

# Communicating in the Mediterranean Area: A Matter of Intercultural Awareness

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ECONOMIC GROWTH in the Mediterranean Region has strengthened the emphasis on interpersonal communication in an intercultural setting. Interpersonal communication is a form of communication that involves a small number of people who can interact with one another and who therefore have the ability both to adapt their messages specifically to the others and to obtain immediate interpretations from them. Within an intercultural setting, nonverbal and verbal communication emphasize the differences in cultures: the way we act and the things we say (and the ways we say such things) determine whether or not we belong to a certain culture. Intercultural communication is a central process in international business; in this paper I will try to formulate a practical model providing some principles useful to the development of skills and methods appropriate to doing business in the Mediterranean Region. The focus of this paper is on communication between Italians and their Greek and Algerian counterparts, giving a key to communication within the management of difference. Examples have been selected from research carried out in Greece and Algeria. The research is supported by theories and perspectives from a field where lines from social psychology, education, linguistics and applied linguistics cross.

## INTRODUCTION

An economic crisis marked the end of the first decade of the new millennium. This led to critically evaluating which could be the best practices to adopt in an area such as the Euro-Mediterranean basin, in which so many different resources can contribute to the improvement of business and economic stability.

The Barcelona Process encouraged cultural and economic cooper-

ation between the European Community and countries surrounding the Mediterranean Basin; The Barcelona Declaration proposed a plan of action to fix the framework and establish the priorities of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue.

[122] The European Commission has been promoting many different actions in order to develop a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and instead, as the European Neighbourhood Policy<sup>1</sup> advises: ‘strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of all concerned.’

One of the strategies to achieve a better global market positioning for the region could be that of improving the exchanges between Europe and its immediate neighbours by land or sea, and being aware that collaboration is a key to any kind of program. Economic growth in the Mediterranean Region has already strengthened the emphasis on interpersonal communication in an intercultural setting. In many domains, including business, teamwork is being recognized as a key to effectiveness, knowledge sharing and innovation.

Collaboration implies communication. Working across the borders of the Mediterranean results in communicating with people who are different in language, nationality, ethnic heritage. Hence intercultural/interpersonal communication implies a dialogue that involves a small number of people who can interact with one another, and who, therefore, are able both to adapt their messages specifically to the others and to obtain immediate interpretations from them. Within an intercultural setting, nonverbal and verbal communication emphasize the differences in cultures, so these cultural differences need to be managed carefully, requiring sensitivity on both sides.

As underlined in the background objectives of the Euromed Heritage Project<sup>2</sup> of the European Union, culture has been recognized as an essential element for people’s mutual understanding and improved perception of each other across the shores of the Mediterranean.

Intercultural communication, the practice of exchanging meaningful and unambiguous information across cultural boundaries, preserving mutual respect and minimizing antagonism, is the place where culture and interaction come to a synthesis, it is an essential competence



in all of the projects promoted by the EU because all of them assume the accomplishment of an intercultural management.

Intercultural communication is therefore a central process in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. In this paper I will try to formulate a practical model providing some principles useful for the development of appropriate skills and methods to improve communication in the Region. The examples in this paper deal with communication between Italians and their Greek and Algerian counterparts, giving a key to communication within the management of difference. They have been selected from research carried out in Greece (Lobasso, Pavan, and Caon 2007) and Algeria (Pavan 2009).

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The research is supported by theories and perspectives from a field where lines from social psychology, education, linguistics and applied linguistics intersect.

#### ADVANTAGES AND PITFALLS OF A LINGUA FRANCA

The use of English, or French, as a *lingua franca* and the growing awareness that while it might resolve a specific communication problem between people, could not provide a basis for real communication. It is a useful shortcut and may help, nonetheless, according to Crystal (1997) language has no independent existence, it lives in some sort of mystical space apart from the people who speak it. It exists in the brains, mouths, ears, hands and eyes of its users, and when they succeed on the international stage, their language succeeds, and when they fail, their language fails.

