INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT LANGUAGE

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Abstract. The paper argues that research in intercultural communication should change the way we think about language. What standard linguistic and pragmatic theories assume about how things work in communication and language use depends on there being commonalities, conventions, standards and norms between language users. These conventions of language and conventions of usage (Morgan 1978, Searle 1979, among others) create a core common ground on which intention and cooperation-based communication is built. When, however, this core common ground is limited as is the case in intercultural communication interlocutors cannot take them for granted, rather they need to co-construct them, at least temporarily. So there seems to be reason to take up the question of how people go about formulating utterances and interpreting them when they can't count on or have limited access to those commonalities and conventions, and in a sense, they are expected to create, co-construct them (at least a part of them) in the communicative process. An answer to this question may change the way we think about language. In the paper I will focus only on three issues that are especially important: 1) intersubjectivity: shift of emphasis from the communal to the individual, 2) modified understanding of linguistic creativity, and 3) the changing role of context in language use.

Keywords: intercultural communication, socio-cognitive approach, intersubjectivity, linguistic creativity, context, co-construction, core common ground.

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1. INTRODUCTION

First of all, we need to discuss the differences between intracultural communication and intercultural communication from a socio-cognitive perspective (see Kecskes 2013) that treats this relationship as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Movement on the continuum and differences between the two phenomena are affected by different factors such as situational context, L1 of interlocutors, register, etc. The hypothetical left end of the continuum is intracultural communication and the right end is intercultural communication. Neither exists in pure form. The question is to which end a given communicative situation is closer to and what characteristics it is dominated by. While moving on toward the right end, communication becomes less dependent on standards, norms, frames, core common ground and formulaic language and is characterized more by emergent common ground, *ad hoc* generated rather than formulaic expressions, norm creating attempts and individual creativity in solving communication problems.

In intercultural interactions, speakers have different L1s, communicate in a common language, and, usually, represent different cultures. Why should intercultural communication be an issue for linguistics? It is a fundamental assumption in modern linguistics that languages are governed by rules and conventions. We have conventions of the linguistic system and conventions of usage. Searle (1979) made a distinction between conventions of language and conventions of usage: "It is, by now, I hope, uncontroversial that there is a distinction to be made between meaning and use, but what is less generally recognized is that there can be conventions of usage that are not meaning conventions (Searle 1979: 49)". Morgan basically talked about the same distinction: "In sum, then, I am proposing that there are at least two distinct kinds of conventions involved in speech acts: conventions of language … and conventions in a culture of usage of language in certain cases … The former, conventions of language, are what make up the language, at least in part. The latter, conventions of usage, are a matter of culture (manners, religion, law….). (Morgan 1978: 269).

What Morgan and Searle speak about are conventions lexicalized in languages for different purposes. These lexicalized units usually reflect cultural values, manners and way of thinking of people belonging to that speech community. Here are some examples from Romanian and other languages.

(1)	în ceea ce mă priveşte	as far as I'm concerned
	în opinia mea	in my opinion
	încântat de cunoştinţă	nice to meet you
	poftă bună	have a nice meal
	mànmanchī 慢慢吃 (Chinese)	enjoy your meal
	szép napot kívánok (Hungarian)	have a nice day
	всё настроено (Russian)	you are all set

What rules and conventions govern intercultural interactions when the common language is not the L1 of any of the interlocutors, and how does that relate to our understanding of language?

In order to answer this question we should first discuss what language is, and then explain how the definition of language relates to the intercultural use of English (English as a Lingua Franca).

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2. LANGUAGE AND THE LINGUA FRANCA USE OF LANGUAGE

Recent linguistic research (e.g. Hauser, Chomsky and Fitch 2002; Pinker and Jackendoff 2005) differentiates between aspects of language that are special to language code ('Narrow Language Faculty', NLF) and the faculty of language in its entirety, including parts that are shared with other psychological abilities (memory, recognition, etc.) found elsewhere in cognition ('Broad Language Faculty', BLF). The lexicon can be considered an interface that ties NLF to the other elements of the BLF. See Figure 1 below:

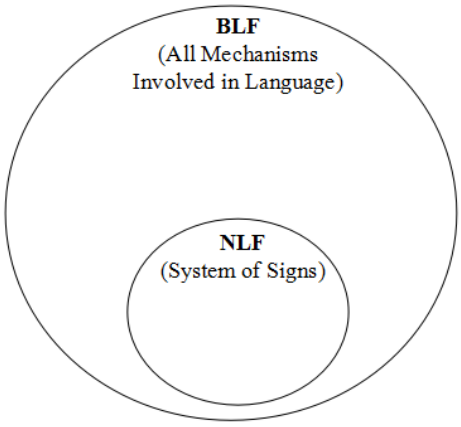


Figure 1: Recent linguistic theory of language.

