

'The foreigner is within us':
Review of: CLAVES PARA LA COMUNICACIÓN INTERCULTURAL
(KEYS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION)
by the GRUPO CRIT (Universidad Jaume I de Castellón, Valencia region, Spain)

Book reviewed (2005) by Christopher Rollason, Ph.D. (rollason54@gmail.com)

Details: GRUPO CRIT: *Claves para la comunicación intercultural*, Castellón (Spain): Publicaciones de la Universidad Jaume I (UJI), 2003. Paperback, 232 pp. ISBN: 04-8021-430-9.

Members of the GRUPO CRIT (Comunicación y Relaciones Interculturales y Transculturales - Intercultural and Transcultural Communication and Relations): Francisco Raga Gimeno, Mary E. Farrell, Dora Sales Salvador (all UJI), Enric Sánchez López (Universidad de Valencia) and Roberto Ortí Teruel (Instituto Cervantes, Tetuán). Website: <www.crit.uji.es>.

A Spanish-language version of this review has been published in: [Revista de Lingüística y Lenguas Aplicadas](#) (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia), Vol. 2, 2007, pp. 85-91 and is available on-line at: www.upv.es/dla/revista/docs/art2007/resena_chistopher.pdf

I

Like other Member States of the European Union, Spain has in very recent years been transformed from a country of emigration into one of immigration, and is now a society faced ever more visibly and urgently with the challenge of receiving and integrating the 'foreigners' who arrive on its soil from the most varied places of origin. A similar process is happening in Portugal, Italy, Ireland and even Greece. In the face of these totally new circumstances, the 'old' or 'original' residents of the various regions that make up today's Spain now have to learn how to relate to the new arrivals and develop criteria of communication which will allow them to feel at home in their host country. This is the context which has produced the volume under review, a publication of the Grupo CRIT (Comunicación y Relaciones Interculturales y Transculturales - Intercultural and Transcultural Communication and Relations). This is an interdisciplinary research group whose work combines theory and practice, formed in 1998. It brings together experts from two universities in the Valencia region (Comunidad Valenciana), namely the Universidad de Valencia and the Universidad Jaume I de Castellón (UJI), and from the Instituto Cervantes, and is supported by the regional government (Generalitat Valenciana). The Grupo CRIT takes as its focus the phenomenon of immigration, conceived from the viewpoint of the understanding of differences: its members believe it is possible to evolve a common space of intercultural exchange by means of communication, translation/interpretation and mediation. Anyone visiting the Valencia region for a couple of days will be immediately aware of the presence of a number of immigrant communities which are already part of the local human fabric, whose members are contributing to the economy in ever more visible fashion, and whose full integration constitutes a vital task, to which the volume under review represents a significant contribution (I add here that I shall hereinafter be using the term 'Valencian', whether as adjective or noun, to signify the whole of the Comunidad Valenciana, which is one of the autonomous regions which make up the present-day Spanish state and consists of the three provinces of Castellón, Valencia and Alicante).

The book in question is a collective work, whose chapters, though signed individually, represent the fruit of the joint labour of the group's members. The scholars making up the Grupo CRIT have between them a remarkably wide range of expertise in the linguistic, translinguistic and transcultural spheres. Thus, Francisco Raga has a detailed knowledge of Senegalese culture, while Roberto Ortí and Enric Sánchez offer similar cultural expertise for the Maghreb and Russia respectively. Dora Sales has dedicated her doctoral thesis (recently published in book form) to the phenomenon of transculturation, while Mary Farrell, a specialist in communication studies, has a long experience of residence as a non-native speaker in the Valencia region.