When two people conversing are from different countries, speaking in a language which is a foreign or a second language for one of them, or which is foreign to both of them, they may still be highly aware of their national identities. This awareness leads to feeling the other as different, and such a situation may influence what they say and how they say it, because they see the other person as a representative of a country, or a nation. This focus on national identity, and the accompanying risk of relying on stereotypes, reduces the individual from a complex human being to someone who is seen as representative of a country or 'culture.'

Regardless of the language, individuals must thus be sensitized to

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what underlies communication: the fact that using a lingua franca is not always a suitable or successful solution to all the problems. They must learn to cope with the complexities of intercultural communication, where grammatical or lexical correctness, important though they are, may not be the decisive factor in communicative success. Neither may a satisfactory control of language functions be enough (Jakobson 1963; Halliday 1973), however essential it may be. Even a basic generalized knowledge of the foreign language's culture may not be a guarantee of success, as it may lead to or enhance existing stereotypes (Steele and Suozzo 1994).

#### THE AIM OF COMMUNICATION

The benefits that would accrue from the existence of a global language, and the use of a lingua franca, are considerable. However, of as much if not greater value in determining communicative success, is the ability to create a 'common ground' in an interaction.

The aim of communication, by means of language, is to exchange messages, and both in the sender's and receiver's mind the result of the exchange must be successful for the communication to be positive.

The success of communication is mainly emotional: according to Mehrabian (1972; 1981) who carried out research on face-to-face interpersonal communication, there are three levels of communication: verbal, paraverbal, nonverbal. Only 7% concerns verbal aspects (linguistic), because 38% of the emotional meaning of a message concerns aspects of the voice (paralinguistic), and 55% has to do with facial expression. He concluded that 93% of the emotional aspects that influence a message are transmitted using nonverbal codes.

However, not all behaviour can, or should, be interpreted as communication. Thus we should specify that in this paper the term 'communication' will be used to refer only to those acts of communication in which the recipient perceives the message as containing a meaning thus decodes, interprets and reacts as a result, giving a feedback.

#### *Context in Communication*

An element crucial to a successful interaction is the overlap between the participants' reading of the context in which they communicate.



According to Hymes (1972) the key to understanding language in context is to start not with the language but with the context itself. Close friends, and sometimes relatives, who share their native tongue and culture, need to re-establish their relationship in terms of language if they meet after an absence; context deserves even more attention when the people are speakers of different cultures, speak diverse languages and meet for the first time.

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As Hymes highlighted, communicating is not only a question of language, it is especially a question of context, i. e. the role of the participants and the subject they deal with. According to Willems (2002), foreigners who meet for the first time usually feel the need to negotiate a context before they 'get down to business' of whatever kind. This 'negotiation of context' process is fraught with problems and requires insight into the nature of culture, a willingness to establish real contact and the possession of the linguistic and pragmatic skills necessary to do it.

#### CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

An anthropological definition considers culture as opposed to nature: Lévi-Strauss (1963) assumes that the unique cultural quality of humanity rests on that which is not natural; culture is the heritage of the learned symbolic behaviour that makes humans human.

Sometimes we tend to consider as 'natural' or 'logical' that which instead is 'cultural': we consider something logical in the sense of 'the presupposed knowledge in the conduct of everyday life' (Holland and Quinn 1991).

An attractive and modern definition by Hofstede (1991) is 'the collective mental programming which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.' He considers the human mind as a computer which needs programming before it can start doing what it is supposed to do, and it takes a lot of effort to acquire another sort of 'logic,' or even open up to other 'logics.'

In other words culture is a shared pattern of categorizations, attitudes, beliefs, definitions, norms, values, where it is important to remember also the subjective nature of culture, since each individual can be different. Even what we mean by lying, inviting, rewarding and

apologising, appears to have diverse social effects in different cultures, they are not universals which only vary at the level of verbal utterance.

*Intercultural vs Cross-Cultural*

[126] The term intercultural is normative and carries values, as opposed to cross-cultural which is considered neutral, a mere description of elements that may vary in different cultures.

