



Semiotics of culture and intercultural communication

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2nd lecture

Social reality, culture and multiculturalism

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Topics of the
2nd lecture

- ❑ The main topics of this second lecture are:
 1. A short discussion of the notion of social reality that frames the life world of a social actor
 2. The two central cognitive dimensions for the culture of any social actor called « sense of reality » and « sense of imagination ».
 3. The question of « learning » of a given culture and the process of *enculturation*.
 4. Four basic complementary definitions of the notion « culture ».
 5. The problem of multi- and interculturalism.

1st topic

- Culture and social reality -

1st topic

Culture and
social reality

- ❑ We say that the social reality of the Lebenswelt of an actor -
 - ✓ is a **constructed**, produced one that assigns collectively agreed **functions** and roles to “brute facts”(cf. Searle 98)
 - ✓ on which people are expected to **conform** their **behaviour** if dealing, interacting with a social actor and participating in its activities.

- ❑ In other words: the different entities composing a social Lebenswelt of an actor are **qualified** entities mainly with respect
 - ✓ to the **interests**, desires, needs or again “missions” of a social actor;
 - ✓ to the **history** and the traditions of the social actor;
 - ✓ to the given **(natural) specificities** of the world the social actor inhabits and has to control.

1st topic

Culture and
social reality

- ❑ In this sense, the culture or a specific cultural form:
 - ✓ composes the **symbolic** or **meaning realm** of the Lebenswelt of a social actor;
 - ✓ which **qualifies** or again **frames** (defines, illustrates, describes, explains, ...) the specificities and particularities of the social reality of his Lebenswelt
 - ✓ and which is essential for the maintenance and evolution of the identity and integrity of his Lebenswelt.

 - ❑ Remember, culture is, among others:
 - ✓ a **qualification means**
 - ✓ a **cognitive** and **potestive** (i.e. power) **resource**
- of the social actor for – as Lévi-Strauss has put it [LEV 58] – inhabiting and controlling the world.

1st topic

Culture and social reality

- ❑ But the common cognitive reference frame can constitute an extremely complex and multi-facetted realm.
- ❑ **Example:** the socio-linguistic status of (sub-)languages as an appropriate communication means. A natural language such as **French** or **English**, socio-linguistically speaking, can constitute – alone or in combination with other sign systems - :
 - ✓ official languages of elites,
 - ✓ intimate languages;
 - ✓ specialised professional languages;
 - ✓ global lingua franca;
 - ✓ group specific languages;
 - ✓ parts of pidgins;
 - ✓ popular and mainly oral languages.
- ❑ This means: a social actor may dispose of common communication resources but they are differently weighted, more or less appropriate and also more or less easily accessible, ...

1st topic

Culture and
social reality

- ❑ More generally speaking the culture of a social actor is a multi-facetted and complex meaning realm where :
 - ✓ **globally shared** values coexist with only **locally shared** ones (i.e. with values that are shared only by a sub-group of the social actor);
 - ✓ traditional - **orthodox** – values may coexist with **heterodox** ones;
 - ✓ **different, concurrent** values may be available for qualifying the Lebenswelt of the social actor (or a part of its Lebenswelt);
 - ✓ a same value may be **weighted differently** by different agents composing a social actor,
 - ✓ etc.

1st topic

Culture and social reality

- ❑ This complexity and multi-faceted nature of the meaning realm proper to the culture of an actor shows – as already theorised in classical rhetoric (cf. Lausberg 1961) – that the process of **qualification** itself, of the “framing” of the world is a complex and generally controversial process motivated by :
 - ✓ the **identity** and the social **status of the agents** who are engaged in a (formal or informal, deliberate or not) qualification process or who are supporting a given qualification;
 - ✓ the **differences of interests**, needs or desires of the concerned agents;
 - ✓ the **differences in existing traditions**, habitudes, customs (i.e. *social genres*)
 - ✓ and also the specificity, the specific nature of the life world itself.
- ❑ Example: linguistically relevant qualification processes : creolization, pidginisation, specialisation, loan translation, ...