My definition of language is slightly different: *Language is a system of signs operated by a conceptual base that is the reflection of the socio-cultural background in which the system of signs is put to use* (Kecskes forthcoming). This definition has three important elements: system of linguistics signs, conceptual base of users and context. Individuals use the system of signs in different contexts to convey meanings that are reflection of their mindset.

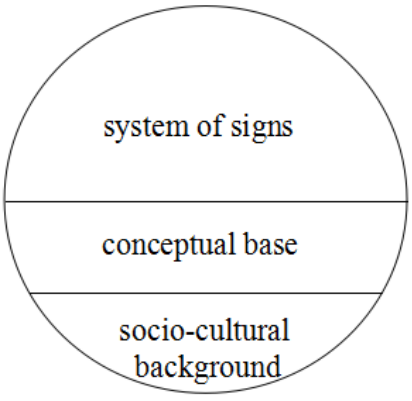
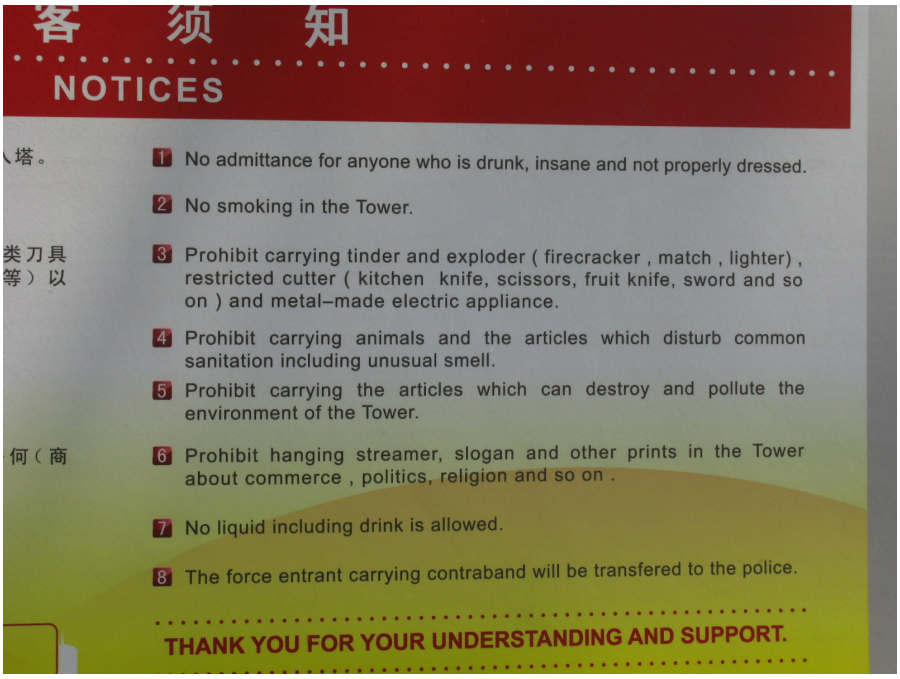


Figure 2: Definition of language (Kecskes forthcoming).

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The sign below explains clearly how language functions:



This is a sign at the entrance to the Shanghai TV Tower. The sentences on the sign are written in English but they reflect the Chinese way of thinking. No native speaker of any native variety of English would say something like "prohibit carrying animals and the articles which disturb common sanitation including unusual smell". This is Chinese English at its best.

Figure 3 shows how English as a Native Language (in the middle) relates to English as a Nonnative language (right) and English as a Lingua Franca (left).

