BAAL / CUP seminars 2009

Key Themes in Intercultural Communication Pedagogy
University of Sheffield, July 9 & 10, 2009[1]

The seminar, organised by Jane Woodin, Gibson Ferguson, Valerie Hobbs and Lesley Walker, (School of Modern Languages & Linguistics and School of English, University of Sheffield) aimed to bring together those working in intercultural communication pedagogy largely – though not exclusively - in the higher education sector. It drew inspiration from the growing number of courses with an intercultural element, from stand-alone modules and training courses to Masters' degrees.
　　As a starting point the seminar proposed some questions which had arisen from the BAAL 2008 conference colloquium on 'Discourses Communication and Interculturality':

- What contribution can a discourse approach make to the learning/teaching of intercultural communication?

- How far is intercultural communication necessarily interdisciplinary in nature? And what are the implications for teaching/learning?

- How can the mismatch between textbook accounts of intercultural encounters and the reality of such encounters be best developed from an educational perspective?

- Within SLA, how easily does an intercultural approach sit with syllabi whose main focus is on language learning?

　　There were 27 seminar participants, with teachers and researchers from a variety of pedagogical contexts, both from the UK and elsewhere. It was well-attended by postgraduate students, two of whom gave papers. Participants came from the Universities of Aveiro (Portugal), Balamand (Lebanon), Birmingham, Durham, Huddersfield, Melbourne (Australia), Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham Trent, the Open University, Sheffield, Warwick and Westminster, and Cambridge University Press.
　　There were two keynote speeches, seven 40 minute presentations and 3 – 4 hours of discussion over the two days either in plenary or small groups to allow for plenty of engagement with the seminar content. Cambridge University Press also arranged a 'vox pop' for their new Applied Linguistics website.
　　Helen Spencer-Oatey's (University of Warwick) keynote speech 'Developing 'Global People': insights from International Partnerships' on the first day described experiences from setting up the eChina-UK programme, and the main issues which this long-term collaborative project needed to face. This included communicating about the project itself, such as goal priorities, communication mechanisms, identifying common ground and building relationships. Identified as fundamental to any intercultural project with

international partners was the need to plan for the establishment of shared knowledge within the project planning itself.

Tony Young (University of Newcastle) reported on the results of research into intercultural communicative competence and English language teachers' beliefs and practice in three countries, raising the issue that while teachers – both native and non-native English speakers – enthusiastically welcomed an intercultural approach, they found obstacles to its practical integration into their teaching. Richard Fay (University of Manchester) offered a reflexive account of the difficulties of setting up intercultural courses with either a lack of institutional support or over-interference in the content of courses in an institutional attempt to 'internationalise' the curriculum.

Jane Woodin (University of Sheffield) provided evidence from research into tandem learners' identification of their language learning partner as native or non-native speakers, using this to raise some issues relating to the implications of a shift from a native-speaker role model to that of the intercultural speaker. Sonia Galluci (University of Birmingham) focused on the Year Abroad experience and in particular the role that emotions play in sojourners' intercultural sensitivity development and attitude to difference, arguing for the importance of considering emotional development.

Mike Byram's (University of Durham) keynote speech 'Intercultural Communication Pedagogy as Training and Education',on the second day, focused on teaching courses in 'intercultural communication'(IC) in institutions such as universities and suggested we consider how the teaching of IC relates to the general purposes and aims of formal institutions of education such as universities who, because of their funding and relationship to the state, have a responsibility to society as well as having their own autonomy and freedom to educate as they consider appropriate. He considered the concepts of '*Bildung* and Liberal education', 'criticality', 'education for citizenship' and 'training and education' and the dichotomy between them with reference to the teaching of IC.

Celia Thompson (University of Melbourne) considered the value of a dialogic approach to intercultural communication. She offered some examples of intercultural teaching/learning activities in the light of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and post-structuralist theory. Adam Brandt (University of Newcastle) presented a microanalysis of skypecasts in an international discussion group to show how the relevance of interculturality in these interactions changed on an ongoing basis. His findings explored the ways in which cultural identities were drawn upon as interactional resources by interactants who contested, negotiated and co-constructed culture and cultural practices. Carmen Lucas (University of Aveiro) reported on research into early years communication development and the implications for intercultural communication pedagogy. She argued that this vital point in children's lives is ripe for the development of intercultural competence and proposed that intercultural sense is created progressively and implicitly within children's identities, preserving their own identities at the same time.

Issues which were discussed in relation to the seminar questions led to the identification of two major foci within intercultural communication pedagogy: that of pedagogy itself and that of analysis of intercultural interactions and in particular a consideration of what it is that makes an interaction intercultural in itself. There was also some discussion around theoretical positions in intercultural communication pedagogy,

such as the replacement of the native speaker role model with that of the intercultural speaker, and the implications for pedagogic practice.

Questions were raised as to the need to define more clearly central concepts such as intercultural awareness, and the concept of criticality. It was acknowledged that intercultural communication pedagogy is a pedagogy for change within the person; with this was wide recognition of the need for framed and conceptualised experiential learning, and the need for a supported process-oriented approach to intercultural development. Ethnographic approaches were highlighted as relevant for this, as well as calls for working together more closely across the traditional training-education divide.

Discussions were also held around the need for clarification of key terminology within the intercultural communication field, and how it links to other research areas within applied linguistics such as L2 acquisition. Further areas for research within the field were identified, among which were:

- further work on identification of establishing common ground in intercultural pedagogy, and on the implications of intercultural interaction research for the pedagogy of intercultural communication
- comparative studies of intercultural pedagogy
- continuing exploration of the relationship of the IC pedagogy to other more established areas within applied linguistics

One immediate outcome of the seminar was vociferous support for the suggestion by Tony Young to set up an Intercultural Communication SIG within BAAL; this is now underway.

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