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2017

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural dialogue and its many variants such as interfaith, inter-ethnic, and interracial dialogue set global scenes with some sort of differences at play. This paper examines difference by proposing ways to develop a reflective capacity relative to specific dialogic practices and goals which are typical in peacebuilding. The chapter is organized into two parts. In the first part, three dimensions of peacebuilding praxis are introduced which focus on interactional needs, relational needs, and informational needs or truth-value. Each is explored in specific cases. The second part of the paper elaborates how these very practical matters can be valued differently in different religious, intellectual, and cultural traditions. The differences can be productively engaged, however, as we deepen our understanding of the ways dialogic peacebuilding encounters activate different models of personhood, means of relating, vocabularies of emotion, and ways of dwelling in the nature of things.

INTRODUCTION

A common stance for dialogue in prominent western cultural scenes is that one should speak directly to others; that one should do so in a way that maintains social relationships; and that one should speak truthfully. This stance for dialogic practice has served many well as a mutual way of addressing important local and global matters from economical, indigenous, political, religious, and racial inequalities to ecological injustices, to mention only a few. However, this stance, as any stance, has its limitations and an ability to reflect upon those limitations, upon dimensions of this dialogic stance, especially as it comes to the fore in practice among different peoples, is essential at times for productive dialogue to occur and to be sustained.

This paper proposes a reflective capacity along three dimensions which are essential when dialogue—as some people believe it should be—gets frustrated or reaches its limits. The reflective capacity is discussed as follows. After presenting some background for the reflections, I introduce three cases of dialogue among people who differ from one another. The cases demonstrate deep differences in what is deemed to be proper practice by each when interacting with the others. A summary of the cases highlights different interactional, relational, and informational needs, respectively, as basic elements in what is deemed proper as dialogue. The point is made explicit with the cases: an ability to reflect upon these dimensions, as they occur in practice, can enhance dialogic practice. The second part of the paper discusses how these dimensions of difference are associated with deep cultural models for being a person, for acting properly, for feeling in various ways, and for dwelling in the nature of things.

BACKGROUND[1]

The discussion that follows is designed within a long-standing program of inquiry in the study of communication codes generally, and intercultural communication in particular.[2] The methodology is a version of cultural

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1. This section is a slightly revised excerpt from one of our published articles on the communication codes of dialogue (see Carbaugh et al., "Cultural Discourses," 89–90).

2. See Carbaugh, *Cultural Communication*; Katriel, *Dialogic Moments*; Philipsen et al.,"Speech codes theory."

discourse analysis[3] with a special focus on cultural practices of dialogue.[4] The approach, as a way of building culturally sensitive practices, has been advanced explicitly with regard to peacebuilding—including in security issues—with special emphasis on initiatives of the United Nations.[5] Specifically, peacebuilding in these ways can not only honor local cultures but also forge better, longer-term, more satisfying plans for future actions.

Regarding our focus on dialogue, our research projects have been implemented as follows: 1) we identified in a language a term, if one is—or more are—available, which has some significant semantic overlap with the English term "dialogue"; 2) we described and investigated uses of that term in specific social contexts; 3) we analyzed the acts, events, and/or styles of communication being referred to with that term, or those terms; and 4) we interpreted the deeper cultural meanings of these terms concerning dialogue itself, as well as presumptions the terms carry about personhood, feelings, and social relations. Eventually, the latter phases of analysis interpreted persons, social identities, relationships, and institutions, in addition to the explicit meanings about what is preferred as dialogic communication itself.

Our procedures follow a specific theoretical model,[6] which has been used in varying degrees in earlier studies of such phenomena, including Leslie Baxter's study of the differences in an English speech community between "talking things through" and "putting it in writing";[7] Mary Garrett's study of Chinese "pure talk";[8] Brad Hall's and Mutsumi Noguchi's study of the Japanese ritual of *kenson*;[9] Tamar Katriel's study of Hebrew "dialogic moments," including *dugri* speech and "soul talks";[10] Richard Wilkins' study of the Finnish *asiallinen* (or matter-of-fact) style of talk;[11] and Makato Saito's study of the silencing of gay identity in Japanese.[12] This

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3. Carbaugh, *Situating selves*; *Cultures in Conversation;* and "Cultural Discourse Analysis." Carbaugh et al., "A view of communication."

