Communicative Styles and Genres: Between Universality and Culture-Specificity

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1 Introduction

The present special thematic issue comes up as a result of a joint effort of members and supporters of the European Network for Intercultural Education Activities (ENIEDA), a collaborative academic initiative exploring and promoting the values of plurilingualism, democratic citizenship and intercultural cooperation through trans-disciplinary dialogue. Having initially focused on the European model of pluralistic society, its policies, practices and perspectives—outlined in the Preamble of the 1982 Recommendation of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers, in which they acknowledge the fact “that the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures in Europe is a valuable common resource to be protected and developed, and that a major educational effort is needed to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding” (Recommendation R (82)18)—ENIEDA’s activities have now expanded both in geographical and disciplinary terms.

2 Background

From its original Europe-based and (predominantly) pragmatics-anchored programme of research set up in 2008, the Network has evolved into an expand-
ing global community of academic collaborators, whose activities go beyond and across all boundaries—regional, cultural, scholarly, disciplinary, phenomenological. Still (largely) preoccupied with issues revolving around communication, culture and society, their practical applications and educational implications, ENIEDA research philosophy pleads for a more inclusive, eclectic approach to current theoretical constructs, putting forward possible models that can bring a new dynamics into the existing paradigms. In this context, the following representatives and their approaches could be singled out: Cap (e.g., 2008, 2013) with his proximization model of the analysis of political discourse; Eslami (e.g., 2005) with her contribution to instructional and varietal pragmatics, focusing specifically on Persian as a non-Western language; Kádár’s (e.g., 2015) development of major notions in Linguistic Politeness in the post-Brown-Levinsonian context; Kecskes’ (e.g., 2010) socio-cognitive model of understanding interculturality; further advances in Proximization Theory, focusing particularly on the analysis of the news media discourse, proposed by Kopytowska (e.g., 2015); Kurteš’s (e.g., 2013) approach to exploring aspects of daily interaction, looking specifically into its culture-specific and ideological underpinnings; Larina’s (e.g., 2009) contribution to interactional pragmatics in cross-cultural contexts, specifically her model of communicative ethno-styles; and finally, Žegarac (e.g., 1998), exploring the implications of Relevance Theory, taken as a cognitive approach to communication, for analysing its social aspects.

Topic-wise, the special issue reports on some of the anchoring standpoints coming out of the ongoing dialogue initiated by the Network. More specifically, a series of panel discussions have been convened, instigating an exploratory dialogue on a range of issues within the scope of the discourse of verbal interaction across disciplines, languages and cultures. One of the panels, organised at the International Conference Cross-Cultural Pragmatics at a Crossroads III, looked into the specifics of how cultural idiosyncrasies impact on values, norms and practices of a society, its specific sub-categorisation of reality and, ultimately, communicative styles and genres, prompting a lasting debate, the upshot of which is (1) the interplay between universality and culture-specificity of communicative events and (2) their pragma-semantic disambiguation and contextualisation within educational, professional and mediatised contexts.

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1 University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom, 26–28 June 2013. The ENIEDA Panel, entitled Communicative styles across borders and disciplines: Europe and beyond took place on 27 June 2013 and can be viewed in its entirety at https://www.youtube.com/user/ENIEDAnetwork.