

Intercultural Dialogue in the Media: focused on <Welcome to South>¹

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Abstract

Today, interculturalism has been raised to overcome conflicts and confrontations between races by respecting each other and enhancing the value of cultural diversity. This article searches for strategy of intercultural dialogue through analyzing media contents. Italian film Welcome to South effectively demonstrates transformation process in which cultural prejudice is overcome and communication between distinct culture is promoted. Preconceived images surrounding aliens work as stereotypes that cause misunderstanding and disbelief. The main character overcomes this obstacle and realizes mutual understanding and respect with open-mindedness, through encouraging cultural communication. Such media literacy can be well utilized for intercultural education, an indispensable component of this multicultural society. A Movie which delivers message through storytelling and visual and auditory media can be effectively utilized for medial education.

Keywords: *Media Education, Intercultural Dialogue, Intercultural Education, Media Literacy, Cultural Diversity, Welcome to South*

1. Introduction

Today, cultural diversity issue has been actively raised to overcome conflicts and confrontations between races by respecting each other and enhancing the value of cultural diversity. This is because of the fact that humans are facing the risk of standardization, commercialization and subordination of cultures in the wake of globalization. The world is getting smaller and cultural difference is diminishing. The pressure of cultural homogeneity is getting serious enough to discuss the concept of world culture. Therefore, social awareness and efforts to preserve cultural diversity have been raised as important issues in this situation. Cultural diversity has been a great asset of human beings and it assumes that there is no ranks between cultural values. Cultural diversity is a rich asset for individual as well as society and individual's imagination and creativity can be improved by maintaining, enhancing and preserving cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is also an essential condition for consistent development of present and future generation.

Another reason why cultural diversity has become an important issue is the discourse on multi cultural society. Dramatic entrance into multi cultural society is causing serious problems to our society. Interculturalism is a great reference to help solving conflicts in culturally diverse society and evolving cultural diversity as a positive energy.

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Interculturalism takes a positive view of potential hybrid of culture brought by cultural diversity and awareness of its value. Theories related to multi culture can be divided into two which are multiculturalism of North America and interculturalism of Europe. Multiculturalism gives priority to group when it comes to the relationships between group and individual. In other words, The identity of group is superior to the identity of individual so certain group can be standardized and categorized. Whereas, interculturalism emphasizes the relationship itself instead of individual or group. Cultural difference needs to be considered as dynamic relationships between two substances as it is not objectively given with static form.

The key subject of interculturalism is 'communication'. The concept of 'inner' is not to arrange different cultures on a line without close relations but it is to make them constantly face to each other. A crucial strategy employed by interculturalism is 'intercultural dialogue'. It is promoting mutual understanding through communications among people with various cultural backgrounds. It is unique in a way that it advocates importance of meetings among individuals, not those among categories or groups of people and advocates mutual interaction. In case of European Union, a cultural communication based on interculturalism is offered as cultural agenda in the continent. The official motto of EU is 'United in diversity' and it means to sublimate conflicts and confrontation caused by different cultural backgrounds into a new harmony. Specifically, it emphasizes intercultural skill and intercultural competence while actively propelling for intercultural city project and intercultural education.

Cultural education through media can have a connection point with interculturalism. Let's look at the characteristics of interculturalism education in Europe [1]. Firstly, the key point lies in 'communication'. Therefore, EU emphasizes 'intercultural skill' for communication in terms of education policy. School needs to be the place for students to learn skills to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds through the education system based on interculturalism. Secondly, the characteristic which differentiate interculturalism from multiculturalism is bidirection. Everyone from major white European people to minor group needs to understand and shares the value, history and cultural backgrounds bidirectionally. Thirdly, the other unique characteristic of interculturalism is that it puts emphasis on individuality than collectivity. In other words, the objective of educating interculturalism is to learn to meet with different people not to learn different cultures. Students should not be considered as a group representing categorized certain group. The contents of education should be focused on recognizing individual as an individual not as a race or nation.

2. Media Literacy and Cultural Literacy

This article searches for strategies of intercultural dialogue, much required in multicultural society, through analysis of media contents. As a part of intercultural education, it should be categorized as a media education. Literacy refers to an ability to read and write, and it aims to attain and comprehend written knowledge and information. This notion of media literacy has been developing, as transformation in media has enabled films and digital components to portray the world more vividly and to allow differentiated communication. The general term of 'seeing' involves passive meaning of observing the information offered by the media. The term 'reading', like as 'reading books, indicates the action of trying to understand the meaning and implication offered by the media [2]. By developing media literacy, we may attempt cultural education through media.