4. See, for example, Carbaugh et al., "Cultural Discourses."

5. Miller and Rudnick, "Case for situated theory."

6. Carbaugh, "Fifty Terms"; and Carbaugh, ed., *Handbook of Communication.*

7. Baxter, "Talking things through."

8. Garrett, "Wit, Power and Oppositional Groups."

9. Hall and Noguchi, "Engaging in 'kenson.'"

10. Katriel, *Dialogic Moments.*

11. Wilkins, "Optimal Form."

12. Saito, *Silencing Identity.*

program of work has now explored, and is now exploring, over 100 such terms for communication practices in several different languages—and varieties within languages—including American Sign Language, Arabic, Blackfoot, Chinese, Danish, English, Finnish, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Japanese, Ojibwe, Russian, Sakapultec, and Spanish.[13]

THREE CASES: DIALOGUE AND ITS INTERACTIONAL, RELATIONAL, AND INFORMATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Discussion of the following cases is built partly upon these earlier and ongoing studies of Wierzbicka.[14] Some of our earlier research reports have explored "dialogue" in Carl Rogers' and Martin Buber's exchange,[15] in various languages,[16] and the field of Dialogue Studies generally.[17] By the end, and building upon our prior works, we look across our cases to identify the large discursive landscape being charted through "dialogue," its considerable crosslinguistic and cultural domains, in order to enhance our dialogic capacities especially when deep differences are at play. On the bases of these studies, I have selected the following cases which demonstrate differences in dialogue which invite deeper modes of dialogue, that is, those dialogic forms which can embrace such differences and hopefully derail monologic assertions, violence, or other destructive forms of behavior.

Case of Dialogue Without Speaking: Reflecting upon Stances for Interaction

For many Native American peoples, places in one's natural environment are deemed sacred. Such places as the Badger-Two Medicine area or the Sweet Grass Hills on the Blackfeet reservation are set aside for ceremonial use and meditation, just as a building of worship is for others. As the Blackfeet man, Rising Wolf, has said to me: "The land that you walk upon is your church." Similarly, for members of the San Carlos Apache of Arizona, Mount Graham is considered such a place. When this place, Mount

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13. Carbaugh, *Handbook of Communication.*

14. Wierzbicka, "Concept of 'dialogue.'"

15. Anderson and Cissna, *Buber-Rogers Dialogue*; Carbaugh, "Cultural Terms."

16. Carbaugh et al., "Dialogue in Cross-cultural Perspective."

17. Carbaugh, "On Dialogue Studies."

Graham, was proposed as a site for an astronomical observatory, support for the proposal was given by the University of Arizona, Germany's Max Planck Institute of Radio Astronomy, and the Vatican Observatory among others. In the wake of the proposal, resistance was expressed, and the San Carlos Apache were asked to respond. The supporters of the observatory proposal, in other words, sought a dialogue with those Apache people who opposed it.

As is typical in the United States, the social stage of a public hearing was set with the expectation that one speak about the issue of concern. This expectation goes back at least as far as the colonial tradition of the New England Town Hall Meeting. The belief is that speaking to the issue is the main reason not only to bring differing parties together but also the means whereby the differences are addressed and mediated. In other words, it is through talking that differences are expressed and can be overcome. This belief about talk is prevalent and prominent in popular American culture and deep in its political tradition.