1st topic

Culture and social reality

- ❑ A qualification itself may be:
 - ✓ elaborated and imposed deliberately as a “**policy**” (language policy, social policy, education policy, ...);
 - ✓ the result or the consequence of a **collective process of repetitive events**, (language evolution, ...);
 - ✓ the result or the consequence of **(social) mimicry** (fashion, eating habitudes, political ideas, ...);
 - ✓ **shared** collectively or only by some small groups,
 - ✓ **unquestionable** or possess a more or less **transient**, ephemeral status,
 - ✓ etc.

- ❑ **Remark:** the production and imposition of “new” qualifications are always dependent on previous, already existing qualifications, i.e. traditions or habitudes determining social networks, the social nature, the social practices, ... of an actor

1st topic

Culture and social reality

- ❑ Nevertheless, the common use of the term “culture” suggests that there exist (is implicitly supposed that there exist) a kind of **cross-cultural communality**, a “**common ground**” underneath the “superficial” diversity of cultural forms.

- ❑ This cross-cultural communality – with respect to the « ontological structure » of the Lebenswelt - is interpreted, framed differently by the different cultural forms.

- ❑ Let us stress the point that the assumption of a sort of communality, of a common ground between the whole diversity of cultural forms:
 - ✓ is an important argument for the position of a **limited** cultural relativism assuming

 - ✓ that **in spite of** the diversity of cultural forms and of a more or less important cognitive distance between two cultural forms, any cultural form is at least **partially understandable** and **translatable** in any other cultural form.

2nd topic

- Sense of reality vs sense of imagination -

2nd topic

Sense of reality
– sense of
imagination

- ❑ Furthermore, culture as a qualification or framing process attributes *different existential status* to qualified entities.
- ❑ We speak here – in reference to Greimas – of the semiotic **modalities** of **cultural existence** of entities composing, organising the life world of a social actor: In this sense, the life world of a social actor is full up of:
 - ✓ existing and not-existing entities;
 - ✓ real and possible or imagined entities;
 - ✓ desired and feared entities;
 - ✓ true and false, fake, fictitious entities;
 - ✓ probable and not probable entities;
 - ✓ etc.
- ❑ **Example:** the **social network configuration** as a real one, possible one, true one or fake one, secret one, probable one ...

2nd topic

Sense of reality
– sense of
imagination

- ❑ In taking into account these (and certainly other) semiotic modalities of cultural existence, we can better understand the complementarity of the two central cognitive dimensions what the Austrian novelist Musil has called in his “Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften”:
 - ✓ the **sense of** (political, economic, historic, ...) **reality**
 - ✓ the **sense of** (artistic, literary, scientific, ...) **imagination**

- ❑ Indeed, each actor has to qualify a specific set of entities (objects, activities, spaces, periods,) as “**real entities**” that acquire the epistemic status of “objectivity”, “naturalness” or even “unquestionability” because of
 - ✓ their traditional and habitual (routine) character,
 - ✓ their institutionalized character (Berger/Luckmann 1966),
 - ✓ their more or less preferential status in a community (cf. Lewis 1970)

2nd topic

Sense of reality
– sense of
imagination

- ❑ On the other hand, no social actor can content itself with this sense of reality.
- ❑ Every social actor has for its sake and survival to cultivate its **sense of imagination** in order, for instance:
 - ✓ to develop and test **possible scenarios** of its actual reality and its history,
 - ✓ to train its **capacity to understand** and classify other forms of social realities (i.e. other Lebenswelten or life worlds)
 - ✓ to be able to **integrate** in a productive way other forms of social realities in its reality which will be more or less profoundly modified by these integrations.
- ❑ Such and other tasks constitute the **deep social justifications**
 - ✓ of scientific, artistic, literary, critical, ... investigations
 - ✓ even if they do not fit with the economic and social success criteria of our liberal world not with the moral criteria of monolithic, fossilised religious regimes.

