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Dialogue in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Deciphering Communication Codes

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1 Introduction

The title of the Nordic Network for Intercultural Communication conference in Tampere, Finland, in December of 2005 was: Intercultural Dialogue: Creating New Perspectives. The title of the International Communication Association's Annual Conference in New York City in May of 2005 was: Communication: Questioning the Dialogue. Like Communication itself, "Dialogue" has become a key cultural term in many academic and public discourses. As a key term it is prevalent, prominent, and potent in its meanings, and in its declaration of a preferred form for communicative action. Who, indeed, would be against "dialogue"?

In spheres of international activities, we hear calls for a Dialogue concerning the war in Iraq, or a Dialogue on Globalization and Free Trade. Within nations, we have been asked to engage in a Dialogue on Race, or on Education, or here in America, on, indeed, by the President of the National Endowment for the Humanities, what it is to be an American. In spheres of intercultural relations we are asked, as we have been at this 2005 NIC conference, to reflect upon "dialogue" and new ways of thinking about it, of engaging in it, especially with those different from us. Such pleas, and calls, for dialogue, presume much. At play are deep meanings, and distinctive ideas about a particularly productive form for communication, a valued type of social action, a set of targeted goals,

various rules for its conduct, placing in our interactional sights a proper tone, mode, and structuring for our practice. In the process, a variety of qualities are brought into play, when pleas are made to “Come and Engage in Dialogue”.

But what indeed is Dialogue, exactly? What form of social interaction is being called for? What motives for such action are at play? What meanings are activated through this term?

In this paper, we take a very preliminary look at several expressive systems in order to ask: Is there something like “dialogue” in each, as a concept and practice? We explore the expressive systems-in-use, both the relevant terms in several languages AND the practices being referenced with those terms. We find that the systems, considered together, reveal a wide variety of possibilities that are active when “dialogue” is mentioned, advocated, and/or translated. The analyses we present follow a general program of inquiry for ethnographic studies of communication generally, and cross-cultural communication in particular (see Carbaugh 1990; Scollon & Scollon 1995). Our methodology is a version of speech codes theory (Philipsen 1997) and cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh 1996, 2005; Carbaugh, Gibson & Milburn 1995), focusing specifically on cultural terms for talk and pragmatic action (Carbaugh 1989).

The specific procedures we use have been implemented in the following stages: 1) we identify in a language a term, if one (or more) is available, which has some significant semantic overlap with the English term, dialogue; 2) we explore specific uses of that term in specific social contexts; 3) we analyze the acts, events, and/or styles of communication being referred to with that term, or those terms; and 4) we interpret the deeper meanings of these concerning communication itself, as well as related premises about personhood, and sociality. Eventually, the latter phase of analysis brings into view cultural meanings that are coded into terms for “dialogue”, about persons, social identities, relationships, and institutions, in addition to the explicit meanings about communication itself. We summarize the findings of the terms, social uses, relevant practices, and their meanings with the construct, Communication Code (see Carbaugh 2005: 120–132; Philipsen 1997). These procedures follow a specific theoretical model (Carbaugh 1989), and have been used in various studies of such phenomena in various languages including Leslie Baxter’s (1993) study of the differences in an English speech community between “talking things through” and “putting it in writing”, Mary Garrett’s (1993) study of Chinese “pure talk”, Bradford Hall

and Mutsumi Noguchi’s (1995) study of the Japanese ritual of *kenson*, Tamar Katriel’s (2004) study of Hebrew “dialogic moments” including *dugri* speech and “soul talks”, and Richard Wilkin’s (2005) study of the Finnish *asiallinen* style of talk. This program of work has now explored over 100 such terms and practices in several different languages including American Sign Language, Chinese, Danish, English, Finnish, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish.

Our analyses that follow are built partly upon earlier studies of dialogue, in particular studies which have examined uses and meanings of the term in prominent texts of American English (see e.g., Cissna & Anderson 1997). In what follows, our preliminary report explores four languages, in varying degrees, Blackfoot, Chinese, Finnish, and Hungarian. For each, we identify terms, practices, and meanings related to dialogue. In our summary remarks, we look across these data to identify the large discursive landscape being charted through “dialogue” in this cross-linguistic domain.