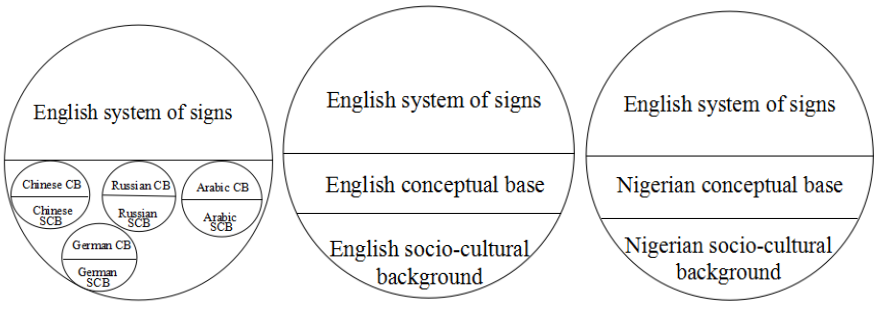


Figure 3: English lingua franca.

CB: conceptual base
SCB: socio-cultural background

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The figures demonstrate why output through the same system of signs (English) is so different in English as a Foreign/Second language use and in English as a Lingua Franca. While in the former the CB and SCB is relatively the same in English as a Lingua Franca we have different varieties of English at work. My definition of English as a Lingua Franca goes like this: *ELF is a way to put a variety, or several varieties of English to use in interactions between speakers whose L1 is other than English* (Kecskes forthcoming).

Why are these differences important? What linguistics assumes about how things work in communication depends on there being commonalities, conventions common beliefs, shared knowledge between speakers and hearers. They create a core common ground, a kind of collective salience on which interaction is built. However, when this core common ground appears to be missing or limited as is the case in intercultural communication interlocutors cannot take them for granted, rather they need to co-construct them, at least temporarily.

So the question is: will the conventions of target language and conventions of usage still hold? My answer is "yes" but there will be three important changes:

1) Intersubjectivity: there is a shift of emphasis from the communal to the individual,
2) We need to alter the way we perceive linguistic creativity,
3) We also have to change the way we understand the role of context.

3. SHIFT OF EMPHASIS FROM THE COMMUNAL TO THE INDIVIDUAL

What is common in interlocutors in ELF?: use a common language, have different L1s, lack of full control over language skills (L2) and full knowledge of conventions, beliefs and norms in the target language (L2). So L2 is not just given to L2 speakers through frames and prefabricated expressions, they need to co-construct it. As a consequence, they have a more conscious approach to what is said, and how it is said. It is not that the individual becomes more important than the societal. Rather, since there is limited core common ground, it should be created in the interactional context. Interlocutors function as core common ground creators rather than just common ground (CG) seekers and activators as is mostly the case in L1. This changes the nature of intersubjectivity. In order for interlocutors to understand each other smoothly, they need to pay more attention to what language they use than it is usually the case in L1. There is more reliance on language created ad hoc by individuals in the course of interaction than on prefabricated language and pre-existing frames. Just think about it. There is a Romanian who interacts with a Cuban person about air travel, in English. They both represent different socio-cultural backgrounds, and at the same time, they are familiar with English socio-cultural background to different degrees. They use English but they do not know how much common ground they share as far as their familiarity with English socio-cultural background is concerned. Are they familiar with English speech acts such as apology, refusal, request, etc. in a relatively equal way? It is almost impossible since they are not members of a native English speech community and their exposure to the socio-cultural background of the target language (English) is limited or none. They represent Romanian English and Cuban English. What is common ground for them, what they share is the language system (English) out of the three elements we discussed above. So they rely on that knowledge of the English language system. The extent they can do that depends on

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their proficiency. This means that they can be sure that they will not misunderstand each other if they stick to literal meanings of the linguistic signs because that is the same for each of them. Let me illustrate the "danger" of use of a native speech act. If the Romanian uses a request: *why don't you sit down?,* s/he cannot be sure that the Cuban partner will handle this as a speech act of request since literally the question is asking about the reason why the Cuban does not take a seat. This problem does not occur in L1 communication.

Intersubjectivity between speakers in intercultural interaction is governed by what I called the "not sure" approach (Kecskes 2013). This means that speakers have some kind of predisposition toward their communicative partners. They are not exactly sure what they can expect from their counterparts. However, the origin and nature of this "not sure' approach differs in native speakers and non-native speakers. In non-native speakers, this "not sure" approach derives from the fact that they share limited core common ground, have little knowledge about each other's proficiency in the target language and can rely on the meaning-specifying function of actual situational context less than in intracultural communication. Since nonnative speakers can't be sure that they can count on these factors (common ground, relatively equal language competence, relatively similar understanding of actual situational context) to the degree that they can in intracultural communication, they monitor production, consciously cooperate, anticipate problems, give more information than needed, etc. This "not sure" behavior goes back to concrete past events where something went wrong with the use of a concept, or an expression, or an utterance, or some kind of misunderstanding happened. So the non-native speakers occasionally anticipate trouble that they would like to avoid.