There are, however, other traditions deeply woven into the fabric of the country. Among Apache people, for example, a reverence and respect for a sacred place like Mount Graham becomes known by being there in that very place, by using it in traditional ways, and by being guided by what it "says" to you. This, the place's spiritual guidance, is much deeper than any one person and each is expected to be properly respectful of that grand power. Given this power, it is best that any one person not try to speak about the place's spiritual power or use its voice, for any one effort by any one person risks diminishing, even desecrating, the sacred spirit that dwells there and all that it is. This severe reluctance to speak on behalf of the sacred mountain obtains among some traditional Apache people. The dynamic is further magnified when Apache people are with others who know nothing about Mount Graham, who know little of treating such a place as sacred, and even less about the specific ceremonies occasioned in this sacred place as well as the traditional Apache ways cultivated there.[18] In such a situation, how could one speak of all of this? It is best to witness the power of the place nonverbally.

The case invites both deep and broad reflection upon what stance is best for dialogic interaction. Is speaking the only stance or are other stances deeply at play? Does verbal interaction interfere with or violate cultural or spiritual principles that are active? What alternate means of communication

18. Helfrich, "Cultural Survival"; Wilkins et al., "Situating Rhetoric."

may be needed or necessary to proceed? If people feel forced to participate, then to do so in ways that violate their beliefs, the results will hardly be of enduring value. Reflection upon stances for speaking or not—what is presumably good or best—for participants is warranted.

A Case of Dialogue That Targets Harmony: Reflecting upon Relationships as the Top Priority

Chinese scholar of communication, Guo Ming Chen, has written that "Chinese culture treats harmony (*he xie*) as the cardinal value. Only through harmony can a conflict free network of human relationships be achieved. Competence—social and moral—is measured by one's ability to maintain harmony, with harmony lubricating the wheels of interaction."[19] Chen makes it clear that the top interactional goal when addressing difficulties from a Chinese view is maintaining harmonious human relationships. When differences risk rising to the fore or dissolving into social conflict, it is best to do what one can to defer to others so relations with them can remain strong, cordial, and productive.

Similarly, Chinese scholar Shi-xu has written: Proper Chinese communication

> is guided by the overarching neo-Confucian principle of being and doing: to bring, maintain and enlarge worldly harmony. That is, relational in nature and holistic in worldview, [Chinese communication] strives to achieve power-balanced harmony, or equilibrium, in society (平天下, peace of humanity under the heaven) as the ultimate moral principle and it does so by conflict avoidance, empathy with others, self-sacrifice, conviviality, etc. in speaking and understanding."[20]

Such a stance and focus can result in a "deep distrust of language in relation to meaning."[21] In other words, from a Chinese point of view, it is best to make positive social relationships the main interactional concern or the targeted goal of dialogue, especially when conflict, difference of opinion, tension, or stress is possible.

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19. Chen, "Harmony."
20. Shi-xu, "Chinese Assumptions," 79.
21. Ibid.

Scholars like Guo Ming Chen and Shi-xu characterize a preferred Chinese style for dialogue which involves—relative to the subject matter of concern—being indirect, subtle, and adaptive. In this way, one can address and construct positive social relationships. This sort of deeply cultural value in harmonious relations can stand uneasily beside others. For example, a prominent and preferred style of speaking in Finland is the style of being direct, of the *asiallainen*. When speaking this way, it is highly preferable that one speak directly about the facts of "the matter at hand." The Finnish preference is for a relatively sparse use of words which address the subject matter frankly with less focus on the "face" of participants or relational matters. In fact to speak in a way "simply to give face" to others, or to focus primarily on relational matters without proper regard to the topical issue at hand would violate this preferred Finnish, *asia*-style.

Let's explore this matter more deeply.

A Conflicting Case of Dialogue with Different Targets: Speaking Facts about Flaws or about the Virtues of the Good Life

A group of Russian professors were invited to visit an American university in order to become familiar with its academic programs. The Russians had travelled to the United States in order to learn on-site how American universities were organized, how specific curricula were designed, and how university personnel were arranged. The professors in the United States were brought together to discuss with the Russians how academic life was conducted in each respective country's universities. Once the professors arrived on campus, a series of rather informal meetings among them was called in order for each to become acquainted. After some short hours together, the American professors began expressing frustration in not knowing what the Russians wanted and needed to know. At the same time, the Russian professors were expressing frustration because they were not getting the information they wanted or needed. Why was this happening?

