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## Intercultural communication: the journalist versus the reader

✦ Кључне речи:  
*journalistic style, persuasion,  
emotive language, intercultural  
communication.*

Intercultural communication is usually understood as a dialogue between speakers belonging to different cultures. Such a dialogue has recently been gaining in importance, especially in intercultural communication in the media, owing to their ability to address large numbers of people.

The term culture has many rather specialised meanings, all of them relating to

Интеркултурална комуникација се најчешће схвата као дијалог међу представницима различитих култура. Све већи значај добија интеркултурална комуникација у средствима јавног информисања, понајвише због могућности да се делује на широке масе. У раду се разматра један од видова интеркултуралне комуникације с аспекта сложених комуникативних односа између публицисте и читаоца у текстовима чешке писане публицистике. Анализирају се тематски оквири такве комуникације, композиција, начини успостављања и одржавања контакта између публицисте и читаоца, употреба графолошких и идеографских средстава и њихова функција у озбиљним дневним листовима и булеварској штампи.

material and spiritual values produced by society in the past, and further developed at present. Culture includes the results of human activity in science, arts, and social life, as well as material products, tools and the activities for which they are used, but also experience, customs, patterns of behaviour, manners, communication strategies, etc. All of this suggests that culture is a dynamic

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process which keeps changing and developing in all fields of human activity.

Intercultural communication is the subject of two articles by A. Jaklová (*Interkulturalita a interkulturní komunikace*. FF JU, České Budějovice, in print; *K základním pojmům interkulturní komunikace*. In: *Jazyk a komunikácia v súvislostiach*. Univerzita Komenského, Bratislava 2007, 295–301). The author comments on the approaches of some foreign researchers exploring intercultural communication in management, philosophy, comparative psychology, education studies, literary science and linguistics. She surveys the essential senses of the term culture in casual communication, which include works of art (literature, music, creative art, film), as well as a particular lifestyle characterised by the acquisition of cultural habits, patterns of behaviour and manners. This use of the term culture also relates to differences displayed by distinct groups of the population and by professional communities; in this respect we may speak of the culture of medicine, agriculture, etc. The author points out that intercultural communication as understood by foreign scholars always involves at least two communicators.

Intercultural communication involves the effort to achieve mutual understanding and show empathy for a communicator from a different culture, and to respond appropriately by adopting the right attitude, and employing the right approach. And how is the term culture understood in the context of intercultural communication? According to Helen Spencer Oatey, it is “a whole comprising principles, values and priorities, patterns of behaviour and attitudes to the essential issues in life shared by a community of individuals and used to interpret the behaviour of others”.

Communicators with different cultural background typically display different be-

haviour, conduct and reactions, since from childhood they have been exposed to different sets of values, which they have consequently adopted. Communication by means of a common language is not the only, nor the principal criterion of communication harmony. Misunderstanding commonly occurs even between people communicating in a language they are proficient in, the reasons being ethnic, religious or social differences within their respective cultures. As a result, a particular communication situation is wrongly interpreted and the communicators' reactions are inadequate. Even the message may be misunderstood or distorted, causing problems of varying scale and intensity.

With cross-cultural contacts becoming more intensive, the danger of potential misunderstanding must be addressed. The urgency of the problem is evident from the large number of articles in current Czech dailies reflecting the importance of intercultural communication for both the reading public and the journalists, who respond to the changing structure of the Czech society in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Although our database includes material collected over a period of several years, the present study only explores the most frequent topics that occurred between January 2008 and January 2009 in the printed versions of the Czech dailies *Mladá fronta Dnes* (MDF), *Hospodářské noviny* (HN), *Lidové noviny* (LN), *Právo* and *Haló noviny*, or were retrieved from the following websites: [www.novinky.cz](http://www.novinky.cz), [www.ihned.cz](http://www.ihned.cz), [www.rozvojovka.cz](http://www.rozvojovka.cz), [www.aktualne.cz](http://www.aktualne.cz), [www.edotace.cz](http://www.edotace.cz), [www.osnoviny.cz](http://www.osnoviny.cz). This one-year period alone yielded a total of 205 articles devoted to intercultural communication.

