

## THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN THE “OWN” AND THE “OTHER” AT THE METALINGUISTIC LEVEL OF CROSS- CULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE ACTS

*The paper is a theoretical overview of the opposition between the “own” and the “other” at the metalinguistic level of cross-cultural communicative acts. The topic is discussed within the theoretical frameworks of Translation Studies, Cultural Semiotics and Pragmalinguistics. Special attention is paid to the concept of intentionality in the process of delineating the “own” from the “other”, which in its turn is viewed as a culture-bound phenomenon emerging on the cross-cultural discourse level through culture-bound elements.*

**Key words:** *identity, meta-communication, ownness, otherness, ego, alter, culture-bound element (CBE), management of CBEs, cross-cultural communication, cultural semiotics, translation*

The research on the binary opposition of “own vs. other” usually revolves around the concepts of “ego” and “alter”, gaining importance within the studies of modern societies. The theoretical background of the topic has been enriched considerably by contributions from the fields of Semiotics and Sociology, particularly, thanks to the works of Bakhtin, Lotman, Sonesson and others. Generally, this theoretical background develops in response to a number of issues that prove to be of paramount importance for ensuring the stability and sustainable development in the globalizing world – the interrelation between different groups and subcultures in societies, as well as the interaction between the majority and the minorities of a given society. Still, the perception of the “other” and man’s automatic or deliberate “classification” of people, things and phenomena as “close/familiar” (own) or “distant/alien” (other’s), according to their origin, function and/or character, constitute the core of the problem. The study of the following topics adds to the knowledge on the workings of human mind in modern societies, as well as sheds light on the ways in which human world outlook is being built up.

Theories remotely describing “otherness” were proposed in various disciplines ranging from Sociology to Translation Studies and Cultural Semiotics. However, an interdisciplinary study of the topic would necessitate the development of a comprehensive approach based on general theories existing in the sphere of Cultural Semiotics and Anthropology. The justification behind this “bias” is based upon the fact that Cultural Semiotics represents a unique synthesis of modern theories developed within the ever-expanding disciplines of Cultural Studies, Intercultural Communication and Translation Studies, linking also to Linguistics and Semiotics. It offers a blend of ideas that have resulted in such groundbreaking theories as those of the representatives of the Tartu School. Echoing to the findings of the mentioned school are those of Göran Sonesson who has researched the topic of “ego” and “alter” viewing it within the context of the globalizing world /Sonesson, 2002/.

Cultural Semiotics, on the other hand, provides a wider framework for explaining

the opposition between the “own” and the “other”. Here, the anthropological viewpoints are also included according to which the mentioned opposition is bound up with the concept of self-identification. To clarify what has been said, we can take the example of any ethnic group which represents a minority in a given society. For instance, the Yezidi population constitutes an ethnic minority in Armenia. The seclusion of the Yezidi people in socio-cultural terms (in certain cases also demographically), can lead to them being perceived as “other” by native Armenians and vice-versa. The perception of the “other” in the relationship between the minorities and the majority of a society is explained within the framework of the theory on “*canonical*” vs. “*inverted canonical*” models developed by the followers of the Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics /Sonesson, 1999/.

The problem of perception of the “other” closely relates to the problem of ethnic and cultural identity as well. The latter is also an important issue in Translation Studies where identity is actually perceived through the translated work. Translation, according to Jiri Levy, is a process of decision-making where the translator makes a choice whether to lay the emphasis on the source culture or on the target one. Moreover, in Intercultural Studies the notion of ‘culture’ is defined as the ‘whole way of life of a distinct people...’ /Williams, 1981: 11/, its ‘total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behaviour, social habits’ /Richards et al., 1985: 70/. It is obvious how closely Translation Studies relates to Intercultural Communication and Sociology, contributing to a unified arsenal of theoretic material for the whole sphere of the Humanities.