2nd topic

Sense of reality
– sense of
imagination

- ❑ Every culture is provided with a sort of **cognitive meta-level** that enables a social actor to reflect and interpret
 - ✓ its specificity and identity,
 - ✓ its historical (mythical) destinee,
 - ✓ the other (i.e. other social actors)
 - ✓ and especially possible scenarios of (its) life world (Lebenswelt).

- ❑ This meta-level is constituted by specialised sign systems :
« **secondary modelling systems** » (in the sense of Y. Lotman)

- ❑ **Examples** of secondary modelling systems:
 - ✓ arts and literature;
 - ✓ science;
 - ✓ (secularised) ideological systems and elaborations;
 - ✓ mythological, religious and para-religious systems;
 - ✓ etc

3rd topic

-Cultural competence and « enculturation » -

3rd topic

Cultural
competence
and
enculturation

- ❑ But a second central aspect of culture is **culture as a constraint**.
- ❑ This is the picture of culture as a set of **norms** or as a **normative framework** :
 - ✓ a sort of implicit or explicitly formulated **social contract**
 - ✓ that enables the **reciprocal expectations** between the members of a social actor concerning the internal organization of this actor and its relationships with the “outer world”
 - ✓ that distributes, furthermore, **duties and liberties** among the members of the social actor in order to make workable, to maintain, to evolve the life world of a social actor.
- ❑ **Example** : the expectations, duties and liberties of the members of the social actor “family”.

3rd topic

Cultural
competence
and
enculturation

- ❑ Furthermore, to live in the life world of a social actor means:
 - ✓ to have not only an **interest/desire** or need to do this (or again to be **constrained** to do this)
 - ✓ but also to have the **appropriate competence** to do this or, at least to have the opportunity to acquire this competence.

- ❑ **Example:** living in the Lebenswelt of soccer fan club means:
 - ✓ to understand the social network of it and to be able to occupy some place within it,
 - ✓ to know the symbols of it,
 - ✓ to know the time agenda of this club,
 - ✓ to be able to communicate with them in their language(s),
 - ✓ to engage actively in its particular activities, etc.

3rd topic

Cultural competence and enculturation

- ❑ A cultural competence (lato sensu) itself is a **capital** (Bourdieu 1979; 1981) that an agent owns in interacting with a social actor or in living in the life world of the social actor.

- ❑ **Examples** of different species of (lato sensu) **cultural capital**:
 - ✓ knowing of people : social networks in the sense of a “**social capital**” (P. Bourdieu [86];)
 - ✓ possessing “social environment” : (goods, services, ...) “**economic capital**”
 - ✓ possessing and manipulating principal topics, ideas: **cultural capital** (stricto sensu)
 - ✓ possessing the languages: **(socio-)linguistic capital**
 - ✓ possessing the skills : **practical capital**
 - ✓ ...

3rd topic

Cultural
competence
and
enculturation

- ❑ This means that a **cultural competence** for interacting with a social actor and living in his Lebenswelt, is composed of two central dimensions:
 - ✓ a **cognitive dimension** – the competence as a knowledge or as a skill (for understanding, interpreting, ... the culture of a social actor)
 - ✓ a **potestive dimension** – the competence as a (technical, political, economic, military, intellectual, ...) power for occupying a position in the Lebenswelt of a social actor and evolving within it.

3rd topic

Cultural
competence
and
enculturation

- ❑ The acquisition of a cultural competence can take – schematically speaking – the form of an enculturation or that of an “acculturation”.
 - ✓ **acculturation**: a person or a group integrates (more or less well) the cultural realm of another social actor (cf. latter on in this lecture, the question of multi- and interculturalism)
 - ✓ **enculturation** is the process of acquisition of one’s culture, i.e. especially of basic values and norms (via “socialisation”; cf. [HER 63])

- ❑ There are different forms and genres of “education”, but basically, we have to distinguish between:
 - ✓ **primary enculturation** by a “first socialisation” (family, school, daily life, ...): family, social environment, ...
 - ✓ **secondary enculturations** via different forms and institutions of learning or “inculcation” (school, work place, ...) : professional,

3rd topic

Cultural
competence
and
enculturation

- ❑ Enculturation furthermore, knows:
 - ✓ a **formal dimension** (called “education”)
 - ✓ an **informal dimension** which covers all opportunities to appropriate, “internalize” the knowledge, values and norms of a group, of a social actor (cf; the actually fashionable notion of “u-learning” which stands for “ubiquitous learning”).

