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A RELEVANCE-THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS IN GLOBAL COMMUNICATION

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> Globalisation can be seen as an evolution which is systematically reconstructing interactive phases among nations by breaking down barriers in the areas of culture, communication and several other fields of endeavour. (Ohuabunwa, 1999, p. 20)

In the light of Ohuabunwa's definition above, this paper[1] aims to show the relevance of culture-contextual representation for the global communication process. The paper will base its discussion on the cognitive-pragmatic communication theory known as Relevance Theory put forward by Sperber & Wilson (1995) and in Sperber's (1996) culture model. In both the theory and the model, culture is understood as collective representations of individual mental representations. The basic concepts of context and assumptions, as described by Wilson & Sperber (2004: 608) for the global communication process, will be discussed, as will the various cultural assumptions that characterize societies in the world today. Those assumptions have been classified by Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998, p. 29) in dichotomous ways as universal vs. particular, individualism vs. communitarianism, achievement vs. ascribed status, and diffuse vs. specific. In the final analysis, though, this paper sees the differences between cultures not as hindrances, but as challenges that have to be overcome in global communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is an interesting phenomenon for intercultural communication. Although the term typically refers to economic

[1] I specially want to thank my husband for his suggestions and proofreading the manuscript.

phenomena,[2] it has its impact on cultural and social issues. As the economic barriers are broken down and the world grows together as a global village economically, the cultural and social aspects of societies are also affected. Globalisation is tightly linked to information, as Kluver (2006) pointed out. The information part of globalization is exactly the area which affects its cultural and social consequences.

This paper aims to highlight the consequences, in the form of intercultural misunderstandings, which globalization and the information age have to face in intercultural communication. In this regard, it will discuss the relevance of cultural representations in the minds of individuals as they affect intercultural misunderstandings in the global communication process. Cultural representations are the norms and values of a society which members of this society hold and act upon. Because not all societies have the same value- and norm systems, communication problems between different cultures lead to misunderstandings.

The paper will discuss these issues in the framework of Relevance Theory. Thus, the next section will introduce the basic concepts of Relevance Theory. It will be followed by sections discussing several concepts of cultural assumptions and thinking patterns, showing how these trends and thinking patterns present challenges to intercultural communication. The paper will conclude with suggestions for successful intercultural communication in this globalisation and information era.

2. RELEVANCE THEORY

Expounded in Sperber & Wilson (1995) and Wilson & Sperber (2004), Relevance Theory is a cognitive-pragmatic model for interpreting and understanding utterances. The model proposes that understanding and comprehension are directed and channelled by the innate principle of

[2] Kluver (2006: 2) says the following about it: "Globalisation … is most typically defined in reference to the interconnectedness of political entities, economic relationships, or even computer networks".

relevance. This principle works like a filter in the mind of communicators, so that only the information that is selected by that principle leads to understanding. The relevance filter is guided by the mental context of the communicators. Relevance is a psychological mechanism that works on the basis of cost and benefit in the mind of communicators. What this means exactly is explained in the section below.

2.1 The communicators' mental context

The idea of context is essential for the theory. Sperber & Wilson (1995: 15) define it as follows: "Context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world." Context is thus some kind of encyclopaedia about the world which contains the values and norms of a society, personal belief systems and cultural norms; in short, it is all the knowledge that the communicators will have stored in their minds at the time they enter a conversation (see also Blakemore, 1992, pp. 16-22, and Gutt, 2000, p. 27 for more on this notion). The next sub-section talks about how the notion of context is related to the principle of Relevance, the cognitive effects and processing effort.

2.2 The principle of relevance for communication

The principle of relevance has been defined in two ways. Firstly, it covers the cognitive part of communication:

> **Cognitive Principle of Relevance**
> Human cognition tends to be geared to maximisation of relevance. (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 610).

Underlying the principle as defined here are two components: an informative component and an intentional one. The informative component communicates the content of the message while the intentional one

transmits the intention of the speaker.[3] The information process between two interlocutors works as follows: the message transmitted by the speaker is monitored against the context of the hearer. The mind of the hearer starts to work and look into the encyclopaedic entries, the socio-cultural norms and the knowledge of the world. This means that the mind searches all the mental representations for understanding. The technical term for the mind-searching devices is *cognitive effects*.

