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Introduction: a phonopragmatic approach to the analysis of ELF cross-cultural communication

The pragmatic dimensions involved in cross-cultural communication, with reference to immigration contexts, are at the basis of this ethnomethodological research.

The increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers (not simply ‘economic migrants’), escaping from their countries of origin to Italy and, as a consequence, to the European States, represents an additional reason for a focus on intercultural pragmatics with reference to cross-cultural linguistic mediation processes in specialized domains.

Actually, the interactional processes here analysed are those that occur especially within professional domains where non-native speakers of English – namely Western experts and non-Western migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – interact by means of ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) variations in multicultural specialized contexts, more precisely, in centres for legal advice in ‘gatekeeping’ situations (Guido 2008).

The use of ELF in situations of ‘unequal encounters’ between non-Western participants (i.e., immigrants and asylum seekers) and Western experts (i.e., Italian/European mediators), is here explored both in the production and in the perception processes by means of a new *phonopragmatic* approach.

Specifically, the *phonopragmatic* approach is here introduced to explore the possible prosodic and auditory dynamics and processes involved in cross-cultural communication, with a particular focus on both illocutionary intentions and perlocutionary effects (Levinson 1983; Searle 1969, 1983) in intercultural interactions, as participants adopt ELF prosodic strategies of: (i) marked speech segmentation in pragmatic acts, (ii) prosodic segmentation of these acts into intonation units, and (iii) acoustic variations in their use of syntactical, lexical and pragmatic features, especially if related to socio-cultural backgrounds and L1 interferences (cf. Guido 2008).

The objective of this approach is to describe, on the one hand, the close relationship between prosody and pragmatics, and, on the other, the role played by prosody in the conveyance of the speakers’ intentions in conversational interactions as they perform speech acts.

More specifically, *phonopragmatics* is a pragmatically-oriented phonological exploration of speaker's illocutionary acts in ELF cross-cultural communication. Therefore the aim of this approach is to identify (i) possible cases or areas of miscommunication in cross-cultural specialized settings; (ii) processes of intercultural mediation in the production and perception of speech acts through the agency of specialized intercultural mediators.

In this sense, the research attempts to explore the employment of prosodic strategies in intercultural communication to give insight into more comprehensive and complete theories of ELF variations, based on "the existence of more than one ELF variety, depending on the particular groups of speakers from different L1 backgrounds who 'authenticate' English according to their own diverse native cognitive-semantic, syntactic, pragmatic and specialized discourse parameters" (Guido 2008: 25).

Nonetheless, L1 phonological patterns transferred to the use of the ELF variations by speakers belonging to different speech-communities may be misinterpreted. Therefore, misunderstandings may arise whenever a phonological or prosodic correlate is not properly interpreted by listeners belonging to speech communities that do not share the same communicative role and meaning of for instance pauses or certain tonal patterns.

Seen from this perspective, the crucial concept of 'schema' (Carrell 1983) – here applied – refers not only to extralinguistic influences due to native background knowledge (in terms of sociocultural filters, experiences, conceptual understanding, and attitudes) but also to L1 paralinguistic variations that activate in the organization, comprehension and storing of information which make sense of a message.

For this purpose, an appropriate *phonopragmatic* analysis is crucial for the understanding, by means of a qualitative research method, of (i) how prosody and phonology are affected by pragmatics and how they in turn affect the perception and interpretation of the message, and (ii) how native-language prosodic, syntactic and stylistic structures are transferred to the use of ELF varieties, and to which extent they influence its production and perception and, as a consequence, enhance cross-cultural communication. Actually, the following analysis will specifically investigate (i) how existing L1 prosodic contrasts (e.g. in terms of length, stress, and tone) can be redefined to acquire novel prosodic contrasts in ELF variations, and (ii) how pragmatically influential are the resulting L1 phonological transfers into the ELF variety, i.e. the nature of L1 phonological phrasing, with reference to the syntactic and morphological elements, and its effects on the ELF variations.

The ultimate aim of this approach is to investigate, by means of an ethnographic method (Hymes 1996), the socio-cultural factors and illocutionary goals that affect intercultural communication, as well as the

perlocutionary effects – in terms of cognitive accessibility, socio-cultural and ethical acceptability and specialized intertextuality (cf. de Beaugrande & Dressler 1981) – produced by cross-cultural interactions on participants from both Western and non-Western speech communities.

In this sense, special attention will be paid to the possibility of transferring the conclusions, derived from the *phonopragmatic* approach and analysis, to everyday mediation contexts with the aim of providing European intercultural mediators with linguistic suggestions that may help them to be aware of the fact that even the use of certain prosodic features and behaviour facilitate, or even influence, the process of meaning construction (and mediation) and then of mutual comprehension from both communicative sides.

Actually, experts in intercultural communication should be aware of the processes at the basis of discourse construction in multicultural encounters and, consequently, of interpreting, and translation as well, which should not be a literal and automatic transferring of L1 semantic structures to ELF. Rather they should be involved into a cross-cultural mediation process by which all speakers' socio-cultural and individual identities are equally respected and properly communicated.

To fulfil these goals, the research is subdivided into three parts: Section 1 will carry out a comprehensive outline of the theoretical assumptions underlying the research hypothesis and objectives; Section 2 will provide a thorough exposure of the *phonopragmatic* model of analysis, thereby focusing on its rationale and multidisciplinary methodological approaches; Section 3 will deal with the *phonopragmatic* analysis applied to five case-studies of naturally-occurred cross-cultural encounters in specialized immigration contexts.

1. Theoretical Background: Focus on ELF Variations

The *phonopragmatic* model described and applied in the present research is grounded on theoretical views that justify its research focus and methodological approach. At the basis of the research rationale, a multidimensional correlation of scientific approaches is set, especially regarding: (i) the interaction between intercultural pragmatics and other components of linguistics, with particular reference to the theory of speech acts and illocutionary intentions (Searle 1969, 1983); (ii) the study of phonology with special attention to the adoption of prosodic strategies of speech segmentation and acoustic variations, and paralinguistic devices in the use of ELF; (iii) the analysis of cross-cultural communication with a careful consideration for specialized-genre conventions and socio-cultural