

Introduction

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Pages ix–xi of

Dialogue and Culture

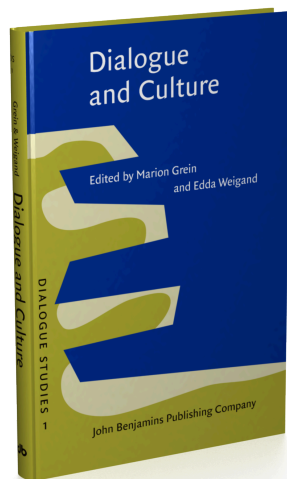
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Introduction

The core of this volume is made up of a strict selection of contributions to an IADA workshop on “Dialogue and Culture”, organized in September 2006 by Walter Bisang and Marion Grein at the University of Mainz. The selection of the papers is guided by a unified conception pursuing a double goal, namely to cover the issue in general as represented in the research discussion and to focus in particular on one group of approaches which starts from the interaction of different components in what might be called ‘the mixed game’. In order to present such a concept it was advisable to invite some contributors who did not participate in the workshop.

There are today approximately 6900 languages spoken in our world. Dialogue across the boundaries of languages, countries and cultures has become an unavoidable necessity of our life in the 21st century. Cross-disciplinary research is called upon to tackle the big questions of how human beings come to grips with the complex challenge of various types of dialogic interaction in ever-changing surroundings. Looking at the state of the art in the field of ‘dialogue and culture’ we might be baffled by the multiple and in part extreme and controversial positions taken. At the centre we are faced with what has been called the ‘language-instinct debate’, a debate between two extreme positions, the nativist and the empiricist, concerning the issue of what determines language. This debate is dealt with in the first part of this volume by *Sampson’s* radical position, on the one hand, and *Weigand’s* mediating position of sociobiology, on the other hand. These two contributions set the framework of the discussion about ‘dialogue and culture’.

In Part II the focus is on different theoretical positions, and some more empirically oriented studies are presented in Part III. All of these papers, theoretical as well as empirical, belong, to some extent, to an approach which focuses on the interaction of components in the mixed game.

The ‘theoretical positions’ in Part II include the following: *Bisang* weaves language typology into the study of intercultural dialogue. *Čmejrková* investigates the relationship between culture and academic discourse by providing an intercultural perspective on writer/reader dialogical communication. She maps the situation in Slavic languages, Czech and Russian, and compares it with English. *Grein* applies the so-called minimal action game, an enhancement of Searle’s speech act theory, and demonstrates differences between the speech act of refusal among German and Japanese speaker. *Nash* incorporates nonverbal components into her research and reveals interesting facts about the relationship between language and culture. She limits her scope to certain hand and head gestures and

some gaze behaviour patterns among French, Japanese and Americans. *Weizman* re-interprets culture-dependent discourse norms and examines them in terms of Grice's maxim of quantity. She refers to discourse in American and Australian English, Canadian French, Israeli Hebrew and Japanese.

Part III presents empirical studies of the 'mixed game' which focus on specific action games, on the action component of politeness and on selected verbal means of communication. *Baraldi & Gavioli* carry out research on institutional talk in naturally-occurring encounters in Italian healthcare settings involving speakers of different languages and an interpreter providing translation service. The study is based on the analysis of 110 encounters, 60 involving English and Italian and 50 involving Arabic and Italian. The institutional representatives are Italian, the patients are from North and Central Africa or from the Middle-East countries. *Feller* compares, using a number of different examples, the verbal greeting behaviour of members of the Peruvian, the Californian and the German cultures, applying the approach of the minimal action game.

Further empirical studies are merged under the headings of 'politeness' and 'selected verbal means of communication'. *Cho* presents an empirical study on the speech act of rejection among Germans and Koreans and focuses on the category of honorifics and different functions of politeness. *Premawardhena* shows how politeness and cultural values are reflected in Sinhala, the major language spoken in Sri Lanka, taking examples from existing corpora. She also demonstrates how these linguistic values are transferred to Sri Lankan English. *Shilikhina* illuminates communicative mistakes in dialogues between English and Russian speakers and separates them into pragmatic and cultural mistakes. It would, for instance, be a pragmatic mistake to interpret the Russian use of imperative constructions in a situation of a request as straightforward while in English the conventional form requires the question form of asking a favour. On the other hand, it would be a cultural mistake to show negative emotions in public. Drawing on data from Ga'dang, *Walrod* illustrates how diverse the external linguistic forms employed in the action game can be. Walrod claims that the design principles of the overall environment in which human communication takes place need also be considered when seeking to explain similarities among languages.

The contributions thus shed light on how human beings as cultural beings act and behave in the mixed game of dialogic interaction. They contribute to a view of dialogue as culturally based interaction which comes about not by the addition of parts but by the interaction of components in the mixed game. The concept of culture emerges as an internal concept inherent to human beings in general as well as being individually shaped, and as an external concept evident in habits and cultural conventions.

Finally, there remains the pleasant duty to thank all those who helped to make the workshop and the publication of the papers possible. We would like to name the University of Mainz for providing the facilities required for the organization

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