2 Blackfoot¹

The Blackfoot language does not have a term which is translated as “dialogue” (nor are there terms in Blackfoot for discussion, verbal interaction, or debate). Perhaps the closest is *sitsipssat*, meaning to speak to, converse with, or talk with. The term is used to refer to a verbal action one has done with other communicants. The preposition, “with”, of course implies a reference to a kind of mutuality of exchange, or an interactive quality among participants.

There is a related Blackfoot term, *i’powahsin*, translated generically as, language, talk, or speech; and another, *i’powsahsiistsa* which is translated simply as talk. Focused on the means of expression, rather than the social practice, neither of these terms carries the explicit meaning, or connotation of interacting with others.

But, there is a term for being incessantly talkative, monologically, thus implying that one is not interacting enough with others. When used, it identifies a violation in the norms for proper verbal interaction and social conduct. This is

identified linguistically with the Blackfoot term *i'poyiipitsi*, meaning, one who is a habitual talker.

In Blackfoot, then, we find terms that overlap in meaning with dialogue, focused on mutuality of exchange (i.e., *sitsipssat*), and its failure (i.e., *i'poyiipitsi*). While not elaborately presented here, a communication code is nonetheless suggested in which communication can have an optimal quality of interactive give-and-take, proper social relations being honored and forged in the process, with persons being conceived and evaluated through these specific cultural premises (i.e., of being properly talkative in the right amounts when with others).

3 Chinese

In the Chinese language several terms can be translated as having similar or overlapping meanings with the English term dialogue. They are *duihua*, *tanhua*, *jiaotan*, *jiaoliu*, and *goutong*, the specific meanings of which will be examined one by one in the following.

Duihua is the most equivalent term to “dialogue” among the aforementioned. It is also a very popular term in China today and is used in versatile settings. It has an almost identical etymological structure with, but much broader range of meanings from, the English term “dialogue”. The second character *hua* means simply “utterance” but the first character *dui* can be interpreted in different ways. As a verb, it can mean “to answer” or “to reply”; as an adjective, it can mean “mutual” or “face to face”. Put together as a term and commonly translated as “dialogue” in Chinese-English dictionaries, *duihua* is mostly used as a noun but can also be used as a verb. Either way, it describes, or calls for, verbal interaction that involves talking or exchange of thoughts and opinions between two or more persons. The settings in which this practice occurs range from private, personal, and casual to public, official, and formal. The traditional channel is face to face but nowadays it can also involve other channels such as newsprint, the Internet, and radio/television broadcasting. Following are some specific communicative acts or events involving *duihua* in some specific Chinese social contexts.

The minimum and literal meaning expressed by the usage of the term *duihua* is its reference to “talking between people”. For example, one can identify a scene in a play and refer to it as *fuqi duihua* (husband and wife talk to each other), or *munu duihua* (mother and daughter talk to each other), or one can mention to a friend, while chatting, about some other classmates, “I overheard their *duihua* outside the classroom yesterday”. Here the most salient meaning conveyed is the one regarding this form of communication itself – the fact that talking has taken place and it involves at least two persons.

A common usage of the term *duihua* is its reference, in formal and political settings, to “strategic dialogue between government officials or countries”. Many reports of this kind of dialogue can be found in various newspapers or media everyday. For example, “China and Japan held the first strategic *duihua* in Beijing”, as reported by Xinhua News Agency.² Consider also this quote from the talk by Mr. Jia Qinglin, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of Chinese Communist Party and the Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, when meeting Mr. Jiang Bingkun, the Vice-Chairman of Chinese National Party and the Chief of the Regiment of Advisory Staff officers of the Chinese National Party: “We’ve been hoping for and actively working toward resuming the *duihua* and negotiation between the two sides (i.e., Mainland China and Taiwan) on the basis of One-China Policy”.³ Another example is a headline from a news report, “India is willing to have unconditional *duihua* with anyone regarding the Kashmir region problem”, expressed by Indian Prime Minister Singh during a public speech on Nov. 17th, 2004 while visiting that area.⁴ A similarity across the three examples is the conflicted or troublesome history between the two sides involved or targeted in each *duihua* but now effort has been taken to open channels of communication, to have the two sides sit down face to face to discuss the difficulties. What is highlighted here is not only the two-directional flow of communication itself but also the prestige of the participants – each is acting as a representative of one’s country or region, not just as one’s self – and thus the weightiness of the topics being discussed involves the institutions of politics and governments. The qualities of the person called for in such a *duihua* practice is a willingness to open up about thoughts, to coordinate and to be constructive so that the problematic relationship between the two sides can be improved or adjusted.