- ❑ In this sense:
 - ✓ enculturation is a **life long process** which starts already, so to speak, before the birth and which ends with the physical death of a person;
 - ✓ which has very much to do of what is called, to-day, **life-long learning** or again “**ubiquitous learning**”

4th topic

- **Four complementary definitions of the notion « culture » -**

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- ❑ In taking account of what we have developed up till now, **four definitions (approaches)** of what a culture is.

- ❑ Culture is :
 1. a **system of knowledge and values** which is supposed to be more or less common to a group of men who constitute with respect to this system a “social actor” (a “community”);
 2. a set of **cognitive strategies and solutions** for given needs (problems) relevant for a “social actor”;
 3. a species of capital (a “**symbolic capital**”) that distributes hierarchical places (produces a “social space”) and opens trajectories within the social space of a social actor (“community”);
 4. a **historical form** with an evolutionary dynamics and embedded within a genetic filiations process.

4th topic

Four
definitions of
the notion
« culture »

- ❑ This means, that for a social actor culture always is :
 - ✓ a valued, graded or gradable **knowledge framework**;
 - ✓ a **cognitive resource** for solving needs and goals;
 - ✓ a **means of power** (i.e. – in the sense of Greimas – a potestive resource) for maintaining or changing a given social position;
 - ✓ a **“historical” resource**.

- ❑ It constitutes, in this sense a **reference** for a social actor for communicating, interacting with members of his own group or members of other social actors.

- ❑ In order to speak with Schütz, such references are themes or thematic configurations that constitute the **“Wissenswelt”** of a social actor.

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- ❑ Culture as a system of **knowledge** and **values** which is supposed to be more or less **common** to a group of men who constitute with respect to this system a “social actor” (a “community”).
- ❑ Such common knowledge and values concern especially, as we have already seen, the Lebenswelt, the different parts of the Lebenswelt of a social actor:
 - ✓ language and other symbolic systems (language culture);
 - ✓ activities (practical culture)
 - ✓ space (territorial culture)
 - ✓ time (historical culture)
 - ✓ objects (material culture)
 - ✓ people (social culture)
 - ✓ other Lebenswelten or other forms of a given Lebenswelt (artistic culture; imaginary, ...)
 - ✓ etc.

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- A **typical example** for culture as a system of knowledge and values is culture as a knowledge of social practices, i.e.:
 - ✓ the specialised culture of a given **profession** (a “metier”): skills, know-how, ...;
 - ✓ the common references of a **scientific community** : ”scientific paradigm”;
 - ✓ the tacit and practical “routine” knowledge organizing **daily life practices**: shopping, consuming, conversing, walking, ...;
 - ✓ the highly elaborated and scholarly transmitted political culture and traditions of citizens of a **state** or a **nation**;
 - ✓ the formalized traditions of behaving in “**good society**” or in **closed** (rural, youth, ...) **communities** ...;
 - ✓ etc.

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- Central aspects to be taken into account for studying culture as a cognitive reference frame (first definition):
 - ✓ a) **specificities of a culture**: principal discriminating patterns (= cultural themes), “folk” classification systems,
 - ✓ b) **functional differentiation** of knowledge with respect to the seven main characteristics of the Lebenswelt of a social actor
 - ✓ c) **species of knowledge**: practical or theoretical knowledge, tacit and explicit knowledge, traditional or innovative forms of knowledge, ...
 - ✓ d) “**constitutional**” forms of knowledge for a social actor and “**derived**” forms of knowledge
 - ✓ e) **social distribution** of knowledge and values over a society of actors
 - ✓ f) **meta-function, meta-stability** of culture in form of imaginative works, hypothetical simulations, “fiction and fakes”,

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- ❑ **Cultural value** : what is more or less relevant, important, for an actor ...
 - ✓ ***hierarchy of preferences*** conditioning preferential choices within a social actor culture is a « preferential »,
 - ✓ **preferentially graded (hierarchical) knowledge** for a social actor.