Cognitive effects try to integrate the content of the information represented by the utterance into the existing mental representations of the hearer. If the message meets some shared context, i.e. some older knowledge, then the understanding is high, which means that the message has reached relevance for the hearer. Consequently, the information is integrated into his mental lexicon. However, if there is no shared background knowledge between the speaker and the hearer, then little or no understanding takes place. As a result, the new information is either rejected or misinterpreted, but not stored in the mind of the speaker. Or it is only preserved as misunderstood or distorted information.

The processing of information between the speaker and the hearer also works on a cost-benefit basis. That is, while searching for optimal relevance, the mind tries to be as economical as possible. The greater the effort the mind makes to invest, the fewer are the cognitive effects that are found, and the less relevant is the message. However, if the processing requires little effort because there are many shared assumptions between the interlocutors, the message will contain a great number of cognitive

[3] In relevance-theoretical terms, the informative component is called "inferential communication" and the intentional component is "ostensive communication". The latter consists of the verbal and non-verbal cues that a speaker builds into his or her message so that the hearer understands the content and the intention of the speaker's message.

effects and thus have much relevance. The processing effort is a device of the mind which helps to understand utterances.[4]

By way of second definition of the cognitive principle of relevance, the principle was later extended to the area of communication, under the name "Communicative Principle of Relevance":

> **Communicative Principle of Relevance**
> Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance. (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 612)

What this principle says is that when communicators talk to each other, the relevant theoretical processes of understanding, as described above, are initiated. As already mentioned above, successful communication relies on the shared background between interlocutors. The next section discusses how the broader concept of cultural mental representation can affect the global communication process.

3. CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

The individual dimension of context as discussed in the previous section has a general cultural dimension. Sperber (1996: 32-55) speaks of cultural representations, about which he says that every culture has trends of cultural manifestations that are unique to it. The cultural dimension of context starts with the mental representations of all the individuals taken collectively and, in addition, includes the artefacts and objects of that culture. Sperber further suggests that there is a direct link between the productions of a culture and its mental representations. In this regard, he says that:

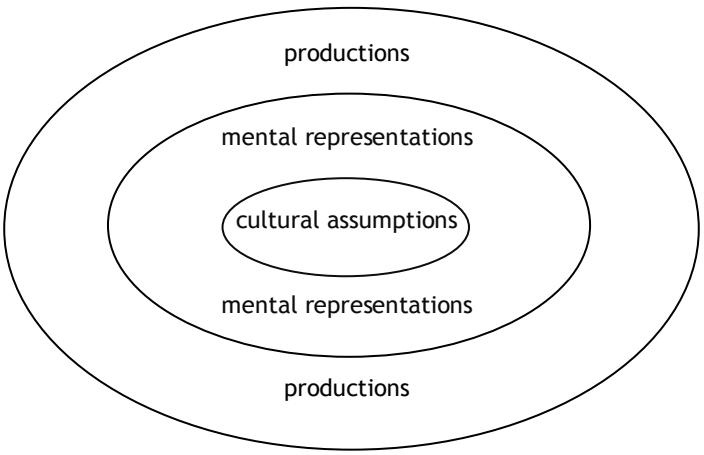
> A human population is inhabited by a much wider population of mental representation: that is, objects in the mind/brain of individuals such as beliefs, fantasies, desires, fears, intentions and so on. The common physical environment of that population is furnished with the production

[4] So, contextual effects can be regarded as "context modifications" (Gutt 2000: 27), while processing efforts are like mind-searching devices for optimal relevance (op. cit., p. 30).

> of its members …. Typically, productions have mental representations among their causes and their effects.

This suggestion is illustrated in the following diagram, which merges Wilson & Sperber's (2004) idea of mental representation with Sperber's (1996) cultural model of mental representations:

Figure 1: Sperber's cultural model



This model is similar to the ideas of Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998: 22). The two authors developed a simple cultural model that splits into basic assumptions that influence the norms and values. The inner circle represents the premises, that is, the assumptions that are implicitly understood by members of the culture and which are transferred from generation to generation in families, schools and other societal institutions. These assumptions manifest themselves in cultural mental representations that influence the outer layer of the artefacts and products of a culture.[5]

This paper focuses on the basic assumptions that cultures hold and how they can help to explain misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

[5] Other models of culture can be found in Duranti (1997: 23-50).

4. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF DIFFERENT CULTURES

The basic assumptions that a culture holds are related to basic questions of survival. Anthropologists have found that while these basic assumptions are beneath the awareness of human beings, they are the root cause for their actions. That is why in this section I talk about the tacit assumptions that cultures hold and which are acted upon unconsciously, but which are seldom, if at all, verbalized. There are numerous ways in which people deal with their environment and with other people, but I will focus on only four universal strategies that dominate the way people deal with other people.[6] These basic strategies of human relationships[7] are: particularism vs. universalism, status-achieved vs. status-ascribed cultures, individualism vs. communitarianism, and diffuse vs. specific cultures.

4.1 Particularism versus universalism

The two terms contrasted here show how people judge circumstances, situations and their fellow human beings: the judging of people or circumstances is done either according to rules in a more universal manner, or according to circumstances, or the particular relationship between individuals, which is the more particular way. Rule-based judgment is more abstract and will not allow exceptions, as exceptions might weaken the system. For example, in rule-based Germany drivers will stop in front of a traffic light at two o'clock at night, even if there is no traffic and no one who could see them breaking traffic rules. For its part, particularistic judgment concentrates on the exceptional circumstances and gives higher priority to them than to the rules.

It has been suggested by e.g. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998: 33) that rule-based judgment, i.e. the universal way of perceiving the world, is found more in the developed world, and that particularistic

[6] The original idea can be found in Kluckholm & Strodtbeck (1960).
[7] Other universal concepts which dominate people's survival are how they deal with time, nature and activities (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998: 27).

thinking is a feature of smaller and more rural communities, where everyone knows everyone else. However, this suggestion has been rejected by the same authors (ibid.),[8] and I would reject it as well.

4.2 Status-achieved versus status-ascribed cultures[9]

All cultures give a higher status to certain people than to others and signal that the former have to be given special attention. Some cultures do this according to people's achievements, while others do it on the basis of age, class, status, and education. The former group is referred to as "achieved-status cultures" and the latter as "ascribed-status cultures". The term *achieved* refers to doing, while *ascribed* refers to being.

Cultures which ascribe status value age and seniority. The status ascribed by an organisation shapes the personality of the individual it is ascribed to. Achievement-oriented cultures value knowledge and put achievement before the status of age. In such cultures the status one holds is based on one's knowledge and skills, and on one's recent achievements. Titles are used to show the competence of an individual. On the other hand, in ascribed-status cultures, titles are used to confirm one's status.

Both cultural preferences have hierarchies of status, but the value system that the hierarchy is based on is different. In ascribed-status cultures the hierarchy is based on the status one has received in life. So often it is structured according to seniority and age; that is, one finds older people at the top of the hierarchy. If the superior is downgraded, then everybody in the hierarchy is automatically downgraded, too. In achievement-oriented cultures, the hierarchy is based on accomplishment. One can find a younger person who has been placed above older persons

[8] The dichotomy between particularistic and universalistically oriented societies is also discussed in Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998: 29-42).

[9] The content of this section is a summary of what Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998) say over pages 106 to 116.

because he is highly qualified. In such cultures, the downgrading of the superior does not entail that of the entire hierarchy.

Further, the recognition of senior staff is different in both systems. In societies with ascribed status, senior people are expected to be more powerful to get things done. This is because their power over people is based on their status and because people are willing to follow them due to their seniority. On the other hand, in achievement-oriented societies, respect for older people is justified because the senior leaders have achieved more for the society using skills and knowledge they have acquired in their lives.

4.3 Individualism versus communitarianism[10]

While everybody behaves and thinks in individualistic and communitaristic terms, "cultures do typically vary in putting one or the other of these approaches first in their thinking process" (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, p. 51). Thinking in individualistic terms is not unrelated to the freedom which individuals are granted in their societies. In this connection, these two authors gave an overview of how countries all over the world scored on granting individual freedom:[11] the United States of America (67%), Canada (69%), Nigeria (74%), Romania (81%), and Israel (89%) scored highly on individualism. Germany came in the middle (53%), and the lowest scorers were Egypt (30%), Nepal (31%), and Mexico (32%).