The term *duihua* can be used in an abstract sense too, involving not just verbal and face-to-face interactions between people but exchanges between different kinds of views, thoughts or purposes. For example, there is a Taiwan-based website featuring *Kexue yu Yishu de Duihua*, meaning, “dialogue between science and art”;⁵ and there are also various articles written in the theme of *Zongjiao Duihua*, namely, “dialogue about (or between) different religions” to promote peaceful co-existence and cooperation among various religious organizations.⁶ In this kind of usage *duihua* refers to “an on-going exchange of ideas and views about certain topics between interested parties”. Here, the interactional concern focuses more on the ideas and perspectives taken to an issue, less on the people, or representatives, expressing those views.

Some untraditional ways of enacting the communicative event of *duihua* has also occurred in contemporary China. Since July 2000, China’s national central television station CCTV has launched a weekly 60-minute TV program titled *Duihua*. Its chosen English name is exactly “Dialogue”.⁷ For each program, some successful and popular people such as CEOs, governmental officials, economists, best-selling book authors, etc., are invited as the distinguished guests to be engaged in a dialogue with the host and the audience regarding some timely issue such as governmental policies, personal experiences, popular thoughts, recent books, etc. To some extent this program is trying to create and portray a politically friendly atmosphere or scene within which common people have opportunities to participate more in the public and social life of the country. In this setting, *duihua* is not only being conducted between the host and the invited guests, it is also intended on two other levels: the on-spot audience with the invited guests and the larger audience from TV and the Internet. Therefore, *duihua* means both “a formal, public, staged, and, especially on the host’s part, scripted dialogical exchange between people” and “an informal, public-oriented, off-stage, oral or written communication between people”.

A similar design to the nature of the aforementioned TV program can be found online. Here it is usually called *Wangshang Duihua* with *wangshang* meaning “online”.⁸ The idea is for common people to logon to this kind of Internet program and communicate any complaints they have, or advice they seek, about various issues in life and society. Local governmental divisions or officials can then investigate and respond to those complaints or inquiries and try to solve the problems people have or direct their inquiries in an efficient

manner. The purpose of this kind of program is to build healthy, more efficient, and more service-oriented governmental bodies. The format of this type of communicational interaction is more asynchronous and informal.

There are other websites that create slightly different kinds of *duihua* programs. For example, *Xinling Duihua*, which means “heart-to-heart dialogue” or “soul talk”, is the title of a program on a Chinese website.⁹ It is hosted by a psychologist and it features the anonymous sharing of private personal stories, experiences, and emotional life, especially those that are secretive, sad, confrontational, confusing, humiliating, or hurtful in nature. During these programs, there is counseling offered by the psychologist host to those with emotional pain; and there is also feedback through various comments and thoughts, usually of an encouraging nature, from the readers. The objective of this program, as stated on its homepage, suggests that this *duihua* happens between *youyuanren* (people who are predestined to be in touch with each other), either known or unknown previously, who are willing to *changkai bici de xinfei* (widely open up one’s heart, be receptive to each other), *changsuo yuyan* (say whatever one wants to say, be expressive), so that they can build, with *zhenxin* (true heart) and *chengxin* (sincere heart), a *wenxin* (a heart-warming feeling) that is shared by all. Here in this setting, to engage in *duihua*, is to engage in the sharing of personal stories and hear responses to them through a commonly available channel, which allows and protects the anonymity of participants.