Interculturality has moral and ethical dimensions for it incorporates respect for what is different and underlies a contact, a change in both the sender and the receiver, which, after the encounter, will be an irremediable change. Being an intercultural speaker implies being able to engage with complexity and multiple identities, and so avoiding the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity. It is based on perceiving the interlocutor as an individual whose qualities are to be discovered, rather than as a representative of an externally attributed identity. According to Kramsch (1998) this implies a language learner who acts as a mediator between two cultures, interprets and understands other perspectives, as well as questions what is taken for granted in his/her own society.

FROM DESCRIPTION TO MODELLING

Being an intercultural speaker implies developing a solid intercultural awareness, and the practice described above indicates a shift from description to modelling, in order to design a process of competence building. Descriptions cannot be taught, they can be memorized and are useful only when the right situation appears, while models can be taught and competences, based on models, can be developed and adapted to many different situations (Balboni 2007).

Balboni (2007) states that, a model is a generative framework, i. e. a pattern or a structure which can include all possible occurrences, it is able to generate behaviour and it is often internally structured in a hierarchical manner. He also states that the higher the level of a model, the greater its complexity, which does not necessarily lead to complexity *in extensio*, but rather *in profundis*, exactly like a website homepage, and finally he affirms that models are forms of declarative knowledge which must generate procedural knowledge. Balboni concludes that, since intercultural communication competence is a competence, it cannot be



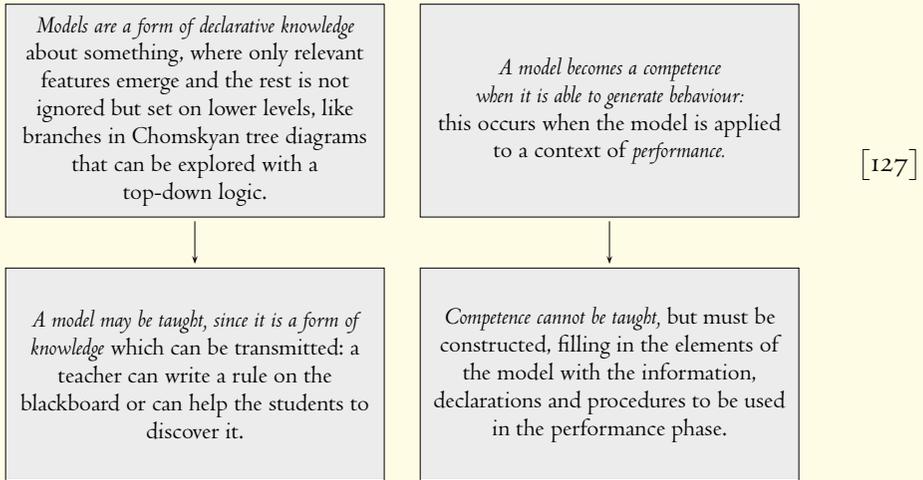


FIGURE 1 Models and competence (adapted from Balboni 2007)

taught, nonetheless once a reliable model of it has been provided, it can be built up.

Respect for cultural models is central to developing cultural awareness, a knowledge sometimes taken for granted. However it is often difficult to understand one’s own models because we tend to assume that our behaviour is natural and we do not realise that it is conditioned by our culture(s).

Balboni’s explanation leads to performance, and to intercultural awareness, which is the foundation of communication and involves the ability to stand back from ourselves and become aware of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions, a crucial knowledge we must have when interacting with people from other cultures.

As the Council of Europe (2001) states, intercultural awareness is the knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community.’

*A Model of Intercultural Communication Competence*

Balboni (2007) identifies three components that are crucial to a model of intercultural communication competence and adopting Hofstede’s metaphor, proposes the following three definitions:

