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NOWE SPOJRZENIE NA KOMUNIKACJĘ MIĘDZYKULTUROWĄ

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THE INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER AS A COMMUNICATIVE EVENT SUBJECT TO MEDIATION

(THIS ARTICLE WAS TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY JAKUB WOSIK)

Keywords: intercultural encounter, communicative event, mediation, intercultural communication, intercultural education, foreign language teaching

Abstract. The aim of this article is to discuss the place and role of the intercultural encounter (IE) in communication and education, including in foreign language teaching. Firstly, I present the IE as a communicative event and define it using terms developed by ethnographers of speech (communication). Secondly, I discuss the concepts contained in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (CEFR 2018) relating to the mediation of text, concepts, and communication, and present the original definition of mediation in intercultural contacts. That section emphasises that mediation does not only act as an intermediary facilitating the course of a communication event but also as an “understanding interview with oneself.” Next, I discuss theoretical concepts related to the IE, I describe it as a tool used in teaching and intercultural education, and I present a description of the IE by a student of the Teaching Polish as a Foreign/Second Language course at the University of Lodz. Finally, I analyse an example description of an IE and present preliminary conclusions on how to use IE descriptions in various educational contexts.

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1. THE INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER AS A COMMUNICATIVE EVENT

According to ethnographers of communication (speech), e.g., Dell Hymes (1974) and Muriel Saville-Troike (1994), a communicative event (CE) is the central element of the notional triad of: *communicative situation – communicative event – speech act*. The representatives of this stream of interactional sociolinguistics used this to develop a theory used for the study of the methods of communication specific to individual speech communities. Among the research tools applied in ethnography of communication, one is particularly interesting, i.e. Hymes's SPEAKING acronym, in which each letter refers to a different element of communication (S – *setting*, P – *participants*, E – *ends*, A – *act sequence*, K – *key*, I – *instrumentalities*, N – *norms*, G – *genre*).

A communicative event may consist of several speech acts (which one identifies by extracting the basic communicative function of the behaviour of the participant of the act), while interrelated diverse communicative events may form communicative situations (with culturally and socially established forms, e.g., a lesson, various ceremonies, or social gatherings). Ethnographers of communication define a communicative situation as “the context within which the communication occurs” (Saville-Troike 1994, p. 26). A CE is considered the starting element of communication subject to analysis and interpretation. It can be extracted based on its uniform fixed set of at least a few significant communicative elements. It ends when one of those elements changes or subsides, e.g., in the case of a change to the participant set, the setting, the tone, the topic, etc. (Saville-Troike 1994, p. 27; Zarzycka 2000, pp. 63–64).

I shall define the intercultural encounter (IE) as a communication event with participants representing different cultures or which occurs in a cultural context foreign to one or more participants, a fact which may have certain (often unpredictable) impacts on the course of the communication or interpretation of the event. An intercultural encounter consists of at least one communicative event. Communication can occur through various “modes of information transmission” (codes or channels), i.e., verbally, non-verbally or in a mixed manner.

An encounter between “my world and the world of the Others”, i.e., an intercultural encounter, is the key aspect in intercultural education, the main educational goal of which is to prepare young people to operate in a linguistically and culturally diverse society (in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural world; cf. the concepts discussed in CEFR 2001/ESOKJ 2003). An IE considered as a communicative event is authentic and unfolds following a specific course; it can become an element that causes a major change of perspective in how one perceives oneself and others.

Based on the many years of my experience in teaching Polish as a foreign language and as a researcher studying intercultural events, I can conclude that participants in such events are not aware of the gravity of the event before they consolidate it and subject it to mediation.

2. UNDERSTANDING MEDIATION

2.1. MEDIATION WITHIN CEFR 2018

A major innovation included in the first edition of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2001 / Polish translation: ESOKJ 2003) was the addition of interactive and mediation activities to the already established receptive and productive ones. This document, similarly to other sources, understood mediation as an act of mediating between interlocutors, though the description of mediation activities was limited to a laconic presentation of examples of text processing (see CEFR 2001, pp. 14 and 87–88); it covered a mere 1.5 pages in total.

