to pay attention to the interactional dimension of communicative processes, and discriminate subjects on the basis of cultural competence (cf. 3.2. below). In this, both kinds of approaches contrast with interaction-based interpretations of communicative or intercultural competence such as Dai's (cf. also Chen & Starosta 2008). Dai (2010) refers interculturality to "a space where different cultural perspectives meet" in the form of "complex connections between and among cultures whose members negotiate intercultural agreements and work together to establish reciprocal interactions" (Dai 2010: 14). Crucially, Dai underlines that such a space implies not only commonality, mutuality and reciprocity, but also differences, tensions and even conflict. Likewise, the intercultural space not only builds on cultural commonality and difference, but also produces culture, intended as "a product of both social and intercultural communication" (Dai 2010: 17).

Dai's characterization of interculturality includes many interesting insights. On the one hand, not only is interaction central in the intercultural space, its main aim is agreement. Moreover, insofar as the latter is reached through negotiation, interculturality is not so much dependent on (factual) knowledge (and even skills) as on reciprocity. For reciprocity and collaboration to take place, emphasis is placed on communication and, more specifically, on communicative processes in which interlocutors strive in order to mitigate the effects that their many differences (in terms of culture, group, gender, profession, skills, knowledge, etc.) may have on their interactions. As a result, interculturality may "[..] enhance self-reflectivity and self-transformation, help individuals understand each

other better and [..] make better adaptations" (Dai 2010:14). In other words, commonalities and similarities among cultures "only make up the basis of constructive dialogue and can seldom guarantee mutual understanding and intercultural agreement", given the multifarious kinds of gap that exist between the cultural self and the cultural other, and the fact that the latter are not involved in a symmetric fashion in the communicative process. Hence, the necessity for people from different cultures to negotiate in order to "produce a shared frame of reference" (cf. Dai 2010: 15).

On the other hand, culture is not separated from communication: it builds on it and, at the same time, influences it, with the mediation of the different modalities of interaction involved in the communicative process. The intercultural space may thus be described as emergent and situated, since the way it is constructed depends on the interactions of the subjects or groups involved. Interculturality implies therefore a process of socialization in which, depending on their interests and personality traits, subjects go beyond the boundaries of their own cultural community and venture into another cultural domain. Commonalities and overlaps between and among cultures, many of which are linked to cultural universals (intended as values or ideas related to humanity), constitute the basis of such a process (Dai 2010: 217).

The resulting dynamic conception of culture emphasizes what is common to human cultures, since in the process of co-construction of the intercultural space, their commonalities serve to mitigate, through communicative interactions, the consequences that their differences may have. In this sense, interaction has the effect of modifying the intercultural space from different points of view. On the one hand, the individuals involved undergo transformation from the cognitive (not necessarily factual) and behavioural point of view, since involvement in the intercultural space improves intercultural understanding and enhances the capacity for "accommodating differences and harnessing intercultural tensions" (Dai 2010; Coste 2009:

167). On the other hand, the intercultural space itself is transformed as a result of the changes undergone by the communicators involved in it and their interrelations.

Dai's characterization also privileges the individual subjects and their relation to culture, whether their own or foreign, and does not make any difference between native and non-native speakers. The emphasis on reciprocity accounts for the presence of both kinds of speakers, seen as equals, though Dai does not explicitly evoke moral or ethical demands in this respect. Furthermore, the ongoing and adaptive nature of interculturality and the fact that interaction is intimately linked to negotiation avoids the frustration and anguish that tend to characterize the intercultural speaker *qua* learner (Jaeger 2001), even in a framework such as Kramsch's (1998), which apparently builds on the linguistic and cultural privileges of non-native subjects. Seen in this light, intercultural interaction shows much consistency with Finlayson & Slabbert's (1997) bridge metaphor according to which the interlocutors involved in code-switching in the (South) African context are required to meet halfway, i.e. to collaborate.