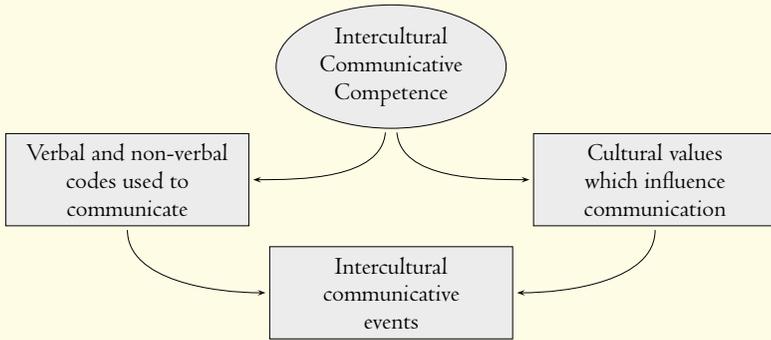


FIGURE 2 Intercultural communicative competence (adapted from Balboni 2007)

- 1 *the software of the mind*, which refers to the cultural factors which affect communication;
- 2 *the communication software*, which refers to the codes used, both verbal and nonverbal;
- 3 *the context software*, which refers to the socio-pragmatic software that governs the beginning, the course and the conclusion of an interaction, of a communicative event as described by Hymes (1972).

The first two elements, cultural and communicative, constitute the competence, the ability to do something, while the third, the ‘context software’ makes it possible to move from competence to performance, the setting where ‘real’ communication occurs.

#### COMMUNICATING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA

Since verbal and nonverbal communication vary from culture to culture, we must try to describe a few barriers to intercultural communication and outline a model to be applied in an international context, which, in this paper, is a part of the Mediterranean region.

We will follow the model of intercultural communicative competence presented above we will map some key communicative problems between Italians, Greeks and Algerians, analysing the main cultural values that influence communication, verbal and nonverbal codes and events. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but rather an exemplification.



The examples been selected from research carried out in Greece (Lobasso, Pavan, and Caon 2007) and Algeria (Pavan 2009).

### *Cultural Values*

Most of the literature on intercultural communication is of an anthropological or sociological nature, and sometimes the communicative dimension tends to be to some extent peripheral. In the model presented in this paper it is indeed the centre around which the whole model revolves. Within this strictly communicative perspective cultural values, which form the nucleus of the software of the mind, are fundamental.

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Unlike verbal and nonverbal codes, which are closed systems, cultural values form an open set, which every single person can fill in, update and integrate depending on his/her needs and experiences. This means that the cultural values that one has to be aware of to be competent in intercultural communication change according to one's role (an international manager, a teacher, a diplomat, etc.)

*Time.* A picture easy to figure out shows a row of sand dunes stretching towards the horizon, and on it a set of footprints coming from nowhere and disappearing in the distance. The sense of time and space in Arab cultures is derived, rooted, in the image of a boundless desert, where space just crossed is not different from the space about to be crossed, where time is not measured by an everchanging succession of rivers, towns and woods, but rather by the progress of the sun through the sky, and will be different from that derived in a Northern European country. Arab people are also used to festivals being set by the lunar calendar, so the start of *Ramadam* is brought forward by eleven days each year. Thus it is hardly surprising that they are not punctual or reliable in their organisation of time in the same as way North Europeans are, who have been raised with an idea of time which is fixed, permanent, emphasized by fixed festivals and events which mark time passing during the year, with the only exception being Easter (Balboni 2007). This different conception of time may lead to relational and communicative problems.

In Greece and Algeria time is not perceived as a value in the way Americans do (*time is money*), consequently it can be wasted.

[130] Greeks highly appreciate and defend their freedom, time cannot be slavery: they do not schedule their day, and events happen sometime in the future. Punctuality, thanks to the increasing contacts with foreign business, is high in working venues that place value on leisure time, but always in a flexible way and with some disorganisation. A foreign manager, waiting for an answer that was announced for *misimeri* (mid-day), pressing for the response, was badly informed by the secretary who underlined that *misimeri* could mean up to 4 p. m. This situation would be difficult to cope with for a Northern Italian manager, who strongly values time, but much more acceptable to a Southern Italian, closer to the Mediterranean style and similar to the Greek attitude.