For the native speaker this "not sure" behavior is something like a general, top-down phenomenon that is associated with language proficiency issues. *The native speaker's expectation and assumptions in a conversation with a nonnative speaker differ from that in an interaction with another native speaker.* They usually do not formulate these feelings for themselves but behave accordingly with non-native speakers, generally subconsciously and automatically. The following conversation between a Korean student and a Chinese student shows that the non-native speakers are aware of this different approach and attitude of native speakers.

(2) – And then language problem. Sometimes I obviously look like a foleign … foreign person … foreigner here… so they assume I don't speak English so they sometimes … I don't know … they sometimes don't understand what I'm saying … even though I'm speaking English. It hurts me a lot … I don't know.
– Could you follow them?
– Of course.
– But they find it hard to follow you?
– Mhmm I don't know why. I think it's because of my … how I look like you know. I don't know it hurts me a lot.
– I don't think it matters very much because just for your physical appearance. Did you try slowing down your space?
– ***Yes eventually they understand I can speak English but still in their mind they have strong strategy … I mean … I'm sorry … stereotypes prejudice like … you look foreign.***
– Foreigner.

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– And you probably don't speak English so they don't even bother themselves to speak to me.

This "not sure" approach in native speakers is usually not connected with concrete prior events or actions. It is more like the result of a general assumption that a native speaker has about a person who does not speak his/her language as a first language. It is important to note that this is not necessarily a negative expectation. It is often instantiated by supporting gestures, repetitions, providing background information, let-it-go behavior, etc. Lüdi (2006: 30) said that the manifestation of an outsider status can generate particular attention and willingness to help. "The interlocutor knows s/he cannot take for granted that the speaker will adhere to usual comportment norms, which are inherent to the group membership. If somebody addresses me with the familiar 'Du' in German where the formal 'Sie' would be appropriate, I'll perceive this behaviour as impolite. But if s/he has a strong foreign accent, I'll debit this behaviour to her/his lack of language control and local rules and accept it. As it is, translinguistic markers are usually interpreted as indicators of lack of competence in the exolingual situation."

This "not sure" approach on both sides defines intersubjectivity in intercultural communication, which leads to different handling of the language system than in L1: less metaphorism, more down-to-earth language, preference of literalness, co-interpretation of the actual situational context. It is more like the individuals create the social situation rather than the social situation determines them.

4. UNDERSTANDING LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY

4.1. The idiom principle and economy principle

Sinclair (1991) argued that language production alternates between word-for-word combinations and preconstructed multi-word combinations. He made a distinction between idiom principle and open choice principle. The idiom principle says that language users have available a large number of memorized, semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments. The open choice principle refers to the opposite: freely generated utterances using word-for-word combinations. According to psychologists and linguists, the default processing strategy is the formulaic option. That is expected to be most salient in language production (Sinclair 1991; Wray 2002; Miller and Weinert 1998).

The idiom principle is tied to the economy principle according to which human beings want to achieve as much as possible with the least possible effort both in production and comprehension (Sperber and Wilson 1995). There is psycholinguistic evidence that fixed expressions and formulas have an important economizing role in speech production (cf. Miller and Weinert 1998; Wray 2002). Sinclair's idiom principle says that "the use of prefabricated chunks may … illustrate a natural tendency to economy of effort" (Sinclair 1991: 110). It is a well-known fact that salient meanings of formulaic expressions are easily accessible in production and processing (e.g. Giora 2003; Kecskes 2007, 2013; Wray 2002). The question is how this alternation of prefabricated and freely generated units

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affects language production and comprehension in L1 and intercultural interactions, how it affects/changes our understanding of linguistic creativity.

4.2. An alternative way of looking at linguistic creativity

Human creativity is always in some sense a response to a regulating order. Creativity and variation are impossible without reference to "existing patterns". The sociologist Csikszentmihalyi (1999) talked about this issue as follows: 'New' is meaningful only in reference to the 'old'. […] Without rules, there cannot be exceptions, and without tradition, there cannot be novelty (Csikszentmihalyi 1999: 314–315). This is true for human languages as well.