Summing up then, content-based approaches consider cultural differences as barriers that may be crossed only by subjects that have attained a certain amount of essentially factual knowledge. However, given the complexities of cultural knowledge, intercultural speakers will never attain such an amount of knowledge and, in consequence they will always act in a cultural space which they know only partially. In absence of native speakers' collaboration, this has the effect of converting them into 'meddlers' rather than genuine mediators, which does not avoid social tensions and conflicts as is the pretension of much interculturality-focused research. By contrast, the starting point of interaction-based approaches is the hypothesis that people are capable of making systematic adaptations, enlarging one's horizon and achieving self-transformation. Thus, according to Dai (2010: 15-16),

> The establishment of interculturality neither leads to the thorough removal of differences nor the end of intercultural tensions. It provides communicators with a shared space where differences and tensions can be constructively managed and changed into creative dynamics.

3. 'Centricity'and the 'content' bias

3.1. 'Centricity' and positioning

Byram (2008: 69) states that acting interculturally presupposes certain attitudes, knowledge and skills that need to be learnt (and taught) for subjects to be able to manage their deepest values as well superficial behaviours. The result of the learning process is an ability to decentre which opposes the intercultural speaker to other kinds of subject defined as "culture centrist", such as the monocultural speaker for instance (cf. Byram 2008: 72). Whereas this categorization concerns individual subjects, another use of centricity focuses on descriptive generalizations of the type discussed in section 2 above. A typical feature of such generalizations is the tendency, noted by Chen & Starosta (2008: 228) for instance, to privilege the variables linked to the message sender or the message receiver over the dyadic or relational dimension of the processes in which they are involved. Insofar as such generalizations are essentialized through their supposed universality, due to their totalizing bias and their tendency to trivialize and even ignore facts and perspectives typical of non-European contexts, many scholars associate them with a Eurocentrist perspective. Moreover, as these critics consider that there can be no effective basis for equitable communication until European exceptionality and Eurocentricity are questioned, they call for adopting a "view of human relationships where centricity becomes the dominant paradigm" as a means to reach what Asante (2007) calls 'co-cultural respect'. This implies to place all cultures in the centre of their particular histories by privileging

assumptions, values, ideas and perspectives that are specific to their geographical and socio-historical contexts (cf. Miike 2006, 2010) with, as a result, a process of de-Westernizing the research on interculturality, and intercultural communication more generally. Two of such contributions, focused on the notions of cultural context and 'third space', will be briefly considered here.

Miike (2010: 2) underlines the relevance of primordial ties, intimately linked to the history of each human community. He notes that, even though such ties as well as cultural particularities tend to be relegated to the background in poststructuralist theories, "communication shapes, and is shaped by, our positions and roles in society, our values and ethics, our memories of the past, and our visions for the future". Therefore, in order to understand the process of communication, researchers must take into account the cultural context in which it takes place with all its peculiarities, and which makes each culture a unique entity. Interestingly, Miike also stresses that cultures may intersect at different spaces and times through what he calls 'transversal values', i. e., values that without being universal cross the boundaries of two or more cultures to which they are common. According to Miike, the notion of 'transversality' has several theoretical advantages over that of universality. On the one hand, the fact that it is about crossing allows for multiple positions and roles, values and memories, as well as viewpoints and perspectives, in contraposition to any form of ethnocentric monopoly. On the other hand, it facilitates research about "humanity in particularity and particularity in humanity", in contrast to the totalizing tendency of universal approaches (Miike 2010: 8). The observations above suggest that the process of reconstructing transversal knowledge from previously deconstructed 'universal truths' may result only from theoretical work, and more precisely from pluricentric approaches to humanity, diversity and communication.

The picture just drawn differs notably from the one propounded in the content-based approaches discussed earlier. The context is doubly

relevant: with respect both to the communicative process and to the cultural tradition in which it takes place. This is not true, however, for other aspects of Miike's discussion. Thus, the uniqueness of cultures may only be conceived of in case one either loses sight of the fact that no culture follows a historical trajectory completely independent of all other cultures, or else constructs such a trajectory exclusively by means of discourse. Miike's discussion only allows the first interpretation which thus needs to be nuanced. Furthermore, the boundaries that are supposed to exist between cultural entities have been questioned together with the ensuing characterization of the latter, very often on the basis of the heterogeneity and mutability observed within them. In accordance with these last observations, then, the differences between pluricentrist approaches and content-based approaches may lessen depending on the dimension of culture that is examined. A more significant similarity has to do with the naturalization of culture, since both kinds of approach typically consider cultures as historical objects rather than emergent processes. This accounts for their common tendency to ignore or overlook the commonalities that may exist among all human cultures.