In Algeria things scheduled will take place 'about/sometime' in the future. In Islam humans submit to God's will in all matters. God is the ultimate creator, authority and judge for all people. The first expression that sojourners will learn upon arrival in Algeria is *Insha'Allah* – the translation is 'If God wills.' Muslims do not question their fate, because God alone knows their destiny. When they say *Insha'Allah*, it may not mean they will do their best to achieve something; sometimes they say that they will reach a place in thirty minutes, and they are 100 km away, or that they will do something for the following day, and they actually handle it after a week. Women handle time in a different way, they are much closer to the Italian attitude, and so the too Berbers, an ethnic group who have inhabited today's Algeria since long before Christ.

As far as meetings and appointments are concerned, in Greece they are seldom scheduled well in advance. Greeks tend to do anything at the very last moment and in the best possible way, so when approaching the scheduled time it is important to call and ask for a confirmation. They tend to postpone things to the following day, considering the future uncertain they make a good use of extensions, sometimes even to their disadvantage. When they talk they point their arms forward indicating the past and backward indicating the future: the past is in front because they can see it clearly, while the future is unknown and lies beyond their vision.

In Algeria, during the *Ramadam*, it may be risky to assume that people will be available, even if they affirm: 'Il n'y a pas de problèmes.'



Deadlines are always postponed; even when the contract has a penalty clause, this can be negotiated, indeed, each contract is a font of permanent discussion, and planning is very difficult. Emotional factors have a strong influence too.

Time may be used as an indicator of power, for example having someone kept waiting at an appointment. In Greece and in Italy it is not a common habit, even if sometimes it may happen, especially on the Greek side, because of bad organisation. On the contrary, it is a habit in Algeria, nonetheless it is of paramount importance to be on time, especially for Europeans and particularly in Algiers, where the fear of terrorism is still very real and there are security checks almost everywhere which can cause delays.

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The agenda connects contents in temporal succession in meetings: in a Greek environment it can be considered perfectly right to twist it. This is normal praxis in Italy as well, and can be extremely efficient, but it can also be irritating and leads to more aggressive moves by foreign participants who are faced with the Mediterranean chaos for the first time.

Time can be an indicator of personal space: a quick and overlapping turn taking in conversation may lead to the conclusion that whoever interrupts is invading the other person's space. Greeks, Italians and Algerians consider what they have to say important enough to interrupt the order and to offer help or suggestions to the speaker.

Silence in conversation is not acceptable to the Greeks, Italians and Algerians, so small talk is preferred, but it is fundamental to pay attention to the topics, because there may be inappropriate subjects. In Algeria silence could mean somebody doesn't agree.

*Space.* Space, like time, is a value that may influence interpersonal communication. Since behaviours, as we have seen, are culture bound and not natural, we must consider some communicative problems linked to space. We already indicated in turn taking an element close to space: those who interrupt may be felt as an invaders, and so causing a feeling of imprisonment and a subsequent reaction with aggressive communicative moves, which may be not understood by the 'invaders.'

As far as public and private space are concerned, in the Greek so-

[132] ciety public space is considered as belonging to everyone and no-one, cooperation is difficult and people take more care of private property and less of municipal space. Even the concept of Agora, that was developed in Greece, has faded away. The situation may be different outside Athens, especially on the islands.

Greeks and Italians do not like open space at work, they accept it as something that cannot be avoided. Algerians tend to occupy other people's space and prefer to have a private space. Even common spaces like a locker room and the showers in a factory must guarantee some privacy, especially for men, who find it hard to accept nudity.

In Greece and Italy many working tensions may be solved in a public space, drinking a coffee: in Italy standing in a bar and in Greece seated at a table. This usually happens in public space inside the companies, where people start talking about the time and carry on talking about work. Both Greeks and Italians easily shift from the personal to the working sphere, with the same person in the same moment. In Algeria relational problems are discussed between the persons involved, and work related questions are discussed at work.

*Hierarchy, Respect and Status.* Hierarchy may be explicit or implicit: the first is made evident by signs, which may range from the size and position of a table or of an armchair in an office, to the position of the office itself; the second is determined by understatement, making it difficult for an outsider to work where their interlocutor is in the hierarchy and means they may choose the wrong person as their qualified interlocutor. Hierarchy may be permeable and/or impermeable; in the first case communication is possible even across hierarchical divides.