This volume is one part of a broader project, others of whose components may be found on the group's website. The greater part of the book consists of the analysis of a set of audiovisual recordings, the format chosen being that of individual interviews with members of certain ethnic groups resident in the cities of Valencia and Castellón. The interviews were conducted exclusively in Spanish, reflecting the fact that immigrants arriving in the region are far more likely to learn the Spanish than the Valencian language. The groups represented are: North Africans (from Morocco and Algeria); Chinese; West Africans (from Senegal and Ghana); Eastern Europeans (from Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Romania); and, in the final chapter, what might be called a 'mixed group' of people of diverse origins who are in the Valencia region 'por motivos no exclusivamente económicos' ('for reasons which are not exclusively economic' - 13). The authors promise that their future studies will include other groups not analysed thus far, such as the Indian/Pakistani community. The face-to-face interviews which form the project's raw material follow, in the great majority of cases, a formula that brings together a member of the Grupo CRIT (the native speaker of Spanish) and an immigrant from the community being studied (the non-native speaker of Spanish). The CRIT website offers full transcriptions of the recordings (the book confines itself to extracts), accompanied by a very appealing collection of videos which allow the interested reader to experience some portions of the conversations 'live'. In addition, the site hosts the entire text of the book, broken down on a chapter-by-chapter basis and presented in .pdf format: the authors thus very concretely demonstrate their commitment to the free circulation of research and to a certain concept of knowledge as a common good.

II

The main objective is to identify the cultural obstacles to communication (verbal and non-verbal) between immigrants and the local community, with a view to resolving them. The first part of the book sets out a theoretical framework in which the practical research is to be located. Thus, in the (collectively written) introduction, the members of the Grupo CRIT, starting out from the position that 'la interacción entre culturas es un proceso enriquecedor' ('interaction between cultures is an enriching process'), affirm the need for the 'toma de conciencia, objetiva, de las diferencias existentes en los modos de comunicar de las distintas culturas' ('objective awareness of the differences that exist between the forms of communicating of diverse cultures'), with a view to avoiding 'la marginación y la guetización' ('marginalisation and the creation of ghettos') in practice, while at the same time recognising that in the sphere of theory 'las interacciones comunicativas cara a cara constituyen un objeto de estudio complejísimo' ('face-to-face communicative interaction constitutes an extremely complex object of study' - 9-10). The first chapter proper, signed by the invited expert Carlos Hernández Sacristán, of the Universidad de Valencia, proposes a number of conceptual criteria for the study, stressing the notions of transculturation and empathy while recalling that

'toda cultura es siempre en mayor o menor grado una realidad polisistémica' ('any culture is always, to a greater or lesser extent, a polysystemic reality' - 31) and that this should deter us from making facile or stereotyping generalisations about the culture of the other. There follows the first (methodological) contribution by Francisco Raga, who expounds a set of concepts taken from sociolinguistics, with the aim of proposing an essentially empirical and descriptive model of communicative interaction, explaining within that framework the terminology which will be used in the rest of the book. Among these basic concepts we may note: paralanguage (non-verbal elements of communication), turn-taking, overlapping, symmetry/asymmetry (vis-à-vis social hierarchies), and 'proximate' and 'distant' models of communication. The theoretical framework having been constituted, Raga invites the reader to share, in the chapters that follow, 'un tipo de análisis integral, orquestal, en el que se tengan en cuenta todas las dimensiones comunicativas, en el que se describan ... todos los datos presentes en la interacción, y se observen como piezas de ese delicado engranaje que es la comunicación' ('a form of integrated orchestral analysis which takes account of all dimensions of communication, which describes ... all the data making up the interaction, observed as parts of the delicate apparatus of communication' - 83).

III

The four chapters that follow are organised according to a common schema: each consists of an analysis by a member of the Grupo CRIT of interviews that in nearly all cases involve a fellow member of the group and immigrants of a particular origin. This method has an interesting side-effect in that, as is clear from the videos on the website, the various members of the group are also present, in a discreet form that might be called a 'diffused presence', in the chapters not signed by them - something which serves to reinforce the status of this project as a piece of authentically collective work. The analyses concentrate less on the intercultural conversations' content than on their form; while the interviews tend to avoid obviously controversial subjects, the approach chosen has the virtue of starting out from the assumption of a possible communication, thus avoiding the confrontational postures - stereotyping on the one hand and 'victim' attitudes on the other - which all too often stand in the way of interaction between natives and immigrants.