Centricity, a common feature of the approaches discussed in this section, has thus much to do with socio-cultural positioning, a process by means of which members of a given culture grant relevance to the values, memories, ideas, customs, perspectives, etc., subsumed in it, i.e. subjectively position themselves with their culture as the main or sole reference. As we have already observed, one the effects of such a process is the essentialization of cultures, which is consistent with the fact that all these approaches privilege factual knowledge over interaction, i.e. with what we will call a 'content' bias. As another effect, their theoretical discourse is heavily influenced by the values, memories, customs etc., of the cultures associated with them. However, whereas in non-Western paradigms centricity is the crucial condition for interculturality, Byram considers it as a characteristic of 'culture centrist' (i.e. typically non-intercultural) speakers.

3.2. Illusion of performativity?

In his discussion of co-cultural respect, Asante (2007: 71) quotes Yin (2006) who, drawing upon Bhabha's (1994) notion of 'third space', argues for a third discourse which "should neither impose Western individualism onto cultures that prioritize the collective, nor replace one form of oppression with another". This interpretation of the 'third space' is typical of the pluricentric approaches commented on above. It is also reminiscent of the approach propounded by Kramsch from the point of view of performativity, intended as the "capacity to perform and create alternative realities" (Kramsch 2009: 246). Although Kramsch does not give details of the dynamics that characterize what she calls 'place of encounter', it may be thought as not devoid of tension and conflict, much as is the case with Yin's 'third discourse' and Asante's cultural reivindication. In this light, the 'third place', associated most consistently with the questioning of 'culture (Euro)centrism', may be seen as the result of conquest, a process presumably carried out by intercultural speakers and by non-Western cultures or cultural agents. Many factors may question the performative effects of this process, however. On the one hand, due to the complexity of cultural knowledge and cultural facts, such a process will necessarily be incomplete (cf. Jaeger 2001) and thus lose part of its efficiency. On the other hand, insofar as it does not affect the power differential that characterizes intercultural interactions, its performative capacity will at best be limited to the symbolic dimension of these interactions, since the most important resources of the intercultural speaker in this process, language and discourse, have little impact on structural constraints of a political or sociocultural nature.

In this respect, sight should not be lost on the fact that simulation, fictitious identities or a critical attitude when dealing with a non-native language -or culture for the sake of discussion-, that is, "the deconstruction of [its] signs and their subversive reconstruction" typical of the third

space (Kramsch 2009: 246), do not have the effect of striping such signs of their centricity. In fact, the empowering properties of such activities do not reach beyond the symbolic realm. In this, Kramsch's notion of 'thirdness' contrasts rather sharply with that of Yin and Asante, as the latter focus precisely on the relationship of power and conflict between cultures which they attempt to modify by simultaneously granting their own cultures (more) centricity and decentering (the signs belonging to) the European cultures (Asante 2007, Miike 2010). In consequence, the 'third place' as conceived by Kramsch carries much of an illusion of performativity, at least as far as the social and political circumstances of the speakers are concerned, even in Kramsch's own definition of performativity quoted above. As we will see in the next section, such an illusion does not favour intersubjectivity either, in part because the critical or questioning attitude of Kramsch's intercultural speaker tends to hinder (social) communication, i.e. the encounter with other speakers, whether native or not.

4. Interculturality as transcultural intersubjectivity

This section aims at a characterization of interculturality as an instance of intersubjectivity which typically obtains between members of different cultural communities. To this end, we will comment definitions of both notions on the basis of Dai's (2010) discussion before considering their relationships. On the other hand, the centrality of intersubjectivity in interaction-based approaches requires a brief discussion of the latter.