One extensive category comprises articles commenting on the relationship of Czechs and foreigners in everyday life. Most of these

articles consider the influx of foreigners into the Czech Republic as a positive phenomenon, particularly with respect to economy and population growth (*Projekt, který má pro Česko získat odborníky z ciziny, bude pokračovat; Rok 2060: Česko cizinců; Politici: Bez cizinců to nejde, ale...; Unie: Dejme cizincům modré karty; Počet žadatelů o azyl v Česku roste; Lidí je víc, díky cizincům; Policii chybí lidé, hledá i u menšin; Budou Češi menšinou?; Za deset let je cizinců dvakrát víc; V Libereckém kraji přibylo cizinců*).

Many other articles point out the problems arising from the arrival of people from different cultures, particularly in the early stages of their stay. The most frequent of these is insufficient acquisition of Czech, which has proved to be a difficult language, especially for Asians, and in which the newcomers have to take a test if they want to get Czech citizenship: (*Chceš tu zůstat? Uč se česky; Čeština přivábila do Prahy studenty z celého světa; Kdo bude chtít občanství, musí umět česky; Škola je základ života, i bez legrace*).

Positive reception is given to the effort of some foreigners, especially those Vietnamese who want to settle in the country permanently, to give their children quality education (*Žáci – cizince čeština netrápí; Kupředu je žene ctižádost a rodiče; Gramatiku nejlépe zvládají Asijci*). School experience shows that it is by no means exceptional that Vietnamese pupils have the best results in the Czech language in some basic schools. They are all too well aware of the fact that a mastery of the language paves the way to higher education and to smooth integration into the Czech society. Their attitude to their mother tongue – Vietnamese – is also clear from some articles, though usually only those published in regional papers: in 2007, the Vietnamese community living in Železná Ruda invited a teacher from Vietnam in the

summer holidays to teach their children to read in Vietnamese.

The early stages of residence in the country may present problems to some foreigners involving social habits or hygiene. Newspapers report on the effort to help the foreigners come to terms with the new reality (*Cizinci se budou učit, jak se žije v Česku; Chtějí pomoci cizincům; Takhle u nás jíme, ukázali si při prvním setkání; Hledá se nový přístup k ženám imigrantkám; Unie: Dejme cizincům modré karty*), as well as on the hardships of the lives of illegal immigrants (*Největší problém cizince: pobyt a bydlení; Když vám za práci nezaplatí; Vrátit se nemohou, čekají na zázrak; První “na řadě” jsou dělníci z ciziny; Jak na imigraci za prací: Zajistit, aby zůstali ti, které chceme, a odešli ti, kteří mají*). Many of the immigrants are in an unenviable situation, having spent all their money only to get to the Czech Republic, as is clear from the following headlines: (*Kdo vydělává na Vietnamcích, kteří chtějí do Česka; Vrátit se nemohou, čekají na zázrak; Za vízum do Česka dávají Vietnamci až 10 000 dolarů*).

Many articles comment on the position of the Romany community within the Czech society. (*Když Romům vzali koně; Velvyslanec: Chování Česka k Romům si hlídáme; Americký sen českých Romů*). Their coexistence with the majority population is perceived as thoroughly negative, and Czechs are often presented as racists, although other articles report on instances of goodwill in the Czech society to help (*Most chce zkvalitnit život v ghetech*); however, the results often do not reflect the effort taken by the majority society: (*Čeští Romové opět míří do Kanady; Guvernérka Kanady jede za Romy; České školství si neví rady s romskými dětmi; Exodus jako hrozba*). Many of the Romany community refuse a helping hand, and sometimes only agree to participate in the programmes aimed at helping them if they get additional

advantages. This is perceived by the majority population as positive discrimination, which, however, cannot be a lasting solution. Occasionally, there are articles in Czech newspapers about Moslem immigrants and their religion-related problems encountered not only in the Czech Republic, but elsewhere in Western Europe.