The superficial treatment of the major notion of mediation in the process of teaching and learning foreign languages triggered several corrective operations. A few years later, an important work was published, promoted by the Council of Europe just as CEFR/ESOKJ had been, entitled: *Cultural mediation in language learning and teaching* (Zarate et al. 2004). It discussed several research projects aimed at defining the notions of mediator and (inter)cultural mediator¹ and offered a description of cultural mediation and its role in language teaching; its authors clearly stated that the reason they decided to act was the omission of the notion of cultural mediation from CEFR 2001. I discussed this work as well as the outcomes of all the projects discussed in it in Zarzycka (2018).

In CEFR 2018², the topics related to mediation were expanded upon considerably; now they cover nearly thirty pages (see CEFR 2018, pp. 105–132).

¹ Consider the following two definitions selected from those included in the work: of a cultural mediator, formulated as an outcome of project no. 1 discussed in the work: a mediator: “A facilitator intervening in the transmission of cultural information, an interpreter of culture, an agent mediating intercultural communication”; “The cultural mediator is a social agent who designs and puts in place devices that make possible to restore meaning where meaning has broken off [...]” (Zarate et al. 2004, p. 219).

² As I was finalising this article, there was still no Polish version of CEFR 2018. The major notions related to mediation included in the publication were discussed in Polish by Waldemar Martyniuk (2018), who utilised the translations included in the M.A. thesis by Marta Ptak, which she defended at the Jagiellonian University.

It includes the following definition, which remains in line with the task-oriented approach to education currently promoted by the Council of Europe:

In mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). The focus is on the role of language in processes like creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, collaborating to construct new meaning, encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and passing on new information in an appropriate form. The context can be social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic, or professional.

(CEFR 2018, p. 103)

Further the work identifies three main types of mediation: mediation of texts (textual), mediation of concepts (notional), and mediation of communication (communicative), discussing it in the context of the following key activities and strategies:

- **Mediating a text** ▶ Relaying specific information – in speech and in writing
 - ▶ Explaining data (e.g., in graphs, diagrams, charts, etc.) – in speech and in writing
 - ▶ Processing text – in speech and in writing
 - ▶ Translating a written text – in speech and in writing
 - ▶ Note-taking (lectures, seminars, meetings, etc.)
 - ▶ Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature)
 - ▶ Analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature)
- **Mediating concepts** ▶ Collaborating in a group ▶ Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers ▶ Collaborating to construct meaning ▶ Leading group work
 - ▶ Managing interaction
 - ▶ Encouraging conceptual talk
- **Mediating communication** ▶ Facilitating pluricultural space ▶ Acting as intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues)

(CEFR 2018, p. 106)

After that the document offers a general description of the skills related to mediation, as well as indicators for each kind of mediation organised within a scale from pre-A1 to C2; it also identifies and discusses the activities and strategies specific for each kind of mediation.

Table 1.

OVERALL MEDIATION	
C2	Can mediate effectively and naturally, taking on different roles according to the needs of the people and situation involved, identifying nuances and undercurrents and guiding a sensitive or delicate discussion. Can explain in clear, fluent, well-structured language the way facts and arguments are presented, conveying evaluative aspects and most nuances precisely, and pointing out sociocultural implications (e.g., use of register, understatement, irony and sarcasm).
C1	Can act effectively as a mediator, helping to maintain positive interaction by interpreting different perspectives, managing ambiguity, anticipating misunderstandings and intervening diplomatically in order to redirect talk. Can build on different contributions to a discussion, stimulating reasoning with a series of questions. Can convey clearly and fluently in well-structured language the significant ideas in long, complex texts, whether or not they relate to his/her own fields of interest, including evaluative aspects and most nuances.

Table 1 (cont.)