4.1. Interculturality and intersubjectivity

The models discussed in the preceding section privilege contents over the communicative process, with diverse consequences depending on whether they focus on cultural contents or claim for culture centricity.

In the first case a static interpretation of notions such as culture and identity obtains, even in approaches which conceive identity in dynamic terms, i.e. in association with processes experienced by individuals (Dervin 2010). Since interculturality has mainly to do with non-native speakers and with cognition, and only marginally with native speakers as we have intended to show above, it is not surprising that these approaches do not deal either with issues of power or with interaction (Ambadiang & García Parejo Ms., in press; see also Dervin 2010). In other words, in approaches which focus on the relationship between non-native subjects and the foreign language they use rather than the native speakers of that language, interculturality does not necessarily imply intersubjectivity. Such occurs even in approaches based on dialogism, in part because notions such as Kramsch's 'third place', sometimes intended as an oppositional (and not a dialogical) space, do not always match a genuine dialogical pattern. Discussions that are typical of 'culture centrist' approaches, on the other hand, suggest that they not only assume a static conception of cultures, intended as permanent, homogeneous, and impervious to the effects of contact with other cultures, but also an interpretation of communication in terms of culture interaction.

From this point of view, it can be said that these models lose sight of the importance of discourse and interaction in intercultural dynamics and, more specifically, of the intersubjective dimension of the latter. They tend to ignore or overlook the commonalities that exist among human cultures (cultural universals, transversal values, etc.) or to exaggerate the differences between them. On the other hand, the relevance they grant to formal learning in the acquisition of interculturality leads them to neglect the intercultural dynamics typical of multicultural contexts, and the strategies speakers bring to the communicative process in order to solve the cultural problems that arise in the course of their interaction. In this sense, they have the effect of solidifying cultures and encouraging people to hold their identities.

In contrast, approaches based on interaction cannot discard intersubjectivity because if social interactions consist in part in engaging in another's world or playing the role of the other, such processes can obtain only through intersubjectivity. According to Dai (2010), from which this section draws, the notion of intersubjectivity refers to the interpersonal connection between individuals who are [culturally] attuned to one another and construct social relations. In such an intracultural context, individuals interpret things on the basis of the same cultural knowledge, and intersubjectivity is constructed in reference to a shared generalized other (Dai 2010: 13). More generally, interpretations of the concept of intersubjectivity typically emphasize its relational dimension, as evidenced in terms such as 'mutual adaptation', 'negotiate', 'agreement', etc., which recur in the definitions propounded (cf. Coelho & Figueiredo 2003: 196; Marková 2003). However, as will be shown below, intersubjectivity is not limited to intracultural contexts. Interculturality, on the other hand, has to do with the "complex connection between cultures whose members negotiate to reach agreements and achieve reciprocal interactions" (Dai 2010: 14). These individuals, who tend to differ both in their cultural background and their first language, communicate as cultural spokesmen, besides having recourse to different frames of reference. Because of these differences, "interculturality is constructed on the basis of cultural overlaps and human universals" (Dai 2010: 16).

As for the relationship of interculturality and intersubjectivity, Dai notes that although they have a similar structure, their operational mechanisms differ, in part because of the differences between the subjects involved, the most important of which has to do with whether the subjects have recourse or not to the same cultural background and the same language. Furthermore, Dai argues that interculturality results from a transformation of intersubjectivity that occurs when "people engage in intercultural communication and become re-socialized into a larger intercultural community", i.e. beyond the boundaries of their cultural community (2010:

12). In this sense, intersubjectivity and interculturality act upon each other and, moreover, can be mutually transformed. Thus, intersubjectivity "facilitates social communication and paves the way for the development of interculturality", whereas interculturality "broadens people's horizons and enriches intersubjectivity" (Dai 2010: 16). In 4.2., we contend that the opposition subsumed under this sequence is both unnecessary and problematic.

4.2. Interculturality as transcultural subjectivity

According to the brief description above, interculturality and intersubjectivity may be compared along diverse dimensions, only two of which will be dealt with here, in our attempt to characterize the former notion as an instance of intersubjectivity: their relationship and the properties that constitute each of them. We will deal with the properties first.