The reason that this kind of *duihua* program has become more and more popular in contemporary China is related to the specific features of China’s social and political life and some changes in these aspects that Chinese people are experiencing. Traditionally and culturally, Chinese political life is rather opaque and Chinese people are in public rather reserved. Lacking an acute sense of democratic participation as people in Western countries do, Chinese people were usually left in darkness in terms of policy making and political administering. They simply followed directions from the government and were rarely encouraged to question them, trusting that the Chinese Communist Party, claiming to represent the interests of people all over the country, would always do the right thing for them. Even if there were people who were concerned and willing to know more, they had no access to the policy making and administering process. As a result, Chinese people were often left unaided when they needed help. The reform and opening policy adopted by China since 1978 has made

it possible for the western democratic ideology and ways of conducting social and political life through forms, such as *duihua*, to exert impact on Chinese people's worldviews and ways of living. Chinese government also came to see the urgency to re-establish Chinese people's trust in officials at various levels and to bring substantial changes to people's lives. Therefore, more and more effort has been given to encourage Chinese people to more actively participate in building a healthy and transparent political system and to encourage officials at various levels to truly care about people's lives and really do things to benefit people. Associated with this change in the political realm is the fact that more attention has been given to encourage Chinese people to develop a healthier and more fulfilling intellectual, economic, and emotional life. As one can see from the aforementioned examples of *duihua* programs on TV, radio and the Internet, almost anything can be the topic of a *duihua* practice. What is implied is an activation of the multiple channels of communication available to people and an ideal picture regarding personhood – a Chinese citizen who has the right to be treated equally and respectfully, to gain access to important knowledge or information regarding his/her life, and to actively participate in social and political life. A presumption behind all these *duihua* programs, similar to the one that can be seen associated with political *duihua* situations, is that open and sincere communication between people help to solve problems, overcome differences and enable progress to happen.

Tanhua and *Jiaotan*: Two other Chinese terms, *tanhua* and *jiaotan*, overlap in meaning with the English term “dialogue”. Here again the character *hua* means “utterance”, the character *tan* means “to speak”, and the character *jiao* means “mutual” or “to cross”. Depending on context, *tanhua* can involve either monologue, one person speaking to the audience, or talking in the format of questions and answers. *Jiaotan* usually refers to conversations between two persons or discussions within a small group. Their specific usage and meanings are given in the following.

Similar to the usage that carries the minimum and literal meaning of *duihua*, one can use the term *tanhua* to simply report the fact that some people are talking with each other without any other connotation implied. But usually when this term is used, it carries meanings of less open interaction among participants, a more serious tone, and is about something formal, important, or problematic. A situation when it involves only a monologue of *tanhua* can be a governmental

official addressing a political meeting or gathering. A situation when it involves talking in the format of questions and answers is when a person in a somewhat inferior status is summoned to meet a person in a somewhat superior status, for example, a high school student being called to meet his teacher for delinquent behavior, or an applicant to the Chinese Communist Party being called to meet the Branch Secretary of the Party for his/her application status. In both situations, there is implied an unequal status between the speaker and the listeners, and it is usually the person in superior status who does most of the talking, therefore, defining the event as a *tanhua*.

In contrast, the term *jiaotan* carries a more plain tone. By identifying a communicative event as *jiaotan*, one is mainly emphasizing the fact that people are talking with each other without implications regarding the social status of the persons involved or the degree of seriousness of the topics being discussed. One point to be noted about *jiaotan* is that it is more of a literal term than a colloquial term. It would be more formal to say, “they are *jiaotan*”, than to say, “they are *jianghua* (or *shuohua*)” (both *jianghua* and *shuohua* mean plainly “speak” or “talk” and sometimes not necessarily to each other).

An interesting discussion occurred about the difference between *duihua* and *jiaotan* as two different alternative approaches to an event, and the impact of choosing one over the other. The occasion involved a group of Chinese students who were meeting and negotiating with Li Peng, the then Chinese Premier, on May 18th, 1989, shortly before the break of the Tiananmen Square Event (see Wenshan Jia 1999). The students proposed to *duihua* with the government but Li Peng and other officials framed it only as *kaihui*, meaning “to have a meeting”, and expected only something like *jiaotan* or *tanhua* with the students. The focal event, if cast as *duihua*, as the students suggested, would carry very different, negative political meanings and significance to the government. According to Jia (1999), “*Duihua*... has clear connotations of political liberalization”. He explains the meaning of *duihua* as “opposite speech or oppositional speech” and remarks that it “suggest(s) an adversarial talk” which asserts or presumes “the basis of equality” between the students and government officials (72). He then explains the meaning of the term *jiaotan* as “exchange-talk” and states that this term “sounds quite neutral in the political sense, but emphasizes coordination” (73). In Jia's words (73):

Had they proposed *jiaotan* instead of *duihua* with the government, there would have been more likelihood that the government would have responded to the students' proposal with less enmity and fear. Later, the students might have shifted from *jiaotan* to *duihua*, or begun to use them interchangeably.

