Working Papers in Language Diversity

Paper **5**.

Modes of Cultural Coexistence

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Despite the fact that many developed societies recognise multiculturalism as the preferred mode of cultural coexistence, no-one can deny that increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the society can cause problems that need to be addressed. The first part of this paper analyses what are the properties of multilingualism and multiculturalism that can create, and often do create problems. The second part gives an overview of the processes that prototypically operate for resolving or at least reducing the scale of these problems in human society. It is argued that consolidation is the optimal process reducing the negative impact of diversity. The third part of the paper presents a model that makes explicit the combination of these forces that lead to diversity reducing processes. The final part is devoted to the possibility of consolidation in European multicultural societies.

1. Functional aspects of language and culture

Multilingualism is a part of cultural diversity which is a well recognised creative resource. As the "UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity", adopted by the UNESCO's General Conference in November 2001, puts it: "as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature". Although often overlooked, both cultural and linguistic diversity create problems, too. These problems arise from the conflict between the instrumental and integrative functions of language and culture (Gardner 1985) in one hand and from the need of the society to promote cooperation and reduce its members' uncertainty in other hand.

Instrumental function of the language and culture

Language is instrumentally a tool of communication. As such its value for the society is easily understandable – without a common language, information exchange and cooperation would be difficult and the chance of misunderstanding high. The same applies, for culture, too.

Culture provides a set of norms that regulate the social life of cultural community. It also provides a broad background knowledge that the members of the society share. Common norms and background information makes people's behaviour in general more predictable and their behaviour mutually more easily understandable. Thus, instrumentally, culture is a tool that reduces uncertainty and enhances understanding between the members of the community. The lack of common cultural knowledge creates culture-chock that is well known phenomenon in the studies of acculturation of sojourners and immigrants (see Kim 2001; Gudykunst and Kim 2003). Therefore, a common language and also a common culture are needed for a successful functioning of the society. In an ideal situation the members of the society share one language and one set of cultural values. Such situation reduces uncertainty between the members to the possible minimum and maximises the possibilities of cooperation and action coordination to the maximum. Of course, different cultures tolerate unpredictability in a different degree (see Hofstede 1991), but even the shared understanding that in this culture we tolerate uncertainty reduces stressful uncertainty and enhances cooperation.

Integrative function of language and culture

From the integrative point of view, language and culture are tools that enable people to identify themselves with important others and to manifest their broader group membership. Thus, both linguistic and cultural features can serve as tokens of collective identity dividing people to groups. These features, including language, are called boundary features (Barth 1969:14). The division of people to different groups works on various dimensions: broad cultural similarities divide people to for example westerners and easterners, religious differences to Christians and Muslims, language differences to ethnic groups, dialectal and subcultural and professional differences even further.

In ideal conditions, the instrumental and integrative functions of culture and language reinforce each other: the less uncertainty there is between the members of the society the more active is cooperation, the higher is the possibility of trust between people. Thus, sharing a language and culture increases the level of social capital. According to Putnam (2000:19), social capital "refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." The more there is social capital, the more the members of the society get attached to the collective identity that is signified by this particular language and culture.

Dialectic between instrumental and integrative functions

Human mobility has created and always will create contacts between various cultural and linguistic groups. In some cases this leads to the emergence of multicultural societies. The emergence of new cultural and linguistic groups in a society increases uncertainty, because people do not share cultural norms with each other, and reduces cooperation because of mistrust and the decreased ability to share information.

This tension that is well known in many multicultural and multilingual societies arises from the clash between the instrumental and integrative functions of language and culture in society. From the integrative point of view, one's linguistic and cultural practices are an important component of one's collective identity and they have a natural right to manifest it. Furthermore, the diversity of these practices is also valued as the source of innovation and creativity. From instrumental point of view, society needs a shared language and a shared set of cultural values to reduce mistrust and uncertainty between the members of the society and increase effectiveness and cooperation, i.e. to create social capital.

This dialectic tension between integrative and instrumental functions of language and culture is not meant to be resolved and probably cannot be resolved. Perhaps it is only possible to seek for the optimal balance between the need for unification and the need for diversity, and even this is not a simple task. There have been periods in history when this balance has got distorted. In one hand, forced unification as in the Soviet Union leads to developmental standstill. In other hand, the post-modern cultural fragmentation of Western societies has decreased internal stability and reduction of social capital. The main hypothesis of this paper is that there are three basic dialectic intergroup processes in operation that aim to achieve the optimal balance between the diversity and unity in society: assimilation, consolidation and disintegration.