Consequently, the topic of “ownness” and “otherness” can be studied through translators’ experience as well. Unlike people of other professions, translators regularly deal with the mentioned dichotomy, where the preservation of identity remains among one of the biggest challenges: suffice it to mention the difficulty of preserving the complete bundle of characteristics of the original work while trying to recreate the author’s idea in conformity with the TL culture (formal equivalence vs. dynamic equivalence). Although Translation Studies provides a linguistic and extra-linguistic study of the linkages between two or more cultures, it does not cover the issue of the opposition between the “own” and the “other” if we delve into further/other subdivisions of ‘culture’, e.g. subcultures or ‘idiocultures’ (the level of the individual) and ‘diacultures’ (the level of a group/organisation) as opposed to the ‘paraculture’ (national or ethnic culture).

Hence we suggest that a theory of “ownness” and “otherness” should encompass the idea of belonging to a *culture*, be it on an *individual*, *organizational*, or *ethnic* level of the mentioned phenomenon. If we take the mentioned levels as points between which the communication is deemed as *intercultural*, then the opposition between the “own” and the “other” can be traced across any two levels. Moreover, it can and should be studied through the discourse phenomena pertaining to any of those levels (idiocultural, diacultural or paracultural discourse). An example from the diacultural discourse level would be a political party leader using the word “we” to denote the party and its followers, as opposed to “them” – the opposition.

In order to explain the reflection of the opposition between the “own” and the “other” in cross-cultural communicative events, we have suggested to use for the notion of *culture-bound elements* (CBE) as features representing the effect or outcome

of the act of delineating cultural spheres (Compare with Lotman's concept of *semiosphere*). The management of culture-bound elements by human mind starts with the realization of points of equivalence vs. non-equivalence across two different cultures. At the pure linguistic level it is generally characterized by the notion of foreign language competence. Roger Bell describes the correlation of L1 and L2 from the perspective of the development of language skills in bilinguals. The author maintains that the *subordinate* bilingual constructs a sentence by establishing a link of equivalence between L1 and L2 units which is characteristic of foreign language learners in the early stage and is quite different from the conceptual approach implemented by *compound* and *coordinate* bilinguals. In fact, in the process of second language acquisition all the individuals outlive a progress moving from the group of subordinate bilinguals to that of coordinate bilinguals, where communicating in the foreign language they actually start to feel that they are "thinking in the given language" rather than "translating from their own" /Bell, 1976: 123/.

Proceeding from and building on the concept of bilingual competence we have proposed to consider also the factor of intentionality, which has resulted in the following explanation of the occurrence of CBEs. Whatever the level of the aforementioned competence (both pure linguistic and intercultural communicative competence), CBEs are managed by each individual in the process of their communication with the representatives of their own or other cultural spheres. Merely because of the level of competence, plus the presence or absence of intentionality, we can deal with either *active* or *passive management of CBEs*. Active management of CBEs is understood as the "conscious" use of loan-patterns (in the broadest sense of the word) in light of their function and adaptability to the TL context. Examples of active management of CBEs can be observed from pure linguistic to paralinguistic and extralinguistic levels: e.g. morpho-syntactic calques – "nonnative approximations" or negative transfers, the introduction/preservation of accent and speaking habits, including the processing of nonnative linguo-cultural data in one's native linguo-cultural dimensions (turn talking rules, body language, spacio-temporal perceptions, etc.).

As opposed to the active management of CBEs, passive management bespeaks a low level of cross-cultural awareness or pragmatic competence in Chomsky's terms and implies a low degree of intentionality from the speaker's part, thus taking the meaning of the message to the meta-communicative level. A very basic mechanism in which it is reflected at the linguistic level is represented by calque or borrowing.

Viewing these features in light of the information-communication distinction, we can clearly define that in the case of the active management of CBEs we deal with *communication*, whereas passive management of CBEs simply yields *information*, since if in the first case CBEs are intended, in the second case they happen as completely unintended elements /Anolli e Ciceri, 1992: 46/.