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As pointed out above, according to most linguists, intercultural communication occurs within direct contact of the communicators. Although mastery of the language of communication is essential to mutual understanding, it does not alone guarantee that they are in agreement. In reality, this issue is much more complex, as a disagreement concerning values is not restricted to contact with foreigners but affects even communication within a relatively homogeneous community. Communication problems are encountered by groups of people that appear to be different, for one reason or another. Such groups include women or handicapped people (*Žena 21. století by měla být rovnoprávná bytost; Proč žena není kus loje...; Osm z deseti handicapovaných se setkalo s diskriminací*). Even within a closed community misunderstanding may arise, and often does, for reasons like different upbringing, different preferences in terms of values, different goals, personal experience, the ways in which people act in various situations. Another source of misunderstanding is the choice of models of communication that may be considered neutral by some, but at the limit of acceptability for others. What is meant is a particular choice of lexical items, the use of emotive or expressive language (decent or indecent), and the suitability of such language in a particular communicative situation. If the speaker cannot correctly predict the reaction of the listener, communication disagreement may arise, sometimes escalating into a conflict.

These problems are not restricted to spoken communication, where the communicators are in immediate contact, but occur even in written communication. The authors should therefore be aware of the danger of communication disagreement, and this particularly applies to journalists. If they want the persuasive potential of journalistic texts to assert itself, they have to bear in mind the structure of the readership. Since it is assumed that the reader may be anyone who has mastered the skill of reading, the demands posed on the writer are very high and it is clearly impossible to please everybody.

There are a number of dailies currently published in the Czech Republic, each of them having a readership of its own. The basic distinction is between quality papers and tabloids. The former category in its pure form only includes *Hospodářské noviny*, although *Mladá fronta Dnes*, *Lidové noviny* and *Právo* also broadly rank among serious papers. Recently, however, they have been going through a process of tabloidisation, which is most apparent in *Mladá fronta Dnes*. The leading tabloid papers are *Blesk*, *Aha*, and *Šíp*.

Tabloid papers typically have a large circulation, which further increases at the time of holidays. In August 2008, for instance, the number of MFD copies sold dropped to 318 725, i.e. 21 000 fewer than at other times of the year, while the sales of tabloid papers soared: *Blesk* sold 478 782 copies, *Aha* 98 537, and *Šíp* 60 292. This rise in sales in holiday time is attributable to the entertaining function of the tabloids, along with better accessibility in the holiday resorts (it is much easier to get *Blesk* abroad than *Hospodářské noviny*).

Tabloid papers appeal to readers by the choice of topics, the graphical layout, the use of colours, the language used, and, last but

not least, by the low price. All of these factors make these papers particularly popular among elderly people (typically retired) and among less educated people. Another group of readers are those who buy a tabloid in addition to a serious paper, the most frequent combination being MFD and *Blesk*.

As far as the topics covered in tabloids are concerned, they typically include scandals of some kind, like stories of violence, sex, corruption, etc. Attention is given to celebrities of show business, sports, culture, and politics, with a focus on the failures they have suffered, illnesses, broken relationships, love affairs, or instances of them being caught misbehaving in public. The information is usually not verified, often only partially true, with the sources left out. The language abounds in expressions expressing indefiniteness and uncertainty, such as *prý, asi, možná, pravděpodobně (it is said, perhaps, maybe, probably)*, etc. It is not uncommon that some of the celebrities are given room in tabloids to comment on issues they know little about. Their personal opinion may, however, be misinterpreted as official by some readers, most commonly by the oldest generation.

A few headlines retrieved from the tabloid *Aha* of 10 January 2009 may illustrate some of the usual topics: *Bouračka na dálnici – Smyk na náledí, auto lítalo zleva doprava – Když auto vletělo do svodidel, přišla strašlivá rána; Záhadná smrt Kalouskova synovce – Dva mrtví, dům v plamenech... – Ta rodina je snad; Řidič přejel zasahujícího policistu; Nevěrná Faltýnová – Už bydlí u milence! – Langmajer? To je jen zástěrka; Miss Kateřina Sokolová – Nejdřív ukázala tanga a pak i...; Petr Čech jezdí jako agent 007; Vladimír Šmicer: Nesnáší mravence; Šokující foto Richarda Krajčá – Takhle skončil kvůli drogám*, etc. Similar headlines are found in *Blesk* of 8 January 2009: *Česko bez ruského*

*plynu a venku -36 – Čeká nás doba ledová?!; Ochotská na Nově – Stejně blond – Stejný úsměv – Stejná prsa, ale... – Bere míň než ona (i.e. less than Lucie Borhyová); Vlajku EU dali na Hrad! – Provokují Václava Klause; Jak vyjít s penězi bez práce? – Měsíčně nám zbude pětistovka; „Krabičková dieta“ až pod nos; Kristelová: Hokejová manželka nebudu; Bartošová chce mít klid na práci – Pomeje dělá chůvu; Gott vydělá 20 tisíc během minuty*, and others. Similar headlines occur in tabloids on a daily basis. They are in colour, and it is by no means unusual for the headlines to take up more space than the text they introduce. The examples also show that a single article is often accompanied by more headlines and sub-headings, which convey the gist of the story to the readers even without them reading the whole article. The large size of types and varied colours make the headlines even more striking – even a poor-sighted person can easily read them without glasses and is therefore prompted to buy the paper.