Cultural literacy is one more essential factor to approach the communication between cultures through media education. Cultural literacy refers to the ability to

obtain knowledge of cultures and to adapt them. When senders writes a message together with the meaning produced by his own cultural expectation (encoding), receiver reads it with his own cultural expectation (decoding). The difference between people from other cultures comes from the fact that they are living in the world of their own senses not from the fact that they are using different languages. Therefore, cultural literacy means the ability to read and understand different cultures and to find the meanings which means to analyze, compare and interpret different cultures [3]. This can be considered as intercultural ability so it is emphasized in interculturalism education. The cultural education using media literacy can be properly performed when it is paired with cultural literacy.



Figure 1. Test Participants

Let's discuss the cultural education using media literacy of documentary as a one example. BBC planed a trial documentary titled *Make Bradford British* and released it on air in 2012. They designed one test with community society researchers to resolve the issue of regional conflicts that British was facing. They tried to revive the meaning of members of multi cultural society through this test. Bradford was divided by races over the decades and residents were splitted so much to such an extend as to move to other place when they had Pakistan family as a new neighbor. Most of the white people believed in the saying that a dog can never be a horse even though it is born in the stable. So they didn't want to live together with other races. Angers and distrust of Asians and black people living in Bradford were accumulated as Asians were constantly getting humiliated by being addressed as "Paki" and black people were also alienated and exposed to violence. The place was like a time bomb instead of one community and it could explode sooner or later.

Test participants were from the same city but they came from different background so they were members of different community. As a standard of selection, they had to have British nationality but failed in the test to get permanent residency. They were from the same city but lived in different area. In other words, there were people came from the area designated only to white people or from the area where most of Asians were living. The selected members were Muslin who needed to pray at a mosque for 5 times a day, female Muslim who didn't shake hands with males, taxi driver who got bullied for being black when he grew up,

middle aged black female who had hurtful memories from racism, white female from high society who was a judge and retired policeman who was living in the area for white people. They made these 8 people live in one place for several days. They needed to be themselves to show their own personalities.

As expected, various problems and conflicts were raised and the process to overcome them was presented. Of course, policy and debate are very important to resolve social problems but they tried to find the alternatives through a real experience. Participants tried to understand each other to find a point of agreement. For example, Rashid, who was a Muslim and had to go to mosque for 5 times a day, caused a problem with his condition. People went to famous tourist attraction together and Rashid decided not to go to Mosque and prayed outside instead. Rashid gave up a part of his religious identity as a member of community. Also other people who were disturbed by Rashid were very impressed by his religious faith. One man who was a Christian helped Rashid to find a way to Mosque. People became to understand and respect each other for religious faith even though they had different religions and they practiced with generosity. They had a structural opportunity to find common things and cultural differences and to learn how to communicate with others.

Interculturalism can be taught by watching this type of documentary and understanding it. For this purpose, understanding it from diverse cultural points of view so called cultural literacy is needed on the top of media literacy. Interculturalism education can be effectively delivered when it is performed through media based on this ability. How about utilizing movies or dramas? When it comes to the contents containing storytelling unlike factual language of documentary, people's emotional participants and immersions can be maximized. Therefore, greater effect can be generated. The story of one movie will be analyzed in the next chapter. The influences of storytelling and media literacy on cultural education will be discussed.

3. Media Literacy: *Welcome to South*

This article intends to explore topics of intercultural dialogue through reading film media. A narrative structure of the movie *Welcome to South* reveals how intercultural prejudice is overcome and communication is achieved. In other words, the movie's plot can be analyzed in different stages of intercultural dialogue. It is advancing toward mutual understanding through contact and communication with aliens, which are bounded by their typical images that society sees.

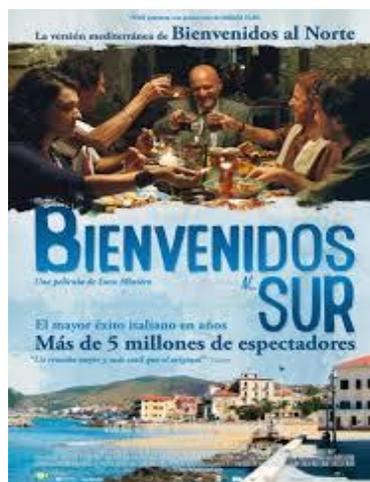


Figure 2. The Movie Poster of *Welcome to South*

The generative model of signification by Greimas will be applied as a methodology for medial literacy. The generative model of signification assumes that there are 3 different structures inherent in the texts shown outside. The structure which is the most further away from the text is called deep structure where the basic significance is produced and it has a close correlation with the subject of story. Surface structure can be regarded as narrative structure or plot and discourse structure is where the character and places are formed more specifically. The significance of story is produced while it is being transferred between structures and it is very important to maintain the consistency throughout the process.