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[10] The content of this section is a summary of what Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998) say over pages 52 to 62.

[11] Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's (1998) figures were obtained from a survey based on the following questions (see p. 52):

> A: One said: "It is obvious that if individuals have as much freedom as possible and the maximum opportunity to develop themselves, the quality of their life will improve as a result."
>
> B: The other said: "If individuals are continuously taking care of their fellow beings, the quality of life will improve for everyone, even if it obstructs individual freedom and individual development."

Thirty thousand managers from all over the world were interviewed.

Underlying the concepts of individualism and communitarianism is the postulate that whether or not cultures put the individual or the group first can only be measured in terms of the individual's or the group's reactions. However, the question arises how we can know what the underlying cultural value is in a given culture. The answer to this question is that the underlying value will surface in specific situations. One specific situation is the process of decision-making. And a relevant question related to this is: Is decision-making a group effort, or does it belong to the individual boss or manager?

Communitarial decision-making takes longer, because the process will take as long as it takes to reach consensus among the group's members. This will require detailed consultations. For instance, to vote down dissenters, as is often done in the West, is foreign to many community-oriented cultures.

Community-oriented cultures do things together. So, they will send a group to negotiate for them in business-related matters or politics. In individualistic societies an individual is sent who has been chosen to represent the company's consensus that will have arisen from the discussions that must have taken place beforehand.

Individual people who are sent by nations, societies and business companies for negotiations cannot have a high status in the eyes of group-oriented cultures, because these ascribe status to people that appear in groups and with representatives.

In both types of culture, organizations are set up, but with different goals. In individualistic cultures the organization is set up to serve the interests of the individual, while in a community-organised culture it is set up to serve the interests of the society.

If one looks at the two opposite ends of this continuum, then one gets a distorted picture, because the individualist also has common goals, and the communitarist has individualistic goals as well. The real picture is perceived by recognizing that the individualist puts his or her interest first by reaching

the common goal, and the communitarist puts the goal of the society first by achieving his or her individualistic goal.

Individualism has often been associated with modernism and economic growth. However the economic successes of Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan have proven this assumption wrong (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998: 53), because all these societies are group-oriented.

A correlation between Protestantism and Catholicism has also been added to the "mix": some research has shown that predominantly protestant-based countries like the USA, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK show more signs of individualism than more catholic-oriented countries like France and Italy, or the countries of South America (op. cit., p. 54).

4.4 Specific versus diffuse cultures[12]

This section deals with the way cultures are divided into different spheres of life. A specific culture is very direct and has a clear understanding of the different areas of life and how they are separated and what kind of function they have. Diffuse cultures do not have such a clear-cut understanding of the various spheres of life; they see the different areas of life as being put together through the superseding principle establishing and maintaining relationships.

Specific cultures have divided life into clearly separated compartments and have set rules for how these compartments relate to each other. For example, there is the private sphere (family, holidays, salaries, leisure time) and the public one (work, public services, membership in clubs, etc.).

On the other hand, diffuse cultures do not have a clear-cut separation between private and public spheres. For example, a professor will be asked

[12] Another contrast that has been suggested by Hall (1959) is that of "low- versus high-context cultures". Hall writes:

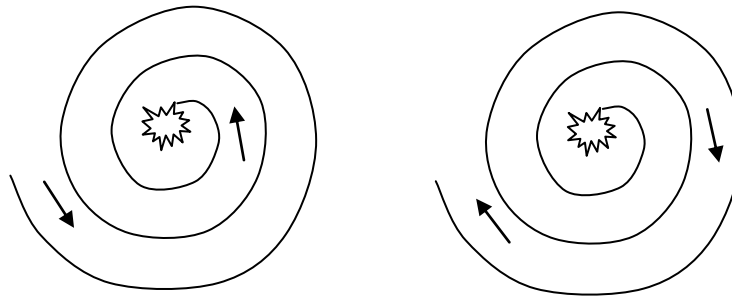
> A high context communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low context communication is just the opposite. (p. 49)

for his or her expertise in all areas of public and private life, even when he or she is highly specialized in one scientific area only.