Roberto Ortí analyses the various communication problems that arise with immigrants from the Arab world, and, specifically, from the Maghreb (the interviews are with Moroccans and Algerians). Concerning the patterns of communication of the Maghreb culture, the reader learns numerous details of interest: for instance, that educated North Africans, when speaking in Arabic, typically pay great attention to grammatical rigour and the aesthetic shape of the sentences - a cultural attitude which means that they frequently discuss 'la corrección y adecuación de determinado vocablo' ('the correctness and appropriateness of a particular term' - 93), and which they may transfer to the situation of speaking in Spanish. The author considers that in the aspects of proximity and use of gesture the Maghreb attitudes are relatively close to the Valencian ones, and thus concludes that communication between the two groups is unlikely to be seriously disturbed by misunderstandings relating to the form. He nonetheless points out that North Africans are more likely to employ flattery and are typically more reticent when asked to give personal information (origin, age, address, etc), and that the more hierarchical and asymmetrical character of Arab culture may also condition communication, above all in interactions marked by age and/or gender difference.

Dora Sales describes the communicative features of the interaction between Valencians and Chinese immigrants, prefacing her chapter with an eloquent quotation from Julia Kristeva: 'El

extranjero está en nosotros' ('The foreigner is within us' - 123). In terms of communication patterns, the Chinese culture is certainly the most different from Valencian models of all those studied in the volume. In this context, Dora Sales evokes the high degree of hierarchisation and the consequent low degree of proximity that characterise conversations between Chinese people, as well as the frequent use of metaphors and proverbs. Chinese speakers typically maintain long silences between turns and avoid overlapping - characteristics which are in stark contrast to Valencian practice. These particularities may lead the interlocutor to seriously underestimate a Chinese speaker's competence in Spanish: indeed, it can even happen that 'la comunicación falla por desconocimiento de las pautas comunicativas' ('communication breaks down thanks to unfamiliarity with the communicative patterns' - 144). The author nonetheless concludes that if the local interlocutor makes the effort of empathy and imagination that is needed to get inside the complex Chinese polysystem, mutual understanding should be possible.

The second contribution by Francisco Raga concerns communication with immigrants from West Africa (Senegal and Ghana). The author explains that in certain aspects, such as proximity and turn-taking, the Senegalese communicative patterns are quite similar to those found among Valencians; he warns, however, that, paradoxically, that very similarity can induce the native speaker to overestimate the Senegalese interlocutor's command of Spanish (this is, then, the reverse of what occurs with Chinese speakers). He stresses the positive implications of the circumstance that 'los senegaleses que se han instalado en la Comunidad Valenciana ... se han integrado (no asimilado) en nuestra cultura de una forma bastante llamativa' ('The Senegalese nationals who have settled in the Valencia region ... have achieved a remarkable degree of integration [not assimilation] into our culture' - 153). Nearly all the interviews are with Senegalese, but one is with a immigrant from Ghana: it transpires that the Ghanaian patterns of communication are very different from both the Senegalese ones and those of the host culture, and are marked by a much greater degree of distance and reserve. Here, Francisco Raga draws our attention to 'los peligros de establecer generalizaciones demasiado amplias' ('the perils of over-generalisation' - 168) with regard to the attitudes of, ultimately, any group or category in which we might be tempted to pigeon-hole the other.

Enric Sánchez examines the interaction between Valencians and Eastern European immigrants, the latter being for the most part from the former Soviet Union. The persons interviewed are of the following origins: Russian (one), Ukrainian (two), Georgian (two) and Romanian (one). The author, who is an expert in Russian language and culture, takes the view that there exists a 'Slavic' communicative pattern, defined by characteristics - totally opposed to those of the Mediterranean pattern - such as distance, formality and very considerable hierarchisation: in other words, the features of 'una cultura poco igualitaria' ('a culture in which equality counts for little' - 179), accompanied by 'muy poca o ninguna gestualidad' ('very little or no recourse to gesture' - 181). He nonetheless concludes that this group's capacity for linguistic and cultural integration is very considerable, no doubt partly for reasons of motivation. Here, the author of this review feels obliged to express a certain disagreement in relation to the analysis: Enric Sánchez considers that Romanians, despite speaking a Romance language, may be assimilated to the Slavic communication pattern (177). It may be pointed out, however, that Romania is a country which has absorbed a very wide range of cultural influences: if for the Moldavia region (the one nearest to the former Soviet Union) it may be possible to speak of communicative criteria similar to the Slavic ones, this is unlikely to be the case for either Wallachia, where the influences are more Greek and Turkish, or for Transylvania, where the impact of German culture has always been extremely strong.

Given the presence of a numerous and growing Romanian community in and around Valencia and Castellón, it would surely be of major interest to undertake a detailed study of this group's communicative integration (remembering also that Romanians, as Romance speakers, tend to learn Spanish particularly fast and thoroughly).