OVERALL MEDIATION	
B2	Can establish a supportive environment for sharing ideas and facilitate discussion of delicate issues, showing appreciation of different perspectives, encouraging people to explore issues and adjusting sensitively the way he/she expresses things. Can build upon other's ideas, making suggestions for ways forward. Can convey the main content of well-structured but long and propositionally complex texts on subjects within his/her fields of professional, academic and personal interest, clarifying the opinions and purposes of speakers. Can work collaboratively with people from different backgrounds, creating a positive atmosphere by giving support, asking questions to identify common goals, comparing options for how to achieve them and explaining suggestions for what to do next. Can further develop other people's ideas, pose questions that invite reactions from different perspectives and propose a solution or next steps. Can convey detailed information and arguments reliably, e.g., the significant point(s) contained in complex but well-structured texts within his/her fields of professional, academic and personal interest.
B1	Can collaborate with people from other backgrounds, showing interest and empathy by asking and answering simple questions, formulating and responding to suggestions, asking whether people agree, and proposing alternative approaches. Can convey the main points made in long texts expressed in uncomplicated language on topics of personal interest, provided that he/she can check the meaning of certain expressions. Can introduce people from different backgrounds, showing awareness that some questions may be perceived differently, and invite other people to contribute their expertise and experience, their views. Can convey information given in clear, well-structured informational texts on subjects that are familiar or of personal or current interest, although his/her lexical limitations cause difficulty with formulation at times.
A2	Can play a supportive role in interaction, provided that other participants speak slowly and that one or more of them helps him/her to contribute and to express his/her suggestions. Can convey relevant information contained in clearly structured, short, simple, informational texts, provided that the texts concern concrete, familiar subjects and are formulated in simple everyday language. Can use simple words to ask someone to explain something. Can recognise when difficulties occur and indicate in simple language the apparent nature of a problem. Can convey the main point(s) involved in short, simple conversations or texts on everyday subjects of immediate interest provided these are expressed clearly in simple language.
A1	Can use simple words and non-verbal signals to show interest in an idea. Can convey simple, predictable information of immediate interest given in short, simple signs and notices, posters and programmes.
Pre-A1	No descriptors available

Source: CEFR 2018, p. 105

It appears that in line with the understanding proposed in CEFR 2018 mediation consists of: mediating in the transmission of information, managing the process of constructing meanings or cooperating in it, and facilitating communication between interlocutors in problematic situations, which can be accomplished with the use of various linguistic strategies. Learner competences in terms of mediating should develop along with the development of other competences. Please note that, surprisingly, the general description of mediation skills CEFR 2018 lacks any reference to cultural mediation or any of the following notions: culture mediator, intercultural interlocutor, or intercultural competences (see, e.g., Byram 2000; Beacco, Byram 2003; Kramsch 1998; Risager 2000; Zarate et al. 2004; Bandura

2007; Zarzycka 2008). However, when reading between the lines one could argue that all of the skills and activities listed in the table translate directly into the (inter)cultural competences of language users.

2.2. ORIGINAL DEFINITION OF MEDIATION

As I understand it, mediation during an intercultural encounter is not only the fact of acting as an intermediary facilitating a communication event, but also “the understanding interview with oneself”³ – any kind of reflection (including internal dialogue) enabling a person to rationalise the various aspects of the encounter, muse about its course, about their part in it, and the engagement of other parties, as well as about the communicative and cultural outcomes of such an encounter.

Therefore, mediation is mainly understood as:

- a) negotiating, establishing points of view and perspectives, activities which may assume the form of a conversation (in the form of various activities, e.g.: posing questions, providing answers, explaining, or facilitating understanding), self-reflection, or introspection;
- b) activities which consist of active intermediation in a communication event in which interferences occur; the aim of mediation in such a case is to facilitate its course (mediation as a corrective activity).

Clearly, then, I feel an affinity to the approach to the analysis of intercultural encounters proposed by Michael Byram and other experts of the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe in: *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Byram et al. 2011); I shall refer to this work further in the article.

3. THE INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER IN TEACHING AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

3.1. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

An intercultural encounter viewed as an educational event should hold a teaching value. What do I mean by that?

³ The understanding interview as a qualitative method was described by the sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann (2010).

In the educational material published by the Centre for Education Development (ORE) for teacher councils *Kompetencje międzykulturowe* (Rafalska (ed.) 2016) *intercultural teaching* is perceived as a subdiscipline of teaching while *intercultural education* as an area of social practice. For both areas the book proposes a common *educational goal*: “overcoming all social and educational forms or instances of exclusion based on cultural diversity,” (Misiejuk, 2017, p. 21). The *object* of the study of intercultural education was defined in it as a “diagnosis and method for preventing intolerance [and the analysis] of the causes of social divisions or social rejection” (ibid.) The *area* of study and the focus of intercultural educational practices are fringes – territorial, interactional, and of awareness (ibid.)⁴, while the *goals* of intercultural education were defined as: “preparing for dialogic interaction” and “education of cultural identity, and cultural development” (ibid.).