On the other hand, the headlines from *Hospodářské noviny* (8 January 2009) introduce a very different kind of news: *Unie bojuje o ruský plyn; Stát chce povolit sázky přes mobil; Bez plynu vydrží Slováci 72 dní, ale s velkými problémy; Firmy se předem chystají na krizi; EU: Češi startují v době krize; Socialisté hlásí bojkot ekonomické rady vlády; Parkovat v Praze bude těžší. Přibudou zóny; Izrael krátce zastavil vojenské operace v Gaze; V Bílém domě obědvalo pět prezidentů USA; Blízký východ nepočkal a sám přišel za Obamou; Klíč k úspěchu příměří bude z novu držet Egypt; Začíná boj o nové vysokoškoláky; Sarkozy odstraňuje Napoleonův rozkaz; Změny trenérů juniorský hokej nespasí*, and others. The same is true of those from *Lidové noviny* (2 January 2009): *Začíná rok velkých zkoušek; Česko předsedá EU, ale dál ji řídí Francouzi; 2009: rok skeptiků a černých labutí; Topolánek hodlá řešit krizi bez vicepremiéra;*

*Budoucnost Kubánců? Odříkání; Izrael zabil předáka Hamásu; Stále vysíláme z tajných míst, i pod palbou*, etc. Both HN and LN publish domestic and foreign news that comes from verified sources. LN explicitly states that it uses the service of the Czech Press Agency, and the texts include the authors' internet addresses in addition to their names, and even the location for those working abroad, e.g. *Vojtěch Blažek* – [www.ihned.cz/blazek](http://www.ihned.cz/blazek); *Renata Havranová* – [www.ihned.cz/havranova](http://www.ihned.cz/havranova) (from our correspondent in Bratislava) *Lucie Tvarůžková* – [www.ihned.cz/tvaruzkova](http://www.ihned.cz/tvaruzkova) – from our correspondent in Brussels, etc. This detailed information imparts credibility to the news and gives them an air of seriousness.

The daily *Mladá fronta Dnes* is somewhat different. It does not seem to belong in any of the two distinct categories but combines the features of both. In addition to the most important domestic and foreign news and to sports news, it includes texts that are reminiscent of tabloids, e.g. *Tuhle jsme v našich novinách zcela vážně rozebírali, zda je Paroubek sexy, přičemž jsme se nezaměřili jen na mozek. Odpověď zněla: Ano, pro některé ženy určitě je. Kuponu se Jiří Paroubek (aspoň podle reakcí jeho spolupracovníků) oním tématem cítil velmi dotčen. Asi proto, že jsme si dovolili zapochybovat.* (MFD, 8 September 2008)

This is illustrated by headlines from the main section of MFD of 11 January 2009: *Plyn nejdříve za dva dny; Lidovci to „zavařili“ Topolánkovi; Řídíte opilí? Na bonbony a ústní sprej to nesvalujte; Řekli: Jste vdova. Pak přišel manžel; Čtyři lidé uhořeli v zahradních chatkách; Al-Kajda přišla o hlavu; Bush odchází, bushismy zůstávají; Za 600 korun udám kolegu; Gaza, plyn a jsme v tom až po uši; V Německu vyšly noviny z dob nacismu*, etc. These examples suggest that the above-

mentioned tabloidisation process primarily affects the MFD.

A comparison of the headlines in tabloids (Aha and Blesk) with those in serious papers (Hospodářské noviny and Lidové noviny) suggests that the two categories have a different readership, characterised by different professions and interests. The logical question is then why the topics in tabloids are so popular, making the daily Blesk the best-selling paper in the country, followed by the MFD, which also leans towards tabloids. One factor might be the fact that the topics covered in tabloids are primarily meant to entertain the readers, some of whom may not want to read or listen to the largely negative news dominating the serious media. With the ever-accelerating pace of life, tabloids may partly substitute for the casual “small talk” – a private discussion of unimportant matters – which most people cannot engage in for lack of time. It is worth noting that tabloids publish short texts, which pose less demands on concentration, and, last but not least, their low price may appeal to people with small incomes, e.g. to less-educated ones and to pensioners.