In Greece hierarchy is direct and explicit and a bit more elastic than in Italy, in where the 'authority' is often perceived as an annoyance. In Algeria it is explicit and strongly impermeable. In a working environment Greeks do not trust foreigners as being able to understand them fully, relationships are warm and productive, but they do not rely on the ability of the foreign manager to comprehend quickly the way things go. The sentence Italian managers will usually hear during their first meetings with the Greek CEOs is: 'It's always been done like that.'

Hierarchy and status determine the degree of respect due to the



interlocutor. Respect can take various forms: body movements, body distance and linguistic expressions.

It is common, in Greece, for a high status person to shout at somebody else, even in the presence of people not directly involved. It is a demonstration of power that Italians may perceive as improper or anomalous. It is important to underline the fact that both in Greece and in Algeria a person in charge must provide solutions, be decisive and solve problems, and above all he/she will show, in an explicit way, who is the boss. This is not always true in Italy, where such a charisma is not felt as an essential feature.

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Three fundamental values in Algerian culture are tradition, relationship and hierarchical devotion. When meeting a superior an Algerian will express his/her greetings with verbosity, smiles, many salaams, questions about family and all the relatives they may have heard of, for a time that can be as long as ten minutes. If a foreigner tries to do the same it is not accepted, they feel it as something false.

In Greece until a few years ago it was compulsory to indicate one's own religion on the identity card. It is not compulsory anymore, nonetheless many people ask to have it recorded. The Orthodox faith is propagandist and very close to the State, offending the Greek religion is, in some way, perceived like offending the State. However the religious orientation is very intimate and therefore less visible.

In Algeria they pretend there are no differences, only because they usually prefer not to talk about discriminations.

*The Sense of History, Nationalism.* In Greece nationalism is very strong, and when criticisms and comments come from a foreigner they are turned down with rage. On the contrary, when critics come from in-group people, they can be fierce and the debate harsh. Nationalism can also be seen as a lost identity, after four centuries of Ottoman Empire domination and before the Byzantine period. Greeks resent that the old continent kept on evolving while they were stuck in bad faith – they positively feel Italians had the Renaissance that Greeks couldn't have – and resent their inability to emulate their ancestors' actions. Italians are felt to be close and preferred to other foreigners, like lucky cousins and, because of that, easily criticised.

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In Algeria the nationalism is very strong too and they do not accept any criticism coming from a foreigner; this is related to a feeling of having lost their identity during the French rule and the fact that they are trying to build much stronger roots. Italians are preferred to other foreigners, especially for historical reasons rooted in the recent dark period in their history, this means they feel closer to Italian people and it also implies they feel they can criticise us.

*The Concept of Family.* The Greek and Algerian concept of family is rigid and extended, quite a sacred concept. When somebody has to make a decision, he/she will consider which member of the extended family/outgroup could be of any help. In business, people trust their relatives/friends most, and there are many family businesses.

On the other hand, in both Greece and Algeria a large company is not seen as a family, and critics of the company are not seen to be criticizing their own family.

Close to the concept of family is that of familiarity: Greeks and Southern Italians are very hospitable, generous towards foreigners. It is very common to be invited home after a short acquaintance, and being addressed with 'you' as a close friend, but this can be misleading.

In Algerian collectivism, family, social, and business are all relationships that are taken seriously and give them a great pleasure. Reassurance and warmth from familiar relationship are feelings they replicate in other relations. Nonetheless, if a solution implies the involvement of friend's and he/she suddenly disappears, it's better to look for another solution instead of looking for an answer or an explanation.

*The Idea of Knowledge.* The idea of knowledge may refer to the superficial repetition of notions or to a full and critical understanding.

In Greece knowledge is replication, a superficial repetition, students are asked to reproduce exactly what is written in a text. This is common in the Ottoman countries, but it is not in Italy, where the ancient Greek philosophy of speculation has survived to a greater extent.