What is implied in Jia's analysis is that *duihua* necessarily asserts that the two sides are equal and perhaps in confrontation, with a fixed agenda requested by the side that initiates the event whereas *jiaotan* has a much softer tone and more flexible arrangement of topics. According to Jia, if this event were to be cast as *duihua*, it would have required Li Peng and other officials to acquire identities that they then did not have, on this occasion, that is, to be persons who can "speak, act, and feel as individuals interacting with equals" (73).

We can interpret these features of *duihua*, in theoretical terms, as bids, indeed political bids, to cast personhood and sociality onto unfamiliar Chinese terrain – that persons can indeed "speak, act, and feel as individuals interacting with equals" (73). This captures the effort by the students to create a cultural shift, or to enact a transformation in personhood (from East to West). This is partly what is at stake in the shifting cultural terms for dialogue, from *jiaotan* or Li Peng's implied *tanhua* (and its expressed preservation of traditional Chinese notions of the person, political institutions, and relations) to *duihua* (which asserts unfamiliar notions of individuality and equality into the political occasion).

Jiaoliu and *Goutong*: The other two terms, *jiaoliu* and *goutong*, can be seen as overlapping in meaning with the English term "dialogue" in a different way. Instead of focusing on the verbal interaction of talking with each other, both terms emphasize more of the quality of the communication. Or, they can both be understood as defining a goal or an outcome for a dialogical verbal interaction.

As mentioned previously, the character *jiao* means "mutual" or "to cross", and the character *liu* means "to flow". Usually translated as "exchange", "interflow" or "interchange", *jiaoliu* as a term both depicts physically the directions or the flows of speech from one speaker to another and also implies a deep, real, and truly satisfactory exchange of ideas, thoughts, and even feelings between persons. The character *gou* means "ditch", "channel", or "trench" and the character *tong* means "open", "through", or "free of blockage". Taken together, the term *goutong* defines a similar communicational state as the term *jiaoliu* does. It means, literally, "to clear away a blockage in a ditch, channel, or trench to

make it open again" and, figuratively, "to re-connect and to communicate". This term is used in situations when people need to establish a mutual understanding of each other so as to get rid of any hard feelings or misunderstandings, if present, that have been brooding in someone's heart. As can be seen here, both the term *jiaoliu* and *goutong* can be regarded as sharing similar meanings with the cultural term of "communication", as is discussed by Katriel and Philipsen (1981). A healthy and harmonious relationship relies on constant and willingly doing *jiaoliu* and *goutong* (which is sometimes abbreviated as *jiaotong*) between each other. For example, a husband and a wife may need to *jiaoliu* and *goutong* to keep a healthy intimate relationship; parents and teenagers may need to *jiaoliu* and *goutong* to cross the generation gap so that parents can help their children address life's challenges and can understand them better, rather than simply criticizing them when they do something wrong; employers and employees may need to *jiaoliu* and *goutong* to understand why complaints have arisen and how to address them effectively. If there is *quefa jiaoliu* (a lack of exchange) or *quefa goutong* (a lack of connection), such relationships can become problematic and things could go quite awry.

A natural expectation about *goutong* and *jiaoliu* is that what is being exchanged or communicated is said with *zhengcheng* (truthfulness and sincerity), or *shizai* (down to the earth or without any embellishment or exaggeration). Otherwise it will not qualify as a proper *goutong* or *jiaoliu* event. The authentic experience of *goutong* and *jiaoliu* comes from the heart. It is a sincere voice speaking from within.

To summarize, the terms *duihua*, *tanhua*, and *jiaotan* depict a range of communicational practices that Chinese people not only identify, but practice in their social and political life. Although these practices all share the common feature of two or more people being involved in verbal interaction, they are different from each other in terms of the tone that each implies, from confrontational yet constructive, to informative or corrective, to simply interactive. While the terms *duihua*, *tanhua*, and *jiaotan* refer more to the actual act of doing "dialogue", the terms *jiaoliu* and *goutong* refer more to its ideal qualities, goals and outcomes. A sense of *goutong* or *jiaoliu* occurs, then, during some enactments of *duihua*, *tanhua*, or *jiaotan*; but they can also be lacking as a result of an insincere *duihua*, *tanhua*, or *jiaotan*. The terms also express meanings about various identities as active (from government officials, opponents, to invited guests, hosts, audiences,

etc.), various bases for social relations (from equal, to unequal, oppositional, confrontational, etc.), institutions (politics, government, education, economy, family, marriage, management, etc.), and personhood (be expressive, receptive, sincere, open, etc.).