- ❑ **Examples:** knowledge that is considered – by the social actor - :
 - ✓ **Epistemic** point of view: true, certain, ... delusive, fallacious, not certain, improbable,
 - ✓ **Moral** point of view: to be **acceptable**, non-acceptable,
 - ✓ **Utilitarian** point of view : to be (practical) efficient, operational, “working”, superfluous, ...
 - ✓ **Ontological** point of view : to be unquestionable, questionable... to be universal, eternal, ...
 - ✓ **Hedonistic** point of view : to be pleasant, un pleasant
 - ✓ **Sensual** point of view to be appealing, disgusting, ...
 - ✓ ...

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- ❑ 2nd definition of “culture”: Culture constitutes a set of (traditionally experienced, explicitly elaborated, etc.) **cognitive strategies** and **solutions** for given **needs (problems)** relevant for a social actor.

- ❑ This means that a social actor is a group of men that:
 - ✓ share a set of **common activities**, i.e. needs and goals to satisfy;
 - ✓ occupy a **place** (social field,...) and lives in a (physical, ecological, social, mental, ...) **environment** with **limited resources** for satisfying these needs and goals.

- ❑ For this, in order to « survive » and to « reproduce » himself, a social actor needs:
 - ✓ a **cognitive competence** (knowledge, skills, traditions, regulating value systems, ...);
 - ✓ a **potestive competence** (power, influence, ...).

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- ❑ A **culture**, in this sense:
 - ✓ is composed by a **set of strategies** (plans, schemata, ...) for satisfying given needs and goals;
 - ✓ constitutes itself – for a person, a social actor or a society of social actors – a **species of resource** (a cognitive and potestive resource) for satisfying given needs and goals (activities).

- ❑ Remark: the importance of **cultural heritage** and of its **transmission**:
 - ✓ via education (formal or practical one);
 - ✓ via specialised institutions;
 - ✓ via specialised persons;
 - ✓ via specialised products and services.

4th topic

Four
definitions of
the notion
« culture »

- ❑ Culture as a set of plans, schemata, ... for solving given needs and interests of a social actor can be understood as :
 - ✓ **biologically pre-determined schemata** (cf. ethology of behaviour);
 - ✓ **via education transmitted schemata** (“traditions”, “customs”, “manners”, ...);
 - ✓ **conventional schemata** (“laws”, “rules”, “standards”, ...);
 - ✓ **highly differentiated and formalised schemata** (“institutions”).

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- ❑ 3rd definition of culture: Culture is a species of **capital** (a “**symbolic capital**” in the sense of Bourdieu) that distributes **hierarchical places** (in a “social space”) and opens trajectories within the social space of a social actor (“community”).
- ❑ A social actor (cf. Bourdieu) :
 - ✓ lives in a **structured** and **structuring** social space (i.e. in a society of social actors) ;
 - ✓ possesses a « **symbolic (economic, ...) capital** » which can be evaluated with respect to the global symbolic (economic, ...) capital and its distribution over the other social actors living on the same social space;
 - ✓ occupies a set of « **social fields** » (“champs”) corresponding to his capital;
 - ✓ can perform on the social space and by the means of his symbolic capital, **social trajectories** leading him from on social field to another one.

4th topic

Four definitions of the notion « culture »

- ❑ 4th approach: Culture is a historical form with an evolutionary dynamics and embedded within a genetic filiations process. This means that has to be taken into account especially:
 - ✓ the **historicity** of cultural forms;
 - ✓ the **evolutionary dynamics** of a cultural form (i.e. the life cycles of a cultural form and the capacity of a cultural form to transform itself);
 - ✓ the historical **heritage** of a cultural form, the tradition to which a cultural form belongs.