The communication dynamics in these gatherings provides a possible explanation. When the Russian professors discussed their home university and its programs, they displayed consistently and relentlessly its corporate identity, via themes of solidarity, a view that was publicly agreeable to them. The view presented in their presentations was of a united and collective persona, focused on the virtues of their university, its programs, and personnel. Further, the Russians did not ask explicitly for information and

guidance, as such questions might have suggested a fault with their system, thus presenting a risk of disloyalty and a threat to the solidarity of those gathered. The proper Russian face and stance for dialogue did not foreground disclosures of limitations and problems as both risked impropriety from their view.

The other half of this interactional occasion involved American professors who approached the gathering differently. As they listened to the Russians, they struggled to identify what the Russians most needed to know and wanted to hear from them. After hearing about the virtues of the Russian university, the Americans perhaps unwittingly invoked a reciprocity norm by talking about the problems and pitfalls with their home university, its programs, and other matters. They discussed in some detail the problems with their university—faulty facilities and sparse funding—in the United States. Displayed at the meeting, then, was a rather typical American problem orientation, self-focus, and recounted individual experiences relative, in this case, to a higher educational institution.

The dynamics between the modes of interaction at play here are worth making explicit. By targeting a corporate virtue, the Russian stance made it impossible to discover what information was most needed by them. By targeting a problem focus, the American stance eagerly made known what was least needed to the Russians. In a nutshell, the Russian stance foregrounded collective virtue, as the American stance foregrounded the facts of suboptimal problems. The resulting confusions and misalignments that resulted in this intercultural dialogue were difficult for all parties.

DEEP ROOTS OF DIALOGUE: DIFFERENT MODELS FOR CONDUCT, FEELING, AND PERSONHOOD

The three cases above demonstrate in particular ways how people in peacebuilding can approach their situations of dialogue quite differently. In doing so, we step often unknowingly into a stance concerning interactional needs, relational views, with presumed priorities pertaining to what is properly informational, whether factual disclosures or expressions of virtue are most desirable. An Apache speaker, equipped with a deeply traditional spiritual view, may find it not only difficult, but lacking virtue, to speak about a sacred landscape. A Chinese participant may find expressions geared toward relational harmony much better than an expression of fact or truth which risks arousing conflict and intense differences of opinion. Russian speakers

may at times in public prefer expressing what is good and virtuous to them rather than problems about their institutions or social systems. In this latter case, I have heard Russians reflect further that Americans at times can seem to be without moral fiber or virtue; then Americans reflect that Russians refuse to speak candidly or factually about their work conditions. And the dramas of dialogue go on!

We may find it difficult to reflect upon these matters; but for peacefully enhanced action, reflect upon them we must. The difficulty may seem impenetrable as it is often housed in customs we take deeply for granted, in beliefs that run deep. The advantages, however, are considerable if we develop the capacity to scrutinize not only the issues but our preferred dialogic means for understanding them. Such reflection, active along the dimensions discussed above, may open new ways to achieve our objectives peacefully. As a result, such reflections can run deeply into our cultural ways and means. This can be difficult, but it also can be highly productive and preferable to running roughshod or violently over others' ways, rendering their ways ineffectual—if they're not going to speak to us we can't help them—and as a result, rendering them helpless. One needs only a reminder of Rollo May's central insight: the seeds of violence are rooted in the soils of helplessness; or alternately, if we can embrace diversity in dialogic ways, we may serve the objective of nonviolent action.[22]

The above cases have been arranged to invite reflection upon three key dimensions in the conduct of dialogic exchanges, especially when differences among people are at play. Before each is elaborated a bit, a central point needs to be made. Dialogue always occurs in a highly particular context; that context is socially occasioned by participants for their purposes; it is also deeply informed by specific, typically unquestioned cultural traditions. Participants to dialogue are best equipped to deal in dialogue when they take the time to know the specificity of that context, the social situation, the cultural traditions at play, as these will be active in the exchange. And as important as it is to develop a reflective capacity along the dimensions only outlined here, that capacity is powerful when applied generally to all means and meanings of dialogic practice.