2. Critique of the acculturation models

The processes of assimilation, consolidation and disintegration are bound to the notion of acculturation. There are a number of acculturation models proposed, I mention two of them. First, Berry (1974, 1980, 1997) proposed a bidimensional acculturation model, where attitudes towards adopting majority language and values and maintaining minority language and values lead to four acculturation orientations: assimilationist, integrationist, separatist and marginalisation. Bourhis (2001) expanded this model to majority acculturation attitudes, consisting of integrationist, assimilationist, segregationist and exclusionist categories. He also added the fifth category: individualist attitude. The main difference between these models and the one advocated here lies in the notion of integration: Berry and Bourhis view it as a distinct intergroup process; I argue that integration is not a distinct intergroup process, but a rhetorical disguise for one of the possible intergroup processes - assimilation, disintegration or consolidation.

Integrationism as smart assimilation

The main principles of the integrationist ideology are the recognition of the key features of the linguistic and cultural identity of the minority while assuming the adoption of some aspects of the majority identity by the members of minority, including the language. Integrationist attitude towards interethnic relationship within a single society is usually coupled with pluralist ideology which expects that all minorities within a society will adopt the public values of the dominant majority, but the state does not regulate the private values of the members of the society so far as they do not disturb the social peace. Further, the pluralist ideology accepts that the citizens so far as they are taxpayers might expect the state to support the maintenance of their linguistic and cultural identity. These ideologies are mainly disseminated by the concept of tolerance towards cultural differences and the right of the minority to demand that its needs be accommodated. (Bourhis 2001)

The integrationist approach is efficient in situations where there are a few immigrants or very small minorities who do not have power to challenge the existing intergroup power relations. In such settings integrationism is actually the most effective way of assimilation, because of the following properties: 1) no pressure is put on the minority to abandon its identity and language, which makes it harder to defend its maintenance; 2) the shifting members of the minority are more easily accepted to the dominant majority as the small number of shifters does not create identity threat amongst the members of the majority; 3) the minority is too weak to create its own self-sustainable segregative society. Under these conditions social mobility becomes the easiest way to fulfil one's need for success and positive feel of belonging.

Although the integrationist ideology supports minority language and identity maintenance, usually in the form of a hyphenated double identity (such as Estonian-Russian, or Italian-American), such double identity is intrinsically unstable due to its cognitive complexity (see Roccas and Brewer 2002, Ehala 2007). In such a situation, the attraction of the majority culture and economy will erode weak minorities within a couple of generations. Thus, the difference between the integrationist and assimilationist policies lies in the manner of conducting interethnic relations: while assimilationist policy aims for a forceful change of the minority identity, and often

creates the opposite effect, integrationism does not threaten one's identity, but leaves the cognitive, economic and prestige factors to promote assimilation much more effectively.

Integrationism as way to disintegration

However, integrationism and pluralism become ineffective if the emergent minorities are large and culturally very distant from the majority. Such high vitality minorities use pluralism and integrationism for constantly negotiating their status within the society. This creates tension amongst the majority whose position is threatened. As a consequence, behind the official policy of tolerance, dissatisfaction with the situation grows both amongst the majority as well amongst the minority members. In these conditions pluralism and integrationism actually do not lead to harmonious society, but instead erode the shared cultural and linguistic norms. This increases uncertainty and fragmentation which reduces social capital in the society as the whole. Basically, in these social conditions, integrationism is essentially the same as separatism: behind official tolerance, both groups are building their separate networks of trust that eventually would lead to the emergence of two societies that may decide to separate (like in the case of Yugoslavia) or stay segregates (as do some Muslim communities in Europe).

Thus, in the case of large minorities, the processes of acculturation have increasingly become the issue of inter-group relationship and inter-group behaviour. In inter-group behaviour usually two dimensional models of mutual adaptation apply – either your group assimilates or it separates and creates its own society. There is however a third, but very hard possibility: consolidation – the creation of a new meta-level collective identity that would include both groups as subgroups.

A prime example of consolidation is the emergence of a nation from linguistically and culturally diverse dialects. This new meta-level collective identity unites the linguistically and culturally diverse subgroups into one integrated whole where the previous top level collective identities are reanalysed as sublevel collective identities. Thus, consolidation accommodates diversity within the new unity. It reduces its cognitive prominence, but does not erase it.

If the groups are not able to consolidate, and neither is willing to adopt, their co-existence in one society becomes problematic. The reason is that the society needs shared language and values to function and to increase social capital and reduce uncertainty. A third possibility besides assimilation and consolidation is disintegration. If the minority community is too small for formally to separate, it chooses to segregate itself or is forced to segregation by the dominant society.