Research on linguistic creativity has two broadly defined strands: a) *Product-oriented* studies, focused on diverse language forms and constructs with a potential for creative use (poetry, new words, new formulas, etc.) b) *Process-oriented* studies aiming at fuller understanding of the mental processes underpinning creative thought and the nature of creativity as it impinges on language production mechanisms. The two strands tend to develop concurrently with large zones of overlap with regard to the resources of language creativity they investigate but diverge in terms of research goals.

Linguists following Chomsky have always paid more attention to the process-oriented strand. Chomsky (1965) interpreted creativity as an inherent feature of normal language use rooted in the specific ability of the human mind to produce an infinite number of novel sentences appropriate to a particular context guided but not determined by internal state and external conditions. Basically, he talked about the open-choice principle without even mentioning the idiom principle. That is why generativists have successfully ignored formulaic language use for decades.

With corpus linguistics and intercultural pragmatics being engaged in researching prefabricated language we would be shortsighted if we continued ignoring the "other side" of language (conventions of usage). Our goal should be to explain how formulaic language fits into our understanding of language. Examining large corpora, corpus linguists spoke about the fact that "language users are adept at shifting in and out of the analytic mode and move between the systems quite naturally" (Skehan 1998:54). The two types of processing (analytic – holistic) could be viewed as forming a continuum (cf. Skehan 1998, Wray 2002, Carter 2004: 350). From the perspective of the language user we can say that formulaic expressions emerge as 'islands' of temporary stability in the course of interaction and manifest varying degrees of variation and possibilities for further evolution in tune with the dynamics of discourse. All this calls for a change in our understanding of linguistic creativity. Without excluding the combinatorial element we can define linguistic creativity as follows: *Linguistic creativity refers to the ability of combining prefabricated units with novel items (ad hoc generated items) in a syntax-and discourse-affecting way to express communicative intention and goals, and create new meaning* (Kecskes 2013, 2016). In this approach, the proper use of formulaic language is one of the conditions for linguistic creativity, which is a discourse level rather than just a sentence level phenomenon.

Linguistic creativity relies on existing knowledge and the actual situational need and intention of the speaker. It is a graded phenomenon ranging from the more conventional and predictable to the less conventional and unpredictable.

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CONVENTIONAL-PREDICTABLE----------UNCONVENTIONAL-UNPREDICTABLE

In language production and comprehension interlocutors constantly move on the continuum. To which hypothetical end they are closer always depends on several factors such as actual situational contexts, partners, use of L1 or L2, common ground, topic, etc. The important thing is that both the idiom principle and open choice principle are on in any language production and comprehension. The only question is to what extent, which depends on the variables, some of which were listed above.

5. THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

Most scholars are radical contextualists in linguistics, pragmatics, second language acquisition, language education, etc. Context-dependency is one of the most powerful views in current linguistic and philosophical theory going back to Frege (1884), Wittgenstein (1921) and others. The Context Principle of Frege (1884) asserts that a word has meaning only in the context of a sentence. Wittgenstein (1921) basically formulated the same idea saying that an expression has meaning only in a proposition.

I think the overemphasis on context-dependency gives a lopsided perspective. Intercultural communication seems to confirm this claim. As said above, semantic analyzability and literal meaning are very important things for non-native speakers. This is what their common ground is (e.g. House 2003; Kecskes 2007; Cieslicka 2006). Even if someone does not quite understand an expression if it is used in its literal sense usually no misunderstanding occurs. If anybody hears the expression "the doctor will see you in a few minutes", everybody knows that this will not happen: "a few minutes" could be half an hour or more. The function of the expression is to indicate to the patient that his/her presence is acknowledged, and s/he will be taken care of soon. The reason why no misunderstanding occurs is that the utterance is semantically analyzable, and basically, what we have is meaning extension.

When talking about context researchers and educators usually mean "actual situational context" (see Kecskes 2008). But dependency on actual situational context is only one side of the matter. Prior experience of individuals with recurring contexts expressed as content in their utterances also plays an important role in meaning construction and comprehension. We can assume that both the traditional semantic view (literalism) and the novel pragmatic view (contextualism) go wrong when they leave prior context out of the picture. According to the traditional view, we must distinguish between the proposition literally expressed by an utterance ('what is said' by the utterance, its literal truth conditions) and the implicit meaning of the utterance ('what is communicated' by a speaker producing the utterance): the former level is the object of semantics, the latter of pragmatics. Followers of the pragmatic view underline the importance of semantic underdetermination. The encoded meaning of the linguistic expressions used by a speaker underdetermines the proposition explicitly expressed by the utterance. According to Bianchi (2010) this means that every utterance expresses a proposition only when it is completed and enriched with pragmatic constituents that do not correspond to any syntactic element of the sentence (neither an explicit constituent, as in cases of syntactic ellipsis, nor

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a hidden indexical present at the level of the logical form of the sentence) and yet are part of the semantic interpretation of the utterance. For instance:

(3) Jim and Sally are engaged (to each other).
Some (not all) girls like singing.
I need to change (clothes).