The differences in the information content of newspaper texts are related to the choice of linguistic devices. The principal register used in written journalism is the standard Czech language. Standard language is the natural choice in official communication and therefore the neutral register in the newspapers. However, non-standard language forms of colloquial spoken Czech are gaining in frequency in current Czech dailies. They are found both in word stems and in suffixes, i.e. both on the phonological and the morphological level (*í/ý* becomes *ej*, *é* becomes *í/ý*, the prothetic *v-* is used at the beginning of words beginning in a vowel, the *-ma* ending is used in the instrumental

case). These forms are most frequently used in quotations of direct speech, making them sound authentic. They always rank among devices of language activation. Equally conspicuous are marked lexical items, including vulgar ones. These commonly combine with non-standard language, e.g. „... tak na to se můžem vysr... prostě.“ *zvolal delegát Jan Šlechta z Prahy, který se ucházel o zvolení do předsednictva. – Už toho mám dost, je to zoufalý, nějakí hajzlíci po mně furt dokolečka jdou. – Nejde jen o jednoho „mladého troubu“ Moravu, který se nechal nahrát při skutečně nemravném chování... – Příběhy neohrožených hrdinů jsou fujtajbl. – Když se „lidový“ zpěvák Pepa Nos domáhal očištění od výroků, že si začal s StB, veřejně popsal soudkyně své kauzy takto: „Po pracovním výkonu tří ohyzdných postklimakterických stařen by je soudný člověk nenechal pracovat ani jako hajzlbáby“.* Though most frequently encountered in true tabloids, they occasionally occur in other papers (MFD).

Language forms suggesting a colloquial character of communication include various phrasal expressions, particularly popular ones, such as proverbs and weather lore. They are found in MFD commentaries, in *Právo*, and, to a lesser degree, in LN. These forms are not used accidentally but intentionally, in order to reach a particular communicative goal. It is crucial for the journalist to be able to predict the response they evoke in the readers, and to use such expressions

tastefully and sparingly. However, predicting the readers' response is a difficult task. Admittedly, the readers are part of one society, but this does not prevent them from having dramatically different values. While the persuasive function of newspaper texts, logically, stems from their content, it is, rather prosaically, also motivated by the need to sell the paper, i.e. to build and keep a regular readership. With information easily available on the internet, this is becoming increasingly more difficult: when you read the news in the paper, it may not be quite up-to-date.

Conclusion: Communication in the daily press is an extensive topic which has so far been insufficiently explored in the Czech Republic. This paper treats one of the forms of such communication in written journalism from the perspective of the complex relationship between the journalist and the reader. These are invariably in indirect contact. The addressee – the reader of newspapers – actually comprises a heterogeneous community of people of various ages, education, and experiences, and it is the journalist's task to take these cultural variations into account. The goal of this paper is to identify several areas within the study of intercultural communication that deserve a more consistent further research. Newspaper texts are a particularly well-suited starting point for such research, since they reflect the developmental changes in language much faster than others.

## summary



### Intercultural communication: the journalist versus the reader

Intercultural communication is a considerably broad concept; it is usually understood as a dialogue between the representatives of different cultures. At present, growing importance is attributed to intercultural communication in media, mainly due to the fact that it is able to affect large numbers of people.

Our study deals with a particular form of intercultural communication observed from the viewpoint of the complicated relationship between a journalist and a reader of the texts of written Czech journalism. The contact is always indirect. The address, the newspaper reader, actually represent a heterogeneous group of individuals of different age, education, experience, and the journalist is supposed to accept these cultural differences.

The study is focused on linguistic, mainly lexical means seen from the perspective of the choice from a broad range of possibilities, on the journalist's reasoning, on the means used to express the journalist's relation to the reader. We attempted to survey the topics of journalistic communication, the ways of creating and maintaining the contact between the journalist and the reader, the use of graphic and ideographic means and their function in serious daily papers as well as tabloids.

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