Bearing in mind the parallel between Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication, we may describe the process of transfers at the idiocultural level through the use of statements formulated in direct speech which pertain to the meta-linguistic subconscious level. Below, the shift from the conventions of one linguo-cultural sign-system to those of another is conventionally marked by the word "translate":

1. *“I don't know that I am translating”* - in this case the bilingual is not conscious of the transfer, be it on phonetic, morphological, syntactic or pragmatic levels. Consequently, the CBEs penetrate into the communication stream in an automatic way. Such is the case of compound bilinguals or individuals who were brought up in bilingual families; besides the ordinary cases of code-switching, their speech contains a vast number of CBEs.

2. *“I don't want to translate: it takes place as a mechanical process”* - in this case the bilingual acknowledges his/her mistake after backtracking in an analytical recourse to the communicative act. In such cases we deal with a passive management of CBEs, where the message yields interpretation at the meta-communicative level which may not be intended by the speaker.

3. *“I know that I am translating and I am doing it intentionally”* - this model includes all the instances when the shift from one sign-system to another is a purposeful action. The speaker not only realizes the shift, but has planned it before. This is the case of active management of CBEs.

The third model can be further discussed against the theoretical backdrop from TS (interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic translation) and Cultural Semiotics (application of the canonical or inverted canonical models).

Both in the case of the active management (communication) and in that of the passive management of CBEs (information) taking place in a communicative event, we deal with an act of prescribing a specific value to the linguocultural element simply by having/preferring it instead of something else (e.g. having/preferring an accent in one's own speech).

The discussion above leads us to infer that linkages between several philological disciplines can provide justification for the use of a comprehensive theory to study the topic of 'otherness'. However, given the fact that language as a sign-system for human communication, is the first and foremost means of contact with the "other" it is also a means of identification, as long as through language, we indicate group membership and mark group boundaries, whether at the national, regional or local, ethnic, political, or religious level /Clyne, 1994: 2/.

At the level of the message culture-bound elements imply the inherent opposition between the "own" and the "other", outlining boundaries to the semiospheres, defined by Yu. Lotman. Operating at the meta-communicative level, CBEs have a decisive impact on the outcome of communication proper.

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**Գ. ՂԱԶԱՐՅԱՆ – «Յուրայինի» և «օտարի» հակադրությունը միջմշակութային հաղորդակցական ակտերի վերլուծական մակարդակում.** – Հոդվածում քննության է առնվում «յուրայինի» և «օտարի» հակադրության խնդիրը միջմշակութային հաղորդակցության վերլուծական մակարդակում: Այն քննվում է թարգմանաբանության, մշակութային նշանագիտության և գործաբանական լեզվաբանության տեսական դրույթների շրջանակներում: Առանձնահատուկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում նպատակայնության հասկացությանը՝ որպես «յուրայինի» և «օտարի» գատորոշման գործընթացի մաս: Վերջինս իր հերթին դիտարկվում է որպես մշակութային պայմանավորվածություն ունեցող երևույթ, որն իր արտահայտությունն է գտնում միջմշակութային դիսկուրսի մակարդակում՝ մշակութային պայմանավորվածություն ունեցող տարրերի միջոցով:

**Բանալի բառեր.** ինքնություն, վերհաղորդակցություն, յուրային, օտար, մշակութային պայմանավորվածություն ունեցող տարր (ՄՊՏ), ՄՊՏ կառավարում, միջմշակութային հաղորդակցություն, մշակութային նշանագիտություն, թարգմանություն

**Г. КАЗАРЯН – Оппозиция «свой-чужой» в металингвистическом плане межкультурного коммуникативного акта.** – В статье описывается оппозиция «свой-чужой» в металингвистическом плане межкультурного коммуникативного акта. Изучение проблемы проводится в рамках теории переводоведения, семиотики культуры и прагмалингвистики. Особое внимание уделяется концепту интенциональности в процессе разграничения «свой-чужой», что в свою очередь рассматривается как культурно-обусловленный феномен, выявляющийся на уровне межкультурного дискурса через культурно-обусловленные элементы.

**Ключевые слова:** идентичность, метакоммуникация, свой, чужой, культурно-обусловленный элемент (КОЭ), управление КОЭ, межкультурная коммуникация, семиотика культур, перевод