It is apparent that both foreign language teachers, who work following the intercultural approach, and intercultural educators operating in other professional areas observe the same principle, namely that the fact of opening intercultural pathways expands one’s knowledge on the topic of the essence of intercultural interactions and helps teachers/educators and learners gain the confidence and competences necessary to engage in such relations. Both the teacher/educator and the student who develops while applying such practices become *intercultural speakers* (Kramersch 1998), while teaching focussed on shaping that kind of an interlocutor was defined in a work on foreign language teaching (Zarzycka 2008, p. 68) as “dialogue and internal development education.” Finally, *intercultural communicative competence* was in the same work defined as the “ability to manage the process of the exchange of meanings in a situation when barriers exist between the sender and the recipient of a message caused by their cultural differences (...)” (ibid.).

The most important goal of all educational activities and practices undertaken by intercultural educators is to facilitate a positive dialogue with diversity in which participants do not lose their identity but rather enrich it by entering – by changing their point of view, i.e., shifting their focus – the space *in between*. Kramersch (1993) referred to that place as the *third culture* while Nikitorowicz (1995) called it the *borderland culture*, see Zarzycka 2008, p. 69.)

Currently, an intercultural speakers is increasingly referred to as a *cultural mediator* (see G. Zarate et al. 2004; also E. Bandura 2007); this name covers and increases the appreciation of the *competences* gained by such a person (Byram 2000; Beacco, Byram 2003) in terms of their ability to mediate between different cultural systems and the history of personal intercultural experience. Byram’s

⁴ Cf. also research by Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2005, 2009), and the social practices of Krzysztof Czyżewski (2017), a collaborator of the Borderland of Arts, Cultures, Nations Centre located in Sejny.

propositions included in his 2000 article were incorporated into the work *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (see Byram et al. 2009). Its authors developed a model for describing intercultural encounters so that every personal narrative would include five components: (a) interest in other people's lifestyles, (b) the ability to change one's own perspective, (c) the ability to cope in a different cultural space, (d) knowledge about a different country and culture, and (e) knowledge about intercultural communication.

3.2. INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN EDUCATION PRACTICE: FORMS AND OBJECTIVES

It is no accident that an intercultural encounter can be considered the most important element of modern education. What are its characteristics?

- It can be planned (arranged by the teacher or students, aimed to achieve certain results) or it can be spontaneous ("it just happens", and it is up to the participants to utilise it for educational purposes).
- Its nature can be direct, when there occurs a genuine "face-to-face" encounter between the representatives of different cultural systems, or indirect, when the encounter occurs via a text (a written or oral story) or an image, i.e., using media: film, the internet, etc. According to researchers and intercultural educators, the more valuable of the two is a direct encounter.
- One can participate in it in an active or passive manner (as an observer).
- It may have an intimate nature (when the number of participants of a communicative event is limited) or a spectacular one (when its participants include groups representative for the speech community).
- Its course may be dramatic (when it assumes the form of instances of critical cultural clashes, events in which the face of the communicating parties is threatened), or mild, humorous, etc.

IEs enable various objectives of intercultural education. They help people, e.g.:

- experience the emotions usually triggered by an interaction with someone different and their world of values; they offer a chance to escape the daily routine
- satisfy the need to step outside the limited area of their own cultural group (offering an opportunity to expand one's horizons and awareness)
- trigger in themselves interest in other worlds and their own one (without it, no intercultural interlocutors can emerge)

- compare patterns from a different culture with those of their own and subject various aspects of the encounter to self-analysis and self-reflection (and as a result develop the skill of critical thinking)
- increase their empathy expressed by their willingness to understand others and apply their point of view); a change of perspective (rejection of earlier biases and stereotypes) can be a deeper result of empathetic behaviour
- expand their various communicative and mediation strategies
- restore once ruptured relations⁵
- learn who they are and where they are heading.