3. Modelling inter-group dynamics

As I have argued above, from the group perspective, there are only three possible scenarios – either one of the groups assimilates, either the groups separate which leads to disintegration of the previous whole; or the groups consolidate, i.e build a new higher level identity that includes both croups as subgroups of the new whole. The actual outcome in each particular contact situation is influenced by many factors, but I argue that there are a few that play a decisive role. These are: cultural mass, intergroup distance, utilitarianism and discordance.

Below I define each of these terms, a more detailed overeview of the model can be obtained from Ehala (2008) and Ehala and Niglas (2008).

Cultural mass

In intergroup settings people compare their in-group (G_1) with the prominent out-group (G_2) in respect of their cultural, political, economic, demographic strength and status M. The status depends on various interdependent factors such as economic wealth, technological advancement, defence capabilities, liveliness of the culture, rich historic heritage, quality of life, etc. These factors together are called 'the cultural mass'. Basically, the cultural mass in this model is conceptually very close to the early conception of ethno-linguistic vitality as advanced in Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) and Bourhis, Giles and Rosenthaal (1981) and later in Yağmur 2004, Yağmur and Kroon 2003; Shaaban and Ghaith 2002; Florack and Piontowsky 1997.

M does not function in isolation but only in comparison with some other group. Thus what is really decisive is not the group's absolute cultural mass, but the mass differential with the most prominent out-group. This differential is the main motivating factor for a possible assimilation. Thus one can say that all other things equal, Group's vitality V equals with the cultural mass differential: $V = M_1 - M_2$

Inter-group distance

Inter-group distance is the sum of cultural differences between the groups such as language, religion, values, collectivism, gender roles, food, clothing, types of government and the level of mutual mixedness of their social networks. The larger is the inter-goup distance (r) between the low status G_1 and high status G_2, the least likely is the G_1 to assimilate and thus, the less is its vitality affected by the presence of the high status G_2. Thus the effect of the cultural distance could be shown to influence the vitality V in the following manner: $V = (M_1 - M_2)/r$

Measuring inter-group distance has not been a widely studied field, although there are a few studies and the topic seems to have become more popular (see Babiker, Cox and Miller (1980), Fukurawa (1997), Chirkov, Lynch, Niwa (2005)).

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a broad attitude that people act as it is economically most useful for them. According to Scollon and Scollon (1995) the basic principles of the utilitarian discourse are the following: 1) humans are defined as rational economic entities, 2) 'good' is defined as what will give the greatest happiness for the greatest number, and 3) values are established by statistical (i.e quantitative) means.

But each culture functions as interplay of innovation and tradition and the utilitarian principles are balanced by what could be called the identity discourse: 1) the essence of humanity is emotional; 2) the notion of "good" is set by the moral authority; 3) values are defined by tradition. The success of the identity discourse relies on emotional attachment of a person to his important others and the heritage as well as to his immediate surroundings – the cultural landscape. In a balanced culture, the utilitarian discourse and the identity discourse are in a modest conflict of innovation and tradition, characteristic to many well-functioning societies.

As the utilitarian principles are discursive, different groups may differ in respect to the salience of the utilitarian principles in their culture. The less salient these principles are the more conservative is the culture. For example some religious groups (like Amish) are so conservative that they almost do not assimilate despite the large cultural mass differential with their prominent out-groups. In this case the utilitarianism is virtually zero. If the society is totally utilitarian, the assimilative effects of the cultural mass differential are enforced; and if the utilitarian and identity discourses are well balanced, U does not play any role in assimilative behaviour. From this, it could be reasonable to let the values of U to change in the diapason $0 \leq U \geq 2$ and to include it to the formula in the following way: $V = U(M_1 - M_2)/r$.

Discordance

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that if the low status of the ingroup is perceived to be legitimate, the members of the group are more likely to abandon their membership. If the situation is perceived illegitimate, the members could be more prone to fight collectively for improvement. Perceived illegitimacy is the main factor that contributes to the discordance between groups. There are other contributing factors too, such as stigmatisation, discrimination, historical injustices, competition over resources, and inter-group violence. The higher is the level of perceived discordance the less likely is assimilation between groups.

Discordance is calculated from two components. The legitimacy perception determines its polarity: if the inter-group situation is perceived as illegitimate, D will have a negative value, if the situation is perceived positive, D will have a positive value. The actual strength of the discordance is measured by the perceived stigmatisation, discrimination, aggression and hostility. This value can vary from 0 (no perceived discrimination) to 1 (maximal imagineable discrimination). Combined with the polarity, obtained from the legitimacy perception the value of D can vary from -1 to +1 (see Ehala forthcoming for its exact operationalisation).

Thus the negative values signify the feeling of unjust discrimination that can lead either to resistance to the majority or, if the inter-group distance is very small, to assimilation, to obtain a more favourable collective identity. In the case of a small inter-group distance, it would be relatively easy to change group affiliation without fearing retaliation from one's previous in-group and get accepted by the new in-group. If inter-group distance is large and the members of both groups could easily be identified by appearance, then the high level of negative discordance makes assimilation almost impossible.

