

Linguistic Misinterpretation and the Dialogue of Civilizations

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Abstract : Globalization and migrations have made cross-cultural contacts more frequent and intensive. Sometimes, these contacts may lead to misunderstanding between partners of communication and misinterpretations of the verbal messages that some researchers tend to consider as the 'clash of civilizations'. In most cases, reasons for that may be found in cultural and linguistic differences and hence misinterpretations of intentions and behavior. The current research examines factors of verbal and non-verbal communication that should be taken into consideration in verbal and non-verbal contacts. Language is one of the most important manifestations of the cultural code, and it is often considered as one of the special features of a civilization. The Arabic language, in particular, is commonly associated with Islam and the language and the Arab-Muslim civilization. It is one of the most important markers of self-identification for more than 200 million of native speakers. Arabic is the language of the Quran and hence the symbol of religious affiliation for more than one billion Muslims around the globe. Adequate interpretation of Arabic texts requires profound knowledge of its grammar, semantics of its vocabulary. Communicating sides who belong to different cultural groups are guided by different models of behavior and hierarchy of values, besides that the vocabulary each of them uses in the dialogue may convey different semantic realities and vary in connotations. In this context direct, literal translation in most cases cannot adequately convey the original meaning of the original message. Besides that peculiarities and diversities of the extralinguistic information, such as the body language, communicative etiquette, cultural background and religious affiliations may make the dialogue even more difficult. It is very likely that the so called 'clash of civilizations' in most cases is due to misinterpretation of counterpart's means of discourse such as language, cultural codes, and models of behavior rather than lies in basic contradictions between partners of communication. In the process of communication, one has to rely on universal values rather than focus on cultural or religious peculiarities, to take into account current linguistic and extralinguistic context.

Keywords : Arabic, civilization, discourse, language, linguistic

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