One important feature of diffuse cultures is the area of losing face, which is also known as the anthropological phenomenon of shame orientation.[13] Losing face is experienced when something is made public that belongs to the private domain. Failure, for example, is regarded as a private matter. That is why being confronted with failure publicly causes somebody to lose face.

Further, in diffuse cultures a lot of time is spent before one comes to the point in negotiation, as everybody has to be comfortable with it. See the following figure (adapted from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, p. 91):

Figure 2: Negotiations in high and low-context cultures



A B

The diagrams A and B illustrate opposite negotiation practices in diffuse high-context cultures and low-context ones. The high-context culture (see figure 2A) starts with the general and goes to the specific, while the low-context culture (see figure 2B) negotiates from the specific to the general.

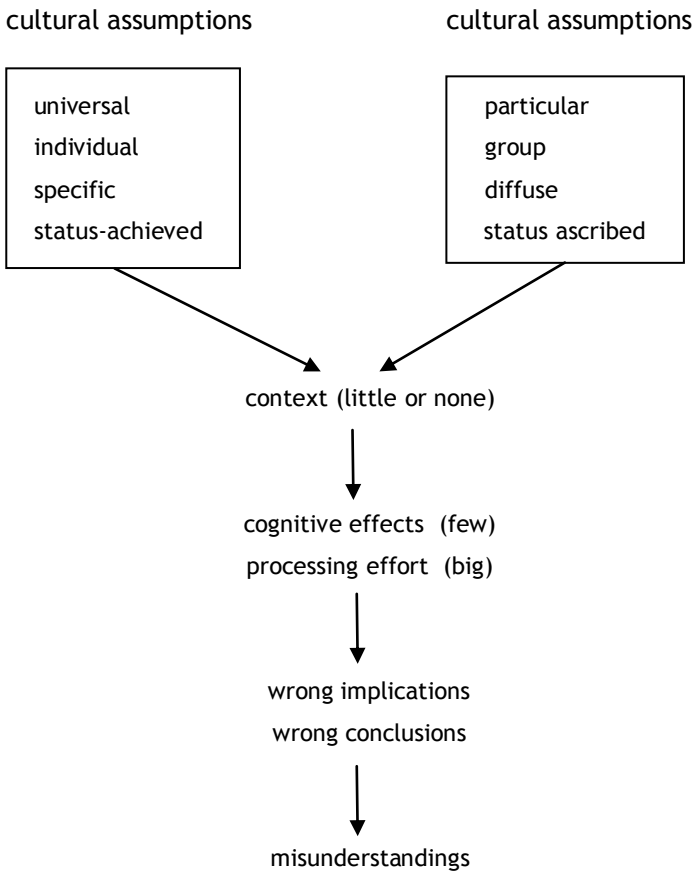
[13] Käser (1997), in his book *Fremde Kulturen* ('Foreign Cultures'), talks about losing face in connection to the super-ego and the conscience. He distinguishes between shame-oriented versus conscience-oriented cultures. The diffuse system would apply to the shame-oriented aspect of dealing with guilt (see pp. 139-146). Käser also points out that the term *shame-oriented* ties in with that of *group-orientation*, while *conscience-orientation* ties in with *individualism*.

The overall aim in the former type is to keep everybody happy so that no one involved loses face during negotiations. The diagram in figure 2 also demonstrates that the result of the negotiation will be the same; that is, both cultures will get to their point, although the strategies employed move in opposite directions.[14]

5. THE VARIOUS CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS IN THE RELEVANCE-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION PROCESS

If we try to put the above different assumptions of cultural thinking into the framework of the Relevance Theory, the following pattern emerges:

Figure 3: Cultural assumptions in the Relevance Theory model



[14] Similar ideas can be found in Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998: 83-98).

Figure 3 gives an idea of how the different cultural priorities would work if confronted with each other, and how they would lead to misunderstandings. The box on the left hand side shows the primary thinking patterns of cultures with universal (or rule-based) judgment, the individual orientation to self, the specific clear-cut thinking, and the status achievement (also known, in Hall's [1959] terms, as low-context cultures). The box to the right shows the value system of cultures with a more particular judgment, which are group-oriented, diffuse and shame-oriented, and status-ascribed (or, in Hall's terms, high-context cultures).