4 Finnish¹⁰

As in the other non-Indo-European languages, and given that Finnish is a Finno-Ugric language, there is no strict correspondence for the Latin based term, “dialogue”. However, there are a range of terms which cover some aspects of the meanings of the English term, “dialogue”, in Finnish.

While there is imported into Finnish the Latin based term, *dialogi*, perhaps the closest term to dialogue in contemporary Finnish speech is, *keskustelu*, which is often translated as “discussion”, and may be the closest correspondence, in most cases. If so, the Finnish loan word, *dialogi*, can often be replaced by *keskustelu* in Finnish.

Vuoropuhelu similarly means to talk together, taking turns, but the term is not as common as it was a generation ago. As a result, the Finnish culture may be moving away from the *vuoropuhelu* concept of dialogue, in which each person with something important to say states his or her thoughts, and towards *keskustelu*, or interactive discussions among two or more people.

There is a related term, *vuorovaikutus*, which means, literally, an ‘exchange of influencing’ (“mutual influencing”). It includes the root term, *vaikutus*, which indicates influence, or impact, along with *vuoro* which indicates a social exchange, taking turns, or shifting from one to another speaker.

The Finnish term, *kanssakäyminen*, is a less precise term, referring generally to an exchange between people associated with being in touch, or establishing social contact among people.

The range of Finnish terms, then, brings into view the importance of the matter under discussion (i.e., *vuoropuhelu*), the interactive quality of discussion (i.e., *keskustelu*), and mutual influence (i.e., *vuorovaikutus*). With these terms, we discover a movement toward interactive discussion as a code for social

relations and expressive life. Of particular interest is the relative muting, through *keskustelu*, of the importance of the matters under discussion, and the amplification of the qualities of interactive discussion among people.

5 Hungarian

Like Finnish, Hungarian, another Finno-Ugric language, features the Latin loanword *dialógus* in its lexicon. Based on Tótfalusi (2003) two other Hungarian terms, *párbeszéd*, (pair talk) and *eszmecsere* (exchange of ideas) can be identified as semantically related to *dialógus* and the American English term “dialogue”. All three terms denote a kind of conversational exchange, with *dialógus* being the most restricted term.

On the one hand, the Latin loanword *dialógus* can refer, as a technical matter, to conversations on stage between actors. On the other hand, in the context of scholarly literature it has strong links to the literary and philosophical traditions of the West. The latter, long philosophical tradition, draws from Plato’s dialogues to more contemporary developments in theology and philosophy.

Párbeszéd is a less technical term than *dialógus* and thus has a wider range of applications and meanings. As a kind of “pair talk”, it can refer to talk that occurs between any two or more people, any two or more groups, or their representatives. In its most generic sense, it refers to a casual conversation as in, “I overheard this fascinating *párbeszéd* on the bus yesterday”. In its more special sense, it refers to conversations in which people realize they are mutually dependent on one another, and are seeking to attain a common goal. The realization of interdependence activates both a respect for the views or opinions of the other party, and a commitment of resources of time or energy to exchange ideas. These premises for *párbeszéd* make evident a cultural target, or norm for this activity: Anything said should move participants toward the achievement of a common goal. If this goal is not advanced, then the activity fails to meet the targeted objectives of *párbeszéd*.

Párbeszéd most typically refers to activities in the political arena where parties find their interests must be aligned. Interest groups engage in *párbeszéd*,

indeed the exigency for it occurs when parties realize their initial differences of opinion can be overcome, and they can benefit from working together. In this sense, *párbeszéd* gives form to a remedy of social conflict and political difference. For example, of contemporary Hungary, it might be said: "If only there were *párbeszéd* between political parties on the left and the right they would be able to work things out".