Dai (2009) lists qualities such as openness to cultural others, flexible and reflexive thinking, willingness to negotiate difference, the ability to integrate diverse cultural elements into a coherent whole, as well as the potential to achieve identity extension as the result of intercultural socialization or interculturality construction. This does not mean, however, that all these qualities are necessarily present in all intercultural subjects nor that they may not be found in diverse stages of development. It thus makes sense to speak of intercultural competence in the plural (cf. Zarate 2003: 113), and to consider interculturality as consisting in many components which may show multiple asymmetries. Thus, openness may be the most developed intercultural quality in a given subject, and willingness to negotiate in another. On the other hand, such properties are neither typical of intercultural subjects nor exclusive to them, contrary to Dai's observations. Even though they are made more robustly manifest in intercultural contexts, they can also be observed in intracultural contexts and, in this sense, they also define intersubjectivity. From this point of

view, interculturality and intersubjectivity may not differ with respect to the dimensions that constitute them and their properties, which means that the differences between them have more to do with degree and context than nature. This fact, together with the idea that intersubjectivity is a more general mechanism than suggested by Dai (2010), leads to question the oppositional relationship between these two notions.

Another aspect of the relationship of interculturality and intersubjectivity has to do with their temporal sequencing. According to Dai (2010: 16-17), intersubjectivity transforms into interculturality as a result of culture and identity extension. In other words, the latter is a development of the former, in the sense that exposure to other cultures broadens one's cultural horizons, effecting transformations in cognition as well as in communicative practices. However, the sequential interpretation of the acquisition of intersubjectivity and interculturality may be questioned on the basis of observed facts. We have just seen that they share many of their properties.[6] Likewise, the fact that interculturality may be acquired very early in life, i.e. without any previous process of intersubjectivity or intraculturality construction, seems to contradict such an interpretation. No difference shows, furthermore, in the acquisition process, as in both cases explicit learning is not necessarily (or always) required. In fact, both may be acquired through socialization or in informal contexts, leaving aside the fact that theoretical discussions focus on the formal learning/teaching of interculturality (cf. Byram, Kramsch, and Zarate et alii (2008), among other references here) but not of intersubjectivity. Lastly, as Dai (2010: 18) judiciously points out, both intersubjectivity and interculturality crucially depend on interaction and imply negotiation without discarding tension and conflicts, in the sense that in both cases "difference is not

6) As a "mechanism that hangs individuals together and facilitates social communications" (Dai 2010: 12), intersubjectivity may not operate differently from interculturality whose properties, in turn, are also present in intersubjectivity.

only legitimized, but also appreciated and treated as a dialogue promoter."

The observations above allow us to consider interculturality as an instance of intersubjectivity and, more specifically, as intersubjectivity among subjects from different cultural backgrounds. As evidenced in multicultural contexts, the subjects solve the problems that arise in their interactions by means of very general adaptive skills whose efficiency tends to lessen as the intercultural space widens. Even though these skills are acquired in socialization processes which typically refer to two cultures, the cognitive and behavioural results of the acquisition process concern all the intercultural space. In this sense such effects, i.e. the qualities subsumed under interculturality, may not be limited to any culture (or any two cultures) and in consequence interculturality is better seen as transcultural intersubjectivity (cf. Jaeger 2001). It is intersubjective in the sense that it underlies all interpersonal relationships as well as social communication, whereas its transcultural nature derives from the fact that it may cut across (any of) the human cultures, in contrast to content-based interculturality which, by definition, deals with cultures taken in pairs.

The observations adduced in this section thus call into question the opposition of the notions of intersubjectivity and interculturality. We have argued above, on the basis of their similarities, that such a relationship is unnecessary once it is specified that interculturality (or transculturality) operates between members of culturally different communities. With respect to the problematic side of the opposition, the following excerpt of Dai's discussion may not cohere with observations of the same scholar commented on above. Dai (2010: 18) considers that

> [..] intercultural communication becomes possible with the extension of intersubjectivity and the development of interculturality.