While it has not been clearly established in the literature that all cultures which have universalistic thinking are also individualistic, specific and status-achieved, and that those that are group-oriented are also particular, diffuse and status-ascribed, often these characteristics of either type of culture cluster together.

6. APPLICATION OF THE DIFFERENT THINKING PATTERNS IN GLOBAL COMMUNICATION

The term *application* here has to do with the following question: How does comprehension between low- and high-context cultures take place in relation to the principles of the Relevance Theory? As I have already suggested above, a key determinant of comprehension is the assumptions that are brought into the communication process by the participants.[15]

All the assumptions described in the previous section work like filters for understanding. The comprehension process that takes place roughly follows two steps: firstly, the information presented to the hearer is interpreted against his or her context (that is, the assumptions in his or her mind); secondly, this kind of evaluating process creates cognitive effects,

[15] I have suggested in Schröder (2010) that primary cultural assumptions affect the way in which people from high and low context cultures communicate. That paper describes how culturally preferred assumptions affect the use of explicatures and implicatures.

i.e. mind-searching activities. If the shared knowledge of the communicators is high, more cognitive effects are produced and the understanding is high. So, the comprehension process and the cognitive effects are in direct correlation. And the higher the correlation is between assumptions and cognitive effects, the smaller the processing effort. That is, the mind has to do little work to understand, as both the speaker and the hearer already know everything.[16]

If these relevance-theoretical assumptions of comprehending and interpreting a message are extended to different thinking patterns that manifest themselves in culturally determined mental representations, it is obvious that the members of group-oriented cultures will have no difficulty communicating with each other when it comes to matters relating to decision making or rectifying mistakes. This is because both cultures place the group's interest before the individual's and the interlocutors are used to waiting for group consensus in decision making and rectifying mistakes.

The same can be said about members of cultures that ascribe status. Their members understand that a person is defined by birth, by his or her family, his or her status in the community, and his or her connections. For instance, if a speaker at a conference were to be introduced within a status-ascribed culture, he or she would not only be referred to by his or her present achievements, or the works he or she has published, but by his or her whole family background as well, and even by what he or she has done for the community. For people belonging to the same culture, the mind will make little effort to understand this kind of introduction, because it is an expected way of introducing someone.

However, things get more complicated when people belonging to cultures with different thinking patterns meet each other, as when, for instance, participating in a global communication process. In relevance-

[16] Below is how Moeschler (2004: 54) expresses the correlation between relevance and cognitive effects and processing efforts:

Relevance:

a. The more cognitive effects an utterance produces, the more relevant it is.

b. The more cognitive efforts an utterance requires, the less relevant it is.

theoretical terms, this would be the case if the shared assumptions were weak. This is because the processing effort must be strong enough to achieve understanding. In such a case the cognitive effects are insufficient, which means that the mind cannot find enough cues to enable a comparison of the information. In such a situation, the mind starts to search for understanding, which in turn increases the processing effort.

Wilson & Sperber (2004: 613) claim that in processing information people balance the costs and the rewards. This balance is achieved when the cues are found or the understanding has been achieved, that is, when the information has been optimally processed.

Based on figure 3, I would like to predict what is likely to happen when participants in a global communication event meet while they do not share the same background assumptions. If a person from an achievement-oriented culture (say Germany, the Netherlands or North America) comes alone to an important business meeting, sent by his or her employer, organization or country, he or she is likely to be regarded as a very unimportant person in a status-ascribed, group-oriented, culture. This is because his or her real status at home would have been measured according to the people that had accompanied him or her. However, since he or she will have come to the meeting alone, he or she will be judged as status-less. In such a case, there is likely to be misunderstanding from the beginning and negotiations will be very difficult, or may not even take place. This is because people from group- or status-oriented cultures are likely to see it as an insult for only one person to have been sent to business negotiations. That may explain why it is customary for African heads of state, for instance, to travel with a big entourage when they visit other countries, a practice which is not always well understood by people from individualistic cultures, like this German who once commented: “Why does the [African] president spend so much money going for negotiations with a group of thirty people?”