According to the traditional view, truth conditions may be ascribed to a sentence (of an idealized language), independently of any contextual considerations. The opposing pragmatic view says that a sentence has complete truth conditions only in context. The semantic interpretation of utterances, in other words the propositions they express, their truth conditions, is the result of *pragmatic processes of expansion and contextual enrichment*. The followers of the semantic view may not be right when they think that any linguistic sign can be independent of any contextual considerations. No linguistic sign or expression can be independent of context because they carry context (prior context), they encode the history of their prior use (prior context) in a speech community. The supporters of the pragmatic view may go wrong when they do not emphasize that expansion and contextual enrichment are the results of the individual's prior experience. Suffice it to say that both sides appear to be mistaken to some extent because they talk about *context* without making a distinction between its two sides: *prior context* and *actual situational context*. The proposition literally expressed (sentence meaning) is the result of collective prior experience of speakers of a given speech community. This is expanded and/or enriched by prior experience, present situational experience and/or need of a concrete speaker when s/he uses that utterance (speaker's meaning). The speaker privatizes the collective experience by enhancing/enriching the content with his private experience. Inferred meaning (implicature) is the reflection of the interplay between prior experience of the speaker and prior experience of the hearer in an actual situational context. Prior context as understood in the socio-cognitive paradigm is declarative knowledge while actual situational context represents procedural knowledge (see Kecskes 2013). Anne Bezuidenhout (2004) claimed that parallels exist between the declarative – procedural divide, the semantics / pragmatics interface and the competence / performance distinction. She proposed that a clear-cut distinction must be made between procedural knowledge, which belongs to the performance system and is pragmatic, on one hand, and lexical conceptual knowledge, which belongs to the competence system and is semantic, on the other. This is in line with what the socio-cognitive approach claims: lexical conceptual knowledge is the basis for prior context that is encapsulated in the lexical items while procedural knowledge, which is pragmatic, is triggered by the actual situational context. So going back to the sentences in example (3) the socio-cognitive approach says that all of those sentences are complete without the parentheticals, and express a truth conditional, actual situational context-independent, proposition. I want to emphasize *actual situational context-independent* because what those sentences are not independent of is prior context. Prior context, reoccurring use (without the elements in parenthesis in example 3) makes their meaning clear even without actual situational context. It suffices to say that the speaker can say Jim and Sally are engaged true or false without concern for "to whom". The speaker can say some girls like singing true or false without concern for whether all do, and can say she needs to change true or false without considering in what way (clothes?

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diet? priorities? career?). The parentheticals add what that speaker was talking about specifically, an added propositional element based on actual situational context. But that is a new proposition. The one it supplants is still adequate in itself as the expression of a proposition. So I argue that *it is a mistake to claim that no sentence is complete without context.* It is more the case that speakers can mean more than the sentence itself means, because actual situational context may supply the rest. But the sentence does say something, completely, and sometimes it is exactly what the speaker means.

In the socio-cognitive approach, underdeterminacy of sentence meaning may exist only from the perspective of the hearer. The speaker's utterance is not underdetermined in any way unless the speaker deliberately wants it to be. The speaker expects that his / her utterance fits into the actual situational context or create an actual situational context. The following conversations will support this point.

(4) Sam: – Coming for a drink?
Andy: – Sorry, I can't. **My doctor** won't let me.
Sam: – **What's wrong with you?**

(5) Sam: – Coming for a drink?
Andy: – Sorry, I can't. **My mother-in-law** won't let me.
Sam: – **What's wrong with you?**

In example (4), Andy says that he cannot go to have a drink with Sam because his doctor does not let him drink. Sam's question "what's wrong with you?" can definitely be interpreted as an inquiry about Andy's health. However, in example (5), when Andy says that his mother-in-law does not permit him to go and have a drink with his friend the whole actual situational context is changed. Based on collective saliency no one would think that Andy listens to his mother-in-law. So the question "what's wrong with you?" may mean something like "are you out of your mind?".