If our understanding of this last observation is correct, intercultural communication is possible only after, and more specifically as a result

of, two processes: the extension of intersubjectivity and the development of interculturality. Note that such an interpretation is in contradiction with a characterization of interculturality and intersubjectivity as emergent processes or constructions which enhance each other and, furthermore, are influenced by the communicative processes within which they unfold. Thus, according to Dai (2010: 14-15),

> Intercultural ties usually first appear in geographically neighbouring communities and then in those societies that have economical, political or cultural interactions. It can be fostered by trade, wars, immigration, cultural integration or other forms of communication.

What is suggested in this last observation is that interculturality -and thus intersubjectivity- is constructed through social interactions and, therefore, may be seen as a "product of social communication" (Dai 2010: 12), i.e. an emergent intersubjective process which typically occurs in a multicultural (and multilingual) context.[7)]

5. Final remarks

Current trends of globalization have added a great deal of complexity in communicative processes. In such interactions, a subject may belong to any of the multifarious cultural (and linguistic) communities that exist in the world. Moreover, any dimension of subjects' identities (cultural, social, gender-related, generation-related, etc.), skills and knowledge may be placed in the foreground by themselves or their interlocutor(s). We have argued that the considerable variation observed with respect to contexts as well as to interlocutors' identities questions any interpretation of interculturality based on specific cultures (taken in pairs). We have attempted

7) According to Dai (20101: 18), strategies such as cultural hybridization, appropriation and transplanting facilitate the growth of intercultural space.

to show that approaches based on this kind of interpretation tend to focus on (thematic) cultural contents or else interpret cultures in 'ethnocentric' ways. Insofar as the outcome of the acquisition process, as defined in these approaches, is necessarily limited to the space relating to two specific cultural communities, it may not be helpful in the open intercultural space that results from globalization processes. This observation has two interesting consequences, discussed above, which have motivated the characterization of interculturality as transcultural intersubjectivity as well as the questioning of content-based interpretations of interculturality.

One of the main aims of the paper has been, therefore, to show the transcultural nature of interculturality. We have suggested that content-based approaches are local by definition, as they imply that the contents of each culture are considered separately, whereas interaction-based approaches such as the one outlined here are well fitted to deal with the variability of contexts and interlocutors, as well as the complexity inherent in the interactions the latter are involved in. Thus, as Jaeger (2001: 56) pointedly notes, the competences corresponding to an open intercultural space such as the one which exists today can only be defined "on the basis of a transcultural (supra-cultural, universal) stance, not an intercultural one". From our point of view, the transcultural nature of interculturality derives from the fact that it may cut across (any of) the human cultures, in contrast to interculturality which, by definition, deals with specific cultures (generally taken in pairs). It is, moreover, trivially intersubjective, as it underlies any interpersonal relationships as well as social communication.

The other aim has been to question the validity of content-based approaches. We have attempted to show that factual knowledge is neither sufficient nor necessary for interculturality to obtain. On the one hand, the relationship cultural between knowledge and behaviour is not a direct one. On the other hand, as evidenced in genuinely multicultural and multilingual contexts such as Africa, for instance, the scarcity of (formal)

factual knowledge does not hinder interculturality, intended in adaptive terms. In the same vein, our discussion also questions the validity of symbolic competence, mainly on the observation that the oppositional interpretation of the 'third space' does not favour intersubjectivity and, by way of consequence, may have the effect of preventing interculturality.

We thus suggest that interculturality is beyond intercultural competence, intended as factual knowledge and symbolic competence, in the sense that practical skills and intersubjectivity, rather than knowledge and cognition more generally, are crucial for it to obtain. This ultimately means that, against Byram, Lengel & Talkington's dismissal, the focus should be on interactions as they unfold (especially in genuinely multicultural contexts; cf. Canagarajah 2007, Makoni & Meinhof 2003) and, by way of consequence, on the subjects naturally -i.e. unreflectingly-involved in them (Matthey & Simon 2009: 10), in order to observe the cognitive and behavioural transformations that eventually obtain as a result of communicative processes which have much of intercultural socialization.

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