Intercultural encounters can be subjected to psychological, sociological, and ethnographic study (e.g., by applying the array of notions developed by ethnographers of communication). They are also (particularly those the course of which is dramatic) the focus of case studies often discussed during intercultural training sessions (see Zarzycka 2010, 2019). IEs should be documented (be the object of reflection, processed in a conversation, a written reflection or an educational project).

3.3. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION OF AN INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER

Autobiografia spotkań międzykulturowych, the Polish translation of *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Byram et al. 2011), which has been available for the past decade on the Centre for Education Development's website, has the form of a template to be filled out. It was prepared in two versions: for children and young adults. It is supposed to help analyse one specific intercultural encounter. It also offers the set of notions helpful in discussing intercultural events. Based on my teaching experience, I can conclude that *Autobiography* can be successfully used in teaching Polish as a foreign language on specialist university courses. By answering the various questions posed in *Autobiography*, a perspective teacher of Polish as a foreign language (PFL) engages in a multi-dimensional introspection which expands considerably their understanding of the problems of intercultural communication.

I gathered from foreign students and the participants of teaching Polish as a foreign language specialist courses at the University of Lodz several dozen descriptions of intercultural encounters based on the extended version proposed in the Polish translation of *Autobiography* (Byram et al. 2011). A year later I noted that the less developed, less controlled form of personal narrative works better

⁵ Cf. projects undertaken by the employees of the Borderland of Arts, Cultures, Nations Centre in Sejny, see Czyżewski (2017).

with adults. Therefore, I developed, based on *Autobiography's* idea, a new template for describing an IE and for some time now I have asked my students to complete the following task:

MY INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER	
I.	Present yourself. How would you like others to perceive you?
.....	
II.	Describe ONE encounter with a foreign person or someone whom you consider a representative of a different (sub)culture
A.	Assign the encounter a meaningful name
.....	
B.	DESCRIPTION OF ENCOUNTER (any form: short story, dialogue, poem, essay, reportage)
Support questions	
1.	When, where and in what circumstances did it occur?
2.	What happened?
3.	Why did you choose this particular situation? Was it strange, intriguing, unpleasant, etc.?
4.	How did the participants behave? Did the ways they behaved result from cultural differences, biases, or stereotypes?
5.	What did you feel? What might have triggered your reactions and emotions?
6.	How would you evaluate your reaction?
7.	What is your opinion about what happened? What do you think about it now? What did you learn from that encounter?
8.	In your opinion, did the foreign person/representative of a different (sub)culture who participated in the encounter think the same as you did? What is the person going to remember from the encounter?
9.	Could/Should the person have acted differently?
10.	Could/Should you have acted differently?
.....	

I have gathered over 80 personal narratives from foreign and Polish students in abridged versions, as presented below. The authors described their intercultural encounters which occurred in Poland in various settings, i.e., at home, in public spaces, in educational or professional settings, e.g., an encounter with a representative of a different culture at a train station, at a shop (the narrator was the shop assistant), at a reception, during an art event, and during a religious ceremony (the author was a volunteer there), as well as abroad (during a short trip, a school or university exchange, or during a visit to the country of origin of one of the author's parents), in a situation of direct contact, and a communicational exchange via online messaging apps. Two students decided to describe their encounter in a poetic form. One foreign student studying at the Faculty of Philology, University of Lodz (a lecturer who had been living in Poland for the past 25 years who was my examiner partner during a Polish language examination, which was part of his

Ph.D. course) surprised me by handing in a several dozen pages long story developed as a graphic novel. Such intercultural surprise encounters are an invaluable benefit to teachers and researchers who trigger them.

Example:

MY INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER⁶

I. Present yourself. How would you like others to perceive you?

I try to be open, friendly, and tolerant. I don't have a problem with accepting different cultures. I would like others to perceive me mainly as a sociable person who can easily establish new relations and is eager to maintain them. This can be difficult because I'm shy. It's hard for me to overcome my shyness and come up to another person I have never met before.