Finally, *eszmecsere*, a term that rings rather formal to the Hungarian ear, denotes an "exchange of ideas" in a setting where interlocutors are present in a professional role (e.g. "Scientists carried out an *eszmecsere* at a conference last week."). Among the three Hungarian terms related to the English term "dialogue", *eszmecsere* is the one most likely to be used in a sarcastic or joking manner, most likely due to its overtone of formality (e.g. "having consumed a fair number of drinks, our *eszmecsere* on current events intensified").

In sum, the range of Hungarian terms highlight a conversational exchange in which the importance of the matter of conversation and, indeed, the importance of the conversation itself hinges on the type of social situation in which it occurs. The communicative act casts interlocutors as social beings, as partners of equal status engaged in an exchange of ideas (*eszmecsere*) or in the communicative pursuit of common goals (*párbeszéd*). The cultural target of the activity denoted by these terms is, primarily, the collaborative performance of the activity, and, in some cases, the collaborative creation of mutual understanding as the ground for future action.

6 Summary: meanings about communication, sociality, and personhood

This brief comparative look at the terms and characters from various languages that are related to the English term, dialogue, brings into view several linguistically and culturally specific practices and their meanings. As we, now, look across this range, we can make the following observations. [The observations below are also partly informed by preliminary, and ongoing explorations of terms and practices related to dialogue in Arabic, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and Sakapultek.]

First, there are several meanings being expressed through these terms about communication practices that are being identified and translated as something like "dialogue". These are the most literal, and explicit meanings at play:

- 1) The terms refer to verbal co-productions, of two or more parties.
- 2) The practices being referenced range from cooperative interactions, to competitive discussions.
- 3) An ethos of mutuality of exchange (or interdependence) pervades these practices.
- 4) The predominant tone is affiliative, or collaborative, and varies from serious and formal to informal.
- 5) The predominant channel is face-to-face conversation, but includes writing, scripted and spontaneous practices, and various electronic media (newsprint, internet, radio, television).
- 6) Structuring norms include speaking in a sincere, informative, and ably expressive way about one's views; and listening in a way that is open to the views of others.
- 7) Goals of the practice vary widely from advancing one's view, to informing participants about issues, clarifying the nature of the issues, presenting a range of views, developing shared understanding, resolving a conflict in a mutually satisfying way, transforming social circumstances, establishing a common goal, affirming and/or repairing social relationships, establishing future actions.
- 8) The practices are conceived to be of varying importance, but mostly are deemed efficacious: in some cases, the weightiness is in the topics being addressed (as these are presumably weighty e.g., societal issues, political, economic matters); in others, the weightiness concerns value in the form of the social activity getting done (and is not so much focused on the topic of discussion).

In addition to the meanings about communication, there are more implicit meanings about sociality getting expressed through these terms and practices. These are active in more of a metaphorical way. That is, as people talk about the importance of "dialogue", they are also saying something about social identities, relations, and possibly institutions. These meanings can be formulated as follows:

- 1) The dialogic form of practice gives voice to various social identities: Political or social opponents; high status participants e.g., scholars, officials; guests and hosts; disputants and intermediaries.
- 2) The form typically but not always presumes social relations to be equal, or moving toward equality.
- 3) The form activates various social institutions: Politics-government, religious, education, friendship, therapeutic, entertainment media (radio, television, theatre, opera).

Finally, there is a range of premises these terms activate about personhood. As the meanings about sociality, these are expressed more implicitly and metaphorically. These can be formulated as follows:

- 1) Persons can be insincere, conniving, or inappropriately inexpressive.
- 2) Persons can act on the basis of their own selfish interests.
- 3) The above are ultimately limited, or bad.
- 4) Persons need forms of social interaction which are sincere, informative, expressive of their views, AND, receptive to the views of others.
- 5) Persons need forms of social interaction which are educational (disseminate information widely) and socially productive (advance mutual interests in socially productive ways).
- 6) These are attached to various philosophical, literary, and cultural traditions (particularity).
- 7) Dialogue (and its linguistic-cultural kin) identifies a form for persons to be, and act, as such.