The positive values of D signify that the group feels that their group is stigmatised for a good cause – they feel that they are, in fact, losers and not able to achieve collectively anything. The positive D values undoubtedly catalyse assimilation.

If we incorporate discordance to the vitality model, it obtains the following shape:

$V = (U(M_1 - M_2)/r) + D$

Note that D is added after the rest of the calculation is completed. This shows the dichotomy between rational and irrational motives in human behaviour. If humans were purely rational, the intergroup processes would be adequate without D. As these processes are influenced often by very strong feelings, D can distort the rational picture.

Basic patterns of intergroup dynamics

The values of V can vary between -12 to +12. If the value of V<0, the group has a low vitality and is in danger of assimilation. If the value of V≥0 the group is stable, i.e. there is no immanent danger of assimilation. It should be noted, that positive V values indicate ethnocentrism – the higher the positive value of V the more ethnocentric the group is. This means that such a group is less likely to accept new members than the group whose positive V values are closer to zero.

Without going to mathematical details, the formula would predict the following intergroup dynamics:

Large cultural mass differences + small inter-group distance + low discordance + utilitarianism = assimilation

Large cultural mass differences + large inter-group distance and/or high discordance and/or low utilitarianism = segregation

Small cultural mass differences + large inter-group distance and/or high discordance and/or low utilitarianism = disintegration

Small cultural mass differences + small inter-group distance + low discordance + utilitarianism = consolidation

Patterns always depend on all members of the contact. In other words, the patterns can be restated like this:

If the groups involved in this contact have high vitality and low ethnocentrism – consolidation is possible. If the groups have all high ethnocentrism – disintegration is a possible outcome. Low vitality combined with low ethnocentrism leads to assimilation, low vitality combined with high ethnocentrism to segregation.

4. Conditions and features of consolidation

After the Muslim terrorist acts in Europe during the recent years, it has become evident that Europe is facing a serious crisis. A good account of this is Fukuyama (2006) who argues that society needs not only acceptance of the differences, but also a set of positive common values that could consolidate the various subgroups, including the dominant subgroup into one whole.

Basically, the current situation demands the creation of a new meta-level collective identity that would provide the various subgroups of the modern multicultural society a uniting concept of *we*. In other words, Europe needs the same type of consolidation movement as it experienced in the process of the emergence of modern nations that united quite diverse dialectal and regional identities under one meta identity – ethnic nation. Yet this process is needed on the higher level abstraction so that it could find the common features of the current ethnic and religious subgroups to create a new higher level collective identity.

If this could be achieved, the current top-level collective identities become sub-level collective identities. And the dividing linguistic and cultural diversity becomes reanalysed as internal diversity within the ingroup. It is a well known social psychological phenomenon that if the group is perceived as the whole, its internal diversity becomes more easily accepted.

The other beneficial outcome of such a hypothetical development would be that the collective identities find a cognitively simpler mode of organisation. Prototypically each person has a number of collective identities, but it is the norm that there is one collective identity on each dimension (female or male, not female and male; Estonian or Russian, not Estonian and Russian). Double identities on the same dimension are cognitively hard to reconcile which is the psychological reason why stable bilingual identities are not stable in long run (Ehala 2007).

Building a new higher level collective identity would resolve the inconsistency that is immanent in integrative ideology that assumes that the minority members acquire a double identity on the same ethnic dimension. The new common identity would be something of the super-ethnic identity of which the current ethnic identity is a sub-identity. Just like regional dialectal identity is a sub-identity of one's ethnic identity.

The question is what would be these values that would be common for all subgroups of the society. I suggest that such a fundamental shared value, anchored in our biology is 'care'. This value is essential for in-group belonging, even in experimental conditions, when groups are formed of random people. The experiments conducted by Henry Tajfel are well known that show peoples preference for the members of their in-group in minimal group setting (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Care, which is known to all subcultures in a society, could be used to define the common core of modern multiculturalism. It would be the basis for constructing a new meta-level mode of identity and belonging that would consolidate the modern subcultures of society in the way nationalism consolidated the historical subcultures within various ethnicities two centuries ago.

As the notion of care is quite abstract and universal, it is easy for the dominant group to impose it as a normative rule to the society without fearing that it would be called racist or nationalist for doing it. If we want to have a well functioning society, we need some values that society has a right to impose for everybody who are part of this society. Care has a good chance for being such a value. It only needs an effective and powerful ideology, but in principle it is able to create the sense of *we*, at the same time not destroying the existing collective identities.

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