IV

The book concludes with Mary Farrell's contribution, on what we have earlier termed the 'mixed group'. This chapter is rather different from the four before it, and thus further opens up the range of the study. The analyses differs from the others in the following aspects: the author is not Valencian, but an American who is a long-term resident of the region; the interviews took place not in Valencia but in Castellón; the interviewees are people who, for the most part, are more fluent in Spanish than those in the previous chapters; not all are non-native speakers (some are Latin Americans); and they do not fall into the received category of 'economic migrant', as they are in the Valencia region entirely by choice, having come there to study or (in the case of certain German and Dutch nationals) to start up businesses. This final chapter thus serves to recall the enormous complexity of the phenomenon of migration, and to remind us that a particular group may have very different attitudes from those of both other groups and the host culture (e.g. to such factors as turn-taking, gestures or silence between turns). Here, Mary Farrell stresses the need for awareness of the great diversity of the patterns that exist: these people are, she underlines, 'miembros de grupos con distintas experiencias de socialización, aculturación y transculturación' ('members of groups with diverse experiences of socialisation, acculturation and transculturation' - 230).

V

The pages of this comprehensive and valuable study are an invitation to its readers, whatever their own origin or residence, to question and adapt their own cultural criteria and find out more about the vital and urgent subject of intercultural communication. This book by the Grupo CRIT, even with its web extension, is, obviously, only a first step. One challenge is, of course, to broaden the scope of study so as to take in other immigrant groups resident in the Valencia region. On a different level, the Grupo CRIT is, at the time of writing, drawing up a set of materials for teaching the host culture (with emphasis on its communication patterns) to immigrants learning Spanish as a foreign languages. Also under way is a research project on the subject of intercultural mediation, with special reference to healthcare services for the immigrant population; this research is directly linked to the practice of translation and interpretation in the public services.

Viewed from the outside, the stimulating and productive work of the Grupo CRIT would seem to have considerable further potential, and here we would venture to suggest two possible lines of action. First, we believe it would be of great interest to undertake a systematic analysis of the communication patterns of the host culture. Considerable reference is made throughout the book to the Valencian model of communication, in its similarities and differences vis-à-vis the models of other communities, and it would surely be highly useful if the empirical findings could be enriched by a detailed account of the local communicative features. These would, we may deduce from the study itself, include: a model of communication based on proximity and informality; relatively flexible social hierarchies and relatively fluid interaction between genders; very frequent recourse to gestures; and a marked tendency to avoid silence between turns and to overlap. Such a systematisation could make a notable contribution to self-understanding in the interests of an enhanced and deepened

understanding of the other. In addition and in the context of the polysystemic approach, the Valencian model of communication could be further theorised as being part of a larger set of systems - from a hypothetical Mediterranean system, passing through another more restricted system comprising the nations and regions that make up the Spanish state, down to the local system of the Valencia region itself.

Our second suggestion, from a viewpoint more attuned to globalisation and related in more indirect fashion to the project, is that consideration could also be given to the usefulness of extending the CRIT method to other intercultural and interlinguistic situations. Transcultural studies exist in close relation to translation studies, and from that vantage point we may ask to what extent it is possible or desirable to transfer this experience to a different language context. To translate the present book into another language would be a problematic endeavour, given the very high 'Valencian' specificity of the content, and a different approach could be preferable. We refer to the notion, not of translating this study as such, but of emulating it. Thus, other specialists from a different language background could work on producing a study with similar characteristics and a similar methodology, but dealing with the cultural and linguistic integration of particular groups of immigrants in their own society. In that connection, the present review, written in both English and Spanish versions by a reader of the book who is not a Spanish native speaker, is offered as a channel for disseminating the project outside its peninsular context, and also as a possible stimulus to its emulation. At all events, projects of this type indubitably form a highly necessary contribution to the cultural dialogue which is now so crucial and urgent a need in our societies. As Dora Sales declares in the closing words of her chapter: 'Se trata de negociar. Se trata de querer hacerlo' ('We have to negotiate. We have to want to' - 147). In the spirit of that commitment, we may conclude from the reading of this excellent study that, if indeed the foreigner is within us, within that same foreigner we will ultimately find ourselves.