II. Describe ONE encounter with a foreign person or someone whom you consider a representative of a different (sub)culture

A. Assign the encounter a meaningful name

REWARD FOR MY STUDIES

B. DESCRIPTION OF ENCOUNTER

When I was working as a teacher of Polish as a foreign language, I had the pleasure to teach an Italian student. Vincenzo was a man over forty. We both enjoyed our classes and we have continued to write to each other outside the classroom. One day he asked me how my bachelor's studies were going; I had just defended my B.A. thesis then. I told him about my achievement. He reacted with great enthusiasm and offered that to celebrate he would prepare a surprise for me. During the following lesson at the language school Vincenzo gave me an envelope. I wasn't sure what was in it. I was expecting a postcard from somewhere (he travels a lot). But it turned out it contained money, quite a considerable amount. I immediately thanked him for his gesture but I refused to accept such a gift. He was very surprised, maybe even slightly hurt, but he refused to accept my refusal. I suggested that instead of giving me money he could buy me a small gift if he really wanted to celebrate my achievement. He eagerly accepted my suggestion, accepted the money back and we went on with our lesson. After the lesson ended, I asked him why he decided to give me such an unusual gift. He then explained that in Italy it is customary for the family or close friends to give a student who completes a stage of her/his education money which is supposed to help them start their adult life and help sustain them during the period of looking for employment. After that explanation I thanked him once again, I told him that it is an interesting and wonderful tradition but in Poland we don't give one another such gifts; and that especially applies to teachers.

I chose this situation because it illustrates cultural differences between Italy and Poland well. In Italy a money gift is customary—it is justified, thoughtful and quite practical. Yet in the Polish context it rather brings to mind corruption than a method

⁶ This description was written by Aleksandra Leszczyńska, a Polish philology student (master's course), who participated in the "Intercultural communication" class that I taught within the Teaching Polish as a Foreign/Second Language course. The author consented for the description of the IE to be included in this article.

of celebrating a person's success. Hence my surprise and shock when I saw the cash and Vincenzo's inability to comprehend my refusal. That is why neither of us could have behaved in any other way; in both cases our reactions were natural. That encounter made me understand at how many levels representatives of different cultures may differ. Thanks to that experience I have learnt not to evaluate the behaviour of my students exclusively through the perspective of Polish customs. Now I will be surely more aware of how other cultures (Italian in particular) can be and I'll try to be more opened to the ideas of my students, who will probably never cease to surprise me.

Vincenzo himself – who had been living in Poland for quite some time – had often told me about how different Poles and our culture were, and that he continued to learn our ways and for him our culture was the most attractive he knew (and he had visited many countries). That situation was awkward for him but he understood my hesitation and he was absolutely not angry with me. From the point of view of his culture his behaviour was normal and completely natural. When I now look at this situation, I appreciate Vincenzo's gesture even more because it meant he considered me as someone worth treating the way he would treat his compatriots.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The pilot studies which I conducted in 2016–2021 among several dozen domestic students of the Faculty of Philology, University of Lodz (including the students of the Polish as a Foreign Language course) using the above-mentioned description of an IE have shown that intercultural experiences of Polish twenty-something people are rare to non-existent – half of them had great trouble recalling any intercultural encounters. Therefore, it seems even more advisable to arrange direct intercultural encounters between prospective teachers of PFL and foreigners or representatives of ethnic minorities. Such encounters allow prospective teachers of PFL to become less self-conscious in contacts with the Others.

If such encounters cannot be arranged, it is necessary to utilise descriptions of intercultural encounters written by students of a specific course group, as well as cases described by people outside it. An analysis of IEs could cover:

- a) the forms of self-presentation by the authors,
- b) the topics raised,
- c) the styles of the titles assigned by course participants,
- d) the mood of the intercultural encounters (whether they were pleasant, unpleasant, dramatic, humorous, etc.; whether they helped change one's perspective), including their descriptions,
- e) detailed descriptions of the parties to the encounters,
- f) the contexts of the IEs,
- g) the forms of interaction and mediation,

- h) the conclusions drawn by the authors regarding the course of individual IEs, and
- i) evaluations by third persons of encounters and original descriptions.

When considering Aleksandra's description of her IE (3.3), several aspects of the encounter seem noteworthy. She described herself as a sociable person but she also mentioned having trouble with opening herself to others during the first encounter. A similar description of personal qualities appeared in more than half of the descriptions I have collected, which could indicate that young Poles are eager to meet the Others yet shyness and a lack of confidence regarding their communicational skills often diminishes their ability to establish such relations.