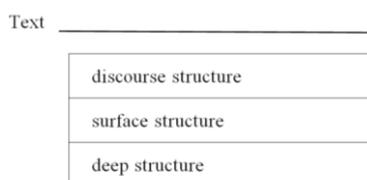


Figure 3. Generative Model of Signification

According to Greimas, the entire significance of story can be expressed through confrontation between two subjects. The basic system of significance is made by one axis of common meaning with two confronting factors. Semiotic square is made by adding contradicting factors to that. The system of significance which is divided by semiotic square forms the basic significance of deep structure. The results of applying semiotic square model to find out narrative significance of 'Welcome to South' are as follow.

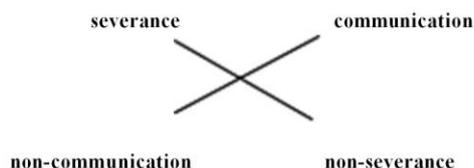


Figure 4. Meaning of Theme by Semiotic Square

The narrative significance of this movie can be regarded as the confrontation between severance and communication. In other words, severance means the prejudice against other people which is opposite to mutual understanding through communication. The story shows the confrontation and competition between two values and it is formed as narrative structure. Significance can be recognized statically but it can be formed through dynamic process. So transition from one structure to another is practiced over the narrative structure. The stage of non-severance can be considered as the point of contact and communication. The main character finally gets to understand and respect others through contact and communication and this is same for conversation process between cultures.

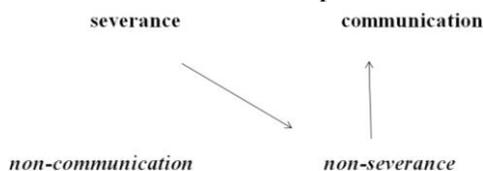


Figure. 5 Process of Narrative

Each structure will be analyzed. First of all, how the mythicization of others can be brought by the situation of severance. In the introduction, North people's

prejudice against South people is addressed from main character's point of view. The main character moves down to South and tries to contact and communicate with local people. Lastly, they understand the difference between North and South and finally get to understand and respect each other through smooth communication.

3.1. Mythicization of Alien

We create stereotype on object unfamiliar to us; sophisticated identity of an individual is simply dissolved, as we package him/her with particular image, as if it should be a natural and normal identity. Roland Barthes named a phenomenon, in which particular culture with particular historical context seems to possess timeless values, as a modern 'mythology'[2]. And he claims that aliens are easy targets of formation of this mythology. Our preconceived notions built through years are no more than assumptions and prejudices.

The main character Alberto admires and hopes to transfer to a great city Milan, but he rather gets shunted off to a rural village called Castellabate. South of Italy, in which Napoli is generally the only known place to Northern people, is an unfamiliar region. Only news they are used to hearing from South are about deaths from violence and cholera. So there is a preconceived notion that South is a place of danger, shortage and insanity. Alberto, heavily concerned of thefts, leaves his valuable at home, wears body armor, and takes off with mouse traps and fire extinguisher. When he spends his first night at house of Volpe, his companion, he locks the door, hides his wallet, and puts newspaper on top of his bed. He sees firework materials as drugs and bombs and even suspects his companion as a gangster.

Having tossed and turned all night in fear and nervousness, Alberto is taken aback by heavy breakfast and pudding with pig blood. He feels frustration over laid-back and slow work environment, and sees this as a problem to be coped. Looking at Milan Cathedral miniature on his desk, gorgonzola cheeses and his family picture, Alberto misses North. He treats these aliens in South with prejudices, as they have different accent, vocabularies and life styles. And his co-workers do just the same, regarding Alberto as a rude person.



Figure 6. Cultural Difference Appearing Through Cheese [5]

The possibility of true communication suddenly increases when we stop viewing aliens with fixed notions[6]. As people live and learn about Alberto in common spaces, they start viewing Alberto with "pure eyes" without prejudices. Alberto learns that South is not as hot as he thought. And his prejudice about South having

high crime rate breaks. When he starts contacting and communicating with his co-workers, he goes through changes.

3.2. Contact and Communication

UNESCO suggest three stages of basic intercultural dialogue[6]. First, the basic of intercultural exchange is “listening”, which is an endeavor to “sympathize with experience of aliens and to perceive their minds”. Second, through “dialogue”, “understanding from inside”; it is meeting the aliens as if they are ourselves. At last but not least, it is “curiosity”. It means “active opening” and is an ability to embrace possibility of existential choices. While Alberto’s story proceeds, he listens to his co-workers’ stories, understands through dialogues, grows curiosity, and embraces new culture.