The meanings above suggest a range of features that are active when people call for “dialogue”. Such a plea is inevitably made, and interpreted through specific communication codes. In other words, when heard, the plea for “dialogue” can play in distinctive ways into specific languages, carrying into one form of communication here (e.g., *duihua* in China), and another there (e.g., “pair talk” in Hungary). Further, the plea can signal change within a society in what is deemed proper public dialogue as movement from the Finnish *vuoropuhelu* to *keskustelu* might suggest, or the movement from the more politically neutral *jiaotan* to the more politically charged *duihua* in China suggests (see Jia 1999).

The features summarized above help sensitize us to the particular meanings active in communication codes about dialogue. Across expressive systems, a wide range of possible meanings can be active, as grounds for coordinating action, or as grounds for misunderstanding, sometimes both of these at once! Clearly there is much more work to be done in order to understand what is getting said through one’s code of dialogue, and how this relates to others.

As we do so, we must address two kinds of problems. One is an overly localized, the other an overly generalized view of dialogue specifically, and communication generally. One error lies in being too specific, making claims that lack generality. This occurs when pleas for dialogue are laden in local culture and ideology that are too close to home, or couched in unreflective beliefs about interaction. Accounts of dialogue, such as these, are steeped in, or overly enmeshed in local presumptions about its proper shapes and meanings. Such accounts can stand firmly on the grounds of a culture, yet are untutored by the way dialogic communication is done elsewhere, if there is anything like it at all.

A second error lies in the other direction: Erecting claims that are too general, thus lacking in any local traction or force. With little resonance in local codes, these are empty, and made without specificity. Accounts of dialogue such as these are sometimes presented in overly abstract terms, even as a universal ideal, which do not touch the grounds of any particular social scene or practice. These accounts can hover over the grounds of actual social life, without an ear to its actual shapes and meanings, as something practiced among actual people.

Our hope here has been to examine dialogue as people have expressed and practiced it in several expressive systems. Our goal is to particularize such study, to understand how dialogue, or something like it, may be practiced by people in specific places. Our goal also has been to generalize, to understand what meanings can be active across the various cultural and discursive terrains of dialogue. By attending to the particular codes and the general meanings at play, we hope to contribute to an understanding of what is involved when people call for dialogue, in specific and general ways, and thus to largely embrace the conversation across languages and cultures.

Notes

- 1 The authors thank Darrell Robes Kipp of the Piegan Institute, Browning, Montana for his enduring support of the Blackfoot language. The interpretations here are indebted to him, but all faults are DC's.
- 2 http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-05/15/content_2959132.htm
- 3 http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-03/31/content_2769285.htm
- 4 <http://news.163.com/41118/9/15FAIOAD0001121Q.html>
- 5 <http://pei.cjhh.tc.edu.tw/>
- 6 The following link, <http://www.yuandao.com/zazhi/3ji/zjdhdxyz.htm>, can lead interested readers to such an article.
- 7 The link for accessing this program online is <http://www.cctv.com/program/dialogue/01/02/index.shtml>.
- 8 The link <http://www.jiaodong.net/special/duihua/offers> an example of this kind of online *duihua* program.
- 9 The link to it is <http://women.sohu.com/29/34/column204893429.shtml>
- 10 The authors thank Saila Poutiainen, Marjatta Nurmikari-Berry, Jaakko Lehtonen, among others for their assistance with these Finnish materials.

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Der Wissenschaftsanspruch der Interkulturellen Kommunikation

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Abstract

Intercultural communication is an interdisciplinary field consisting of a number of areas: linguistics and foreign languages, cultural sciences, communication science, psychology, translation studies, economics, education, politics, etc.

One problem common to all interdisciplinary fields is that nobody can be an expert in all aspects of a large field. This problem does not generally occur in research, because researchers normally have a thorough knowledge of their own field, but it does occur when attempts are made to bring together results from a number of fields, which is the case for instance in survey-type works on intercultural communication. These works commonly contain problems such as:

- The use of outdated or misunderstood theories
- The repetition of unproven claims
- Lack of knowledge of other languages and/or cultures
- One-sided use of sources
- Lack of attention to normal academic conventions

This paper analyses a number of such cases which raise the question of the standards of scholarly work in intercultural communication. Solutions to the problems are seen in international collaboration in intercultural research, especially for works which aim to give a survey of the whole field, an increased use of informants, the use of more foreign-language material in works on intercultural communication, and a stricter adherence to the normal conventions of scholarly work.