And yet the description of the IE entitled *Reward for my studies* presents its author as an intercultural interlocutor who could serve as a role model: despite feeling embarrassed when an Italian (an adult man who was her PFL student) handed her an envelope (which in Polish immediately evokes the context of bribery), she managed the problematic situation well. She opened the envelope to check what was inside and refused to accept the cash stating the reason for her refusal. In doing so she provoked him to explain his actions. Apparently, his gesture was rooted in his native (Italian) cultural framework, as was the narrator's response to it. Aleksandra took control of the interaction and explained to him that in her native culture such cultural behaviour (accepting money from an unrelated person, regardless of their intentions) was unacceptable. The fact of having insight into the emergent situation increased in both parties to the encounter the level of their cultural competence and mutual trust: that IE transformed into a cognitively significant event—the narrator has become more aware of behaviour which might cause cultural misunderstandings even if it is common (“natural and normal”) for a person raised in a different culture. It became clear that something which was normal and natural for an Italian person was anything but for a Polish person, nor was it appropriate in the professional context of the situation.

The mediation undertaken by the parties to the encounter was of a mixed nature—it was a communicational mediation, notional communication, but most of all (inter)cultural mediation as they assumed the roles of cultural intermediaries: the manner of giving and accepting gifts in Poland and in Italy became the object of culture-oriented mediation. Aleksandra explained to the Italian man how inappropriate his behaviour was within the Polish context (communicational mediation), while by explaining his intentions he turned the embarrassing event into a perspective-changing one. Notional mediation could be found in the strategy of comprehensive interpretation of the cultural behaviour of both sides, as well as in Aleksandra's way of handling the interaction: she took the initiative and transformed the critical event into an event with a reflective aspect.

In summary, I consider encounters to be the most important or even an inseparable element of intercultural education and I hope that I have appropriately accentuated its significance.

The publication *Kompetencje międzykulturowe. Materiały edukacyjne dla rad pedagogicznych*, which provides not only a discussion of theories and notions but also scenarios of intercultural workshops founded in intercultural education (many of which are focussed on the description and analysis of cultural encounters as communicative events), is a useful tool in intercultural education. Together with *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* they constitute sterling teaching aids, which are useful in schools, at the university level, and at centres for teaching Polish as a foreign language.

I believe that the principles of intercultural education should not be disregarded even when someone removes the ideals of multiculturalism, diversity, or empathy towards the Others from their educational creed. It seems difficult to imagine that a modern person could be completely insulated from contacts with otherness. It is we, the instructors of specialist courses for prospective foreign language teachers, who can make intercultural education an attractive and truly landmark teaching method.

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SPOTKANIE INTERKULTUROWE JAKO ZDARZENIE KOMUNIKACYJNE PODLEGAJĄCE MEDIACJI

Słowa kluczowe: spotkanie interkulturowe, zdarzenie komunikacyjne, mediacja, komunikacja interkulturowa, edukacja interkulturowa, glottodydaktyka

Streszczenie. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie miejsca i roli spotkania interkulturowego (SI) w komunikacji oraz edukacji, także w praktyce glottodydaktycznej. W części 1. pracy przedstawiono SI jako zdarzenie komunikacyjne i zdefiniowano je z użyciem pojęć stosowanych przez etnografów mowy (komunikacji). W części 2. omówiono koncepcje zawarte w *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (CEFR 2018) związane z mediacją tekstu, pojęć i komunikacji oraz zaprezentowano autorską definicję mediacji, odnoszącą się do kontaktów międzykulturowych. Zaakcentowano w niej, że mediacja polega także na prowadzeniu „wywiadu rozumiejącego z samym sobą”, nie tylko na występowaniu w roli pośrednika ułatwiającego przebieg danego epizodu komunikacyjnego. W części 3. omówiono pojęcia teoretyczne odnoszące się do SI, scharakteryzowano je jako narzędzie stosowane w pedagogice i edukacji interkulturowej, a następnie zaprezentowano wybrany opis SI autorstwa studentki specjalizacji Nauczanie Języka Polskiego jako Obcego/Drugiego Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego. W części czwartej przeanalizowano przykładowy opis SI oraz przedstawiono wstępne wnioski na temat sposobów wykorzystania opisów SI w różnorodnych kontekstach edukacyjnych.