It is when his co-workers bring furnitures and decorate his empty house that Alberto begins to truly contact and communicate with them. He is touched and notices beauty in those furnitures. And for the first time he tries communication, he learns that those fireworks materials were not bombs. With all this benevolence, his co-workers want to get to learn more about him. Alberto smiles as he first discovers sea through his window and wonders how he has been unaware of this scene. Sitting himself on a nice dinner on a beach, he takes interest in unique accents and vocabularies of South and tries to replicate them. He follows how Volpe throws away the garbage and participates in pick-up soccer games. He learns to relax with a cup of coffee and plays games with villagers. Alberto begins to absorb himself to this new culture and feels as if this is a true life-style that fulfills his taste. He now feels like the weekend is approaching to fast, when he has to return to his home. Through dialogues with Volpe, he builds mutual understanding. He even tries teach his friend how to make refusals in social settings like Northern people by taking him to mail delivery, but he understand that Volpe is not capable of doing that. Eventually, drunk Alberto, running on a beach on his motorcycle, sings about how much he loves South now.



Figure 7. Alberto and his Co-workers' Plays

Meanwhile, his wife Sylvia does not believe Alberto who claims his love for South. She in fact encourages him to confess of his difficult life there. Accordingly, Alberto tells his wife and his friends “what they want to believe”: lies fitting their fixed ideas. In other words, they have ‘confirmation bias’. This refers to a tendency to accept informations fitting into one’s belief and to dismiss informations that are not. It is a cognitive distortion to establish and confirm one’s preconceived ideas [7]. This leads a person to view others with prejudices and maintain fixed ideas through refusing to discover and change them. His wife’s biased thinking clearly reveals when Alberto and his co-workers perform plays upon her arrival in

Castellabate. However in conclusion, his wife also comes to embrace South and discards all prejudices.

3.3. Mutual Understanding and Respect

Attempt for open-minded communication and reducing gaps between cultures can accomplish truthful meeting with others. Values that guarantee successful intercultural dialogue are flexibility, sympathy, reduction of nervousness, humility and kindness, not necessarily the knowledge of other places [6]. On his first night at Castellabate, Alberto frights over the sign “You die here”. But when he takes another look at the sign without prejudice, he sees “you do not die here”. It stresses the fact that the same object may be represent a completely different thing depending on viewers’ minds and attitudes. As Alberto opens up and grows curiosity, he achieves communication with kind co-workers and reaches to mutual understanding. He finally loves and admires South, which turned out to be not as hot, dangerous as thought, but rather relaxed and crowded. On a first day to South, Alberto gets pulled over a police for over-speeding; he wanted to see the sun-set over the sea. Alberto once hoped the time to fly by, but now he does not want to leave this place. Just like Volpe predicts, this alien cries on the last day, just as he did when he first got there.

A mythicized image of aliens is no different from prejudice and preconceived notions. People can expand their prospects of understanding of different places through contact and communication with others. But what is more important is that an individual can never represent particular ethnic group or communities formed by religions. For example, an identity of Volpe consists of multiple, collective factors, other than being from South.



Figure 8. Alberto and Volpe’s Mutual Dialogue

In the conclusion, the movie does not merely discuss the issues regarding cultural gap between North and South. Volpe’s decision to confess his love to Maria was as difficult as Alberto’s to confess his true feelings to his wife. Alberto helps Volpe and Maria to form loving relationship, which later helps him to recover his relationship with his wife. Eventually, overcoming cultural gaps and accomplishing mutual understanding provides an opportunity to renew his own human relationship.

4. Media Literacy and Intercultural Education

The story of this movie shows the change in awareness of main character regarding cultural diversity. Main character who used to have biased point of view towards other culture finds a new perceptive through mutual communication and conversation with strangers. The issues between cultures were visualized through various materials and spatial backgrounds. And the issues were re-interpreted from main character's point of

view which was changed by narrative structure. As a result, the story shows the victory of communication in the battle of severance and communication.

Table 1. Generative Model of Signification of the Movie

discourse structure	Space: North and South Material: Cheese, Food, Language, Crime, Sanitation
surface structure	Moving forwards mutual understanding through intercultural dialogue
deep structure	confrontation between severance and communication

This study analyzed narrative structure and surface structure of this movie and recognized deep structure through media literacy. The value of communication between cultures was drawn which is very important in terms of cultural education for both sides. Especially, movie which delivers message through storytelling as a visual and auditory media can be effectively utilized for medial education.

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