To refer back to figure 3, different cultural assumptions are likely to lead to different conclusions and, thus, misunderstandings are likely to occur. In a diffuse, shame-oriented, group-oriented, and relationship-based culture, where relationships are valued more highly than rules, mistakes are dealt with differently than in an individualistic, specific culture. If a person from this latter type of culture works in an organization and then makes a mistake, this affects the entire organization. The person will be confronted, the mistake will be pointed out to him or her, and a record of the incident will most likely be put into his or her employment file.

In a particular, diffuse-oriented culture, the person is not confronted alone, but the whole group is informed. The whole group might take responsibility for the mistake or error, and the individual is not even confronted; rather, a mediator is sent in order to help the person to save his face, and the group also wants to keep the relationship intact. An observer from an individualistic culture then might ask the questions as to why that person is not confronted and why he or she does not take responsibility. On the other hand, an observer from a group-oriented culture might react and ask the question why the group is not taking responsibility and no one is helping that person to save his/her face. Again, we see the different reactions that stem from different cultural assumptions held in the minds of the communicators.

In an earlier article (Schröder 2005) I suggested that the different assumptions which communicators hold in cross-cultural conversation are responsible for cross-cultural misunderstandings, as also seen in the above examples. This claim agrees with that made by Moeschler (2004: 61), which suggests that different background information is the crucial factor in cultural misunderstandings, and that comprehension is disturbed if speaker and hearer do not share the same background knowledge, thus the search for relevance is guided into two different directions.

Interestingly, Moeschler also points out that the process of comprehension in cross-cultural communication is sometimes cut short

when the principle of relevance has been satisfied too early.[17] As I suggested elsewhere, "too early" here means that "the principle of relevance [has been] satisfied with the wrong conclusion [being] reached" Schröder (2005: 71). This will happen when the communicators do not share the same context, which in turn means that either party used the wrong implicatures to read the other party's mind. Actually, in some situations, the listener may simply give up trying to understand the message, because he or she cannot find any match of it in his or her memory, due to the differences in cultural assumptions.

7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to show that cultural assumptions matter a great deal for successful global communication. The paper has argued that every culture operates on basic assumptions and values that shape and determine the communication process. Fundamental cultural differences are likely to lead to misunderstandings in global communication.

A successful global communication requires accessing the cultural assumptions of the different parties involved in the communication process. To this effect, I have proposed a communication process principle involving two basic steps:

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[17] For the comprehension process to be successful, two more theoretical concepts have been posited by Wilson & Sperber (2004, p. 13) to underlie cognitive processes:

> a. Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.
>
> b. Stop when expectations of relevance are satisfied.

> **Step 1:**
> Successful intercultural communication requires the awareness on the part of the participants in a conversation that in spite of good mutual linguistic competence cultural assumptions may be quite different and can lead to wrong conclusions in the comprehension process.

> **Step 2:**
> Successful intercultural communication relies on the investigation of different cultural assumptions of the parties involved.[18]
> (Schröder 2005: 73)

After the participants in a communication situation are aware of their different cultural assumptions, and after they are willing to investigate these cultural assumptions, successful communication now relies on their willingness to integrate enough knowledge of each of their respective mutual background assumptions into their communication, which is formulated in step 3:

> **Step 3:**
> Successful communication needs to integrate the respective cultural assumptions of the diverse cultures into the communication process.

What is required in these three steps leads me to conclude this paper by restating, but in a slightly revised version, a principle of successful intercultural communication, which I stated elsewhere:

> On the basis of awareness and investigation of cultural assumptions (steps 1, 2 and 3), successful communication relies on the extent to which both speaker and hearer explicitly state and explain cultural

[18] In the same vein, Dattner (2006: 1) observes that:

> Successful communication between human beings, either within a culture or between cultures, requires that the message and meaning intended by the speaker is correctly received and interpreted by the listener. Sustainable error-free communication is rare, and in most human interactions there is some degree of miscommunication.

> assumptions to open up to enough cognitive effects for speaker and hearer so that the information can be relevant for them.
> (Adapted from Schröder 2005: 74).

Therefore, a good cross-cultural communicator provides additional explanations for the communication of his or her message, so that cognitive effects can take place for the hearer along the lines of conditions 1-3.

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