Context plays both selective (actual situational context) and constitutive role (prior context). Actual situational context is viewed through prior context. Meaning in the socio-cognitive approach is the outcome of the interplay of prior and current experience.

Prior context <----------→actual situational context

Radical contextualism is based on actual situational context: no pragmatic meanings are inherent: they are contextually generated / derived. This approach ignores the importance of categorization. Leibniz (1697) said:"..si nihil per se concipitur, nihil omni no concipietur" ("…if nothing can be understood by itself nothing at all can ever be understood"). This is where the other side of context comes in.

Prior context (prior experience with lexical items, expressions, utterances) is present in salience while actual situational context is present as relevance effect. Prior, reoccurring context may create actual situational context or cancel the selective role of actual situational context. When someone starts the conversation with "let me tell you something" the conversation partner knows that something bad or not so pleasant is coming. The collective salience effect of the expression "it's not my cup of tea" is so strong that its literal equivalent is less salient. When native speakers of English were asked to interpret the

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utterance without actual situation context all subjects referred to the figurative meaning "I do not like it" (see Kecskes 2013). However, more than 50% of the nonnative speakers interpreted the utterance according to its literal meaning: "that cup of tea is not mine". They relied on semantic analyzability because they were not familiar with the socio-cultural load attached to the expression. This is where the effect of intercultural communication seems to be coming into linguistics: semantics is gaining space over pragmatics. More attention is paid to semantic content (collective salience) than actual pragmatic meaning. Political correctness prevails. It does not matter what actual situational context and expression or utterance is used. What really matters is its "traditional' interpretation. We cannot see signs "men at work" at construction sites anymore. Those signs have given place to "crew at work", which is considered not sexist. We cannot say any more "limited English proficiency students" because the traditional (prior context) meaning of "limited" may hurt students. We are expected to talk about "English as a New Language" rather than "English as a Second Language" because "new" is neutral but "second" is not. Language users do not wait for language to follow social changes as it has always been doing. They rush the process and select those lexical items and expressions that best suit their present way of thinking. With their picks, they create context rather than expect the actual situational context to specify the lexical units and utterances meaning. They may certainly be a challenge for both linguists and pragmaticians.

6. CONCLUSION

It was argued that analysis of intercultural communication may change the way we think about language. With globalization the traditional view of language that is based on shared common ground, conventions, common beliefs and cultural frames within relatively homogenous speech communities cannot be maintained any more. We need to adjust our understanding of language and accept that the forces (conventions of language system and conventions of usage) that keep a language together are loosen up, are more flexible and rapidly changing. There are three factors in which this change is especially visible: intersubjectivity, linguistic creativity and role of context.

Intersubjectivity changes with less reliance on the socio-cultural frames and prefabricated units of the target language. Since there is limited core common ground, it should be created in the interactional context. Interlocutors function as core common ground creators rather than just common ground seekers and activators as is usually the case in L1. In order for interlocutors to understand each other smoothly, they need to pay more attention to what language they use and how they use it. There is more reliance on language created *ad hoc* by individuals in the course of interaction than on prefabricated language and pre-existing frames. So it is the individual speaker with his/her creative language use that comes to the fore rather than the linguistic and socio-cultural frames that represent the target language.

This leads to a need for a change in how we understand linguistic creativity. We cannot ignore formulaic language any more as has been the case in generative linguistics. It should be included in the definition of linguistic creativity which refers to the ability of combining prefabricated units with novel items (*ad hoc* generated items) in a syntax-and discourse-affecting way to express communicative intention and goals, and create new

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meaning. Linguistic creativity relies on existing knowledge and the actual situational need and intention of the speaker. It is a graded phenomenon ranging from the more conventional and predictable to the less conventional and unpredictable.

Intercultural communication where semantic analyzability prevails in meaning construction directs our attention to the changing role of context and the reinterpretation of the semantics-pragmatics interface. Context has both selective (actual situational context) and constitutive role (prior context). Meaning is the outcome of the interplay of prior and current experience (context). However, both linguists and pragmaticians have been giving much more power to actual situational context then it deserves. They have overemphasized the selective role of context. But present climate is changing because actual language use shows a significant strengthening of the importance of semantics over pragmatics. This calls for the reinterpretation of the semantics-pragmatics interface that has been a leading topic of pragmatic debates for decades but it still needs further research.

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