- ❑ Culture as a graded knowledge, cognitive resource and symbolic power:
 - ✓ has a certain **life span**;
 - ✓ is involved itself in an **evolutionary process**;
 - ✓ **inherits** from preceding cultures, cultural forms.

5th topic

-Multiculturalism and Interculturalism –

5th topic

Multi-culturalism vs inter-culturalism

- ❑ “ **Multiculturalism**” – at least **two** different acceptations:
 - ✓ different cultures that coexist within one social actor (one society, one state, ...)
 - ✓ a person that belongs to different social actors, lives in different Lebenswelten

- ❑ Multiculturalism : is an **official cultural policy** in Canada and Australia :
 - ✓ **cultural mosaic** as opposed to the “melting pot” doctrine associated with the USA
 - ✓ “**cultural mosaic**” means the coexistence and preservation of different cultures within the frontiers of one state, one society state (such as Canada, Switzerland or Australia)

- ❑ The **multicultural** model is also opposed to the idea of classical the (dominantly **mono-cultural**) “nation state” model in Europe.

5th topic

Multi-culturalism vs inter-culturalism

- ❑ The **multicultural reality** in many of non-European states and countries: South Africa, Nigeria, India, Indonesia, Australia, ...:
 - ✓ diversity of coexisting natural languages;
 - ✓ different ethnic groups living within the same boundaries;
 - ✓ different (social, political, religious, artistic, ...) traditions, norms and values, ... shaping the broadly speaking political culture of a state
 - ✓ etc.

- ❑ **Problem:** Such a multicultural reality
 - ✓ cannot reasonably refer to the **nation state model** as elaborated in Europe since the 18th/19th century (since the French Revolution) and as inculcated through colonialism and, to-day, the global information industry
 - ✓ but has to look for other reference models or build on own experiences ...

5th topic

Multi-culturalism vs inter-culturalism

- ❑ This points to the importance of social changes within a social actor in order to adapt social actors such as nations or states to a multicultural reality, i.e. dealing with
 - ✓ the **spatial demographic dynamics** (migration, homogenous local spaces, ...);
 - ✓ the transformation of given **institutional realities** ;
 - ✓ the reshaping of global and local **identities** of a social actor;
 - ✓ the production of **symbols** and global **traditions**, values, norms, ...

- ❑ These seem to be some of the most important challenges for:
 - ✓ the European Union
 - ✓ the post-apartheid South Africa
 - ✓ Canada (cf. the **Canadian Multiculturalism Act** 1985/88)

5th topic

Multi-culturalism vs inter-culturalism

- ❑ **Interculturalism**: forms and modes of exchanges between two different cultures, i.e. two groups, social actors referring to two (partially) different knowledge and value frameworks.

- ❑ In this sense, interculturalism sticks to questions such as :
 - ✓ the **(historical) relationship** between actors living in two different life worlds;
 - ✓ the **(autonomous or heteronomous) motives** determining a relationship between actors living in two different life worlds;
 - ✓ the **position** that occupies a social actor with respect to other social actors;
 - ✓ the “**commensurability**” (and the “**translatability**”) between two Lebenswelten (i.e. what are the “bridges” between two different Lebenswelten).

- ❑ **Acculturation** is a very central and often discussed process in intercultural exchanges. It can be distinguished, following Berry (1989) in a set of more specific forms of acculturation such as, for instance:
 - ✓ **assimilation** : actor A gives up/renounces of his cultural identity and does not adopt the culture of actor B;
 - ✓ **marginalisation** : actor A gives up his identity without being able or willing to adopt the culture of actor B;
 - ✓ **separation** : actor A maintains his cultural identity without adopting the the culture of actor B;
 - ✓ **integration** : actor A maintains, adapts his cultural identity and adopts also the culture of actor B).
- ❑ These and other constellations will be discussed in a further lecture dedicated to intercultural communication and translation.