When difference comes into play, the proposal here suggests asking three basic questions: what is the interactional stance of the participants (and in turn, what interactional stance is being presumed by you)? One key feature in a response is whether one should speak or not; another involves

22. May, *Power and Innocence.*

explicitly how to speak (or not) and in what ways? This is a key interactional dimension as conceived and enacted in dialogue.

The second question for reflection is: how, if at all, are social relationships being targeted in this dialogue? And in what ways? The question invites one to think about connections (or divisions) being forged among people and in what ways this is being done. Some participants approach dialogue with the primary goal to forge relations; others with the goal of exchanging information, as we see next. This is a key relational dimension of dialogue.

The third question asks: what information and/or ideas must be exchanged and in what ways? How do these effect participants? It may be, for some, that information should be at best implied rather than directly stated, especially when face-threats are related to that information. It may be for others that the truth must never be harnessed by any other objective. For still others, what should be expressed is housed in statements of virtue and visions of the "good life." None of these of course are mutually exclusive, yet each can appear where another is expected, thereby seeming somehow out of place to one, about the other. This is a key informational dimension(s) of dialogue.

Reflection upon these dimensions of dialogue can help inform how people work together and enhance their effectiveness in doing so, that is, by acknowledging a range of stances and objectives at play, scrutinizing each, then working in an integrative way to advance the range of stances and ideas at play.

Applying this point to the cases above results in several more specific reflections:

1. Dialogue might involve a nonverbal stance that pays witness through silence.

2. Dialogue might involve massaging interpersonal relationships so people feel comfortable together, being related harmoniously, even at the expense of the information or facts being exchanged. In fact, the information exchanged might not quite be true, or may even be misleading, but the goal of harmonious relations is being served and this can be good.

3. Dialogue might involve, even when asked a question of fact (what actually happened?), a lengthy response about the good, virtuous life (this is the way we think people should live)!

4. A dialogic stance oriented to speaking directly and honestly to the facts of the matter may be least effectual, even harmful.

Typically, elements like those discussed here are beyond the realm of the discussable. They are unknowing or unreflective aspects of discursive preferences and habits. As such, they often serve as unwitting bases for negative judgments, stereotypes, and misunderstanding. By capably bringing these dimensions up for reflection, by reflecting upon these elements in the dialogic practice, participants can scrutinize each, making the process work better for both, and the outcomes more fitting and enduring to the occasion. This task is of course not simple. Why not?

These reflections can and often are tied to deep cultural, religious, and/or political orientations. This is of course demonstrated above as the Apache stance, through its traditional ways, as it is adopted as part of the ancient wisdom of a people. Similarly, the Chinese view, through basic Confucian principles, carries with it a deep cultural tradition. In a different way, basic dynamics of political life can make a tradition of speaking truthfully in public difficult, as in many post-Soviet societies, not to mention a host of others where minority voices are prohibited. This of course runs counter to other traditions where speaking out in public, freely, even if discreditable as George Washington did, is held as a sacred value. The various trajectories for proper conduct bring deeply different stances to dialogue. Reflecting upon them, endeavoring to recombine them in practices toward goals of social betterment, all is required for humane and peaceful advances to be made.

So in closing, recall from the Tao Te Ching: "The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao." Keep in mind the "ineffable Tao," for it reminds us that the truth at times or perhaps never can be spoken. But also be mindful of John 1:1, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God."[23] Through sharing our words, and our different worlds, we can create not only the hope but a practical procedure for moving forward together. Reflecting upon, then using better, diverse dimensions in dialogue can provide for productive moves in many directions.

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23. Biblical reference from Oxford English

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