#### *Nonverbal Communication*

Balboni (2007) defines nonverbal codes as a closed system in which he recognises three components: kinesics, proxemics, objectemics. Often



people are unaware of these codes, and when they think about them, they strongly believe they are transnational. On the contrary, nonverbal codes are linked to a culture exactly as language is and, when communicating in English, people tend to concentrate so much on the language that they forget to pay attention to the nonverbal elements of communication. [135]

*Body Language/Kinesics.* In Latin cultures much of the emotional state of the speaker is left to the expression of the face; words are for rational communication, facial expressions underline emotions and feelings. Italians smile a lot: to express consensus, approval, happiness, irony and superiority. In Greece smiling carries a connotation of sincerity and agreement, and Italians think that Greeks do not smile that much.

To look someone in the eye is perceived as a sign of frankness in Western cultures, but in many cultures of the Mediterranean Region and in Arab countries, looking a man straight in the eyes may be interpreted as a challenge, while looking at a woman in the same way may be felt as a sexual invitation. In Greece looking a person in the eyes is a sign of frankness, involvement in what is being said; to greet somebody one can use one's hands or simply look into the eyes. Raising the eyes skywards, and sometimes making a slight click of the tongue at the same time, as Sicilians do, in Greece indicates a negation. Yawning indicates boredom and tiredness both in Italy and in Greece, but in the Peloponnesus it also means that something related to an evil power is going on.

In the Arab world to cross legs is to reveal the soles of one's shoes, which indicates a lack of respect and is a serious offence; in Greece people tend not to cross their legs, especially in the presence of authorities or when there is a strong hierarchical difference.

*Distance Between Bodies/Proxemics.* All animals live in a sort of invisible bubble which protects their intimacy and indicates their safety distance, the minimum distance needed to defend themselves or to escape from attack. Hall (1966) developed a theory of proxemics, arguing that human perceptions of space, although derived from sensory apparatus that all humans share, are moulded and patterned by culture.

In Greece it is common to touch each other during a conversation

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and men can walk arm in arm; in Algeria people come even closer, and people can touch each other's chest as an indication of the truthfulness of what they are saying: they literally speak with 'their hearts in their hands.' A man greeting a woman can replace shaking hands with a slight movement of his hand in hers, an act of chivalry in Greece, but with a sexual connotation in Italy. Where Italians kiss, Greeks hug; as we said before, they usually greet with eye contact.

*Objects/Objectemics – Offering and Rejecting.* Money is an absolute value in Greece and therefore precious objects, such as cars, watches and mobile phones, must be visible, clear symbols of power and well-being. Hierarchy and status can be indicated by wearing Italian fashion clothes. Nonetheless, Greek and Algerian managers are far less formal than their Italian counterparts: they seldom wear a tie and pay less attention to colours and fabrics. High status Algerian love Italian fashion, and a parallel market, where anybody can buy anything fake, is a well known reality.

A present may be a hazardous matter: in Italy people tend to open it at once, in Greece they tend to open it later, but if the present is valuable the donor will insist on having it opened in front of the participants. In Greece people prefer local to foreign presents, nonetheless Italian gifts are always welcome. When invited to a home, one can take flowers, wine, liqueurs, sweets: it is important to remember that it is compulsory to bring something and that usually the present is for the lady, and is given on arrival and generally it is not opened. If the gifts are opened the expressions of surprise are so exaggerated that, to a Northern Italian, they may sound artificial. In Algeria it is common to bring sweets.

As far as tobacco and alcoholic drinks are concerned, Greeks still smoke and drink quite a lot. As regards offering and accepting, Greeks tend to insist when they offer something and even Italians may feel embarrassed in front of such a strong insistence, especially if they come from North Italy. Not accepting an offer may be considered an offence. Friendship is a strong value for Greeks, so any action that can lead to a kind of support towards the other will be full of passion and involvement.



*Verbal Communication*

According to De Saussure (1967), a language can be defined as *langue* (language, linguistic competence and textuality, lexicon, morphology and syntax) and *parole* (speech, linguistic performance, language production in use, the pragmatics aspects of communication).

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A critical issue in textuality is the fact that not only communication but also discourse must be considered a cultural element (Scollon and Scollon Wong 1995). A text produced by an English speaker tends to go straight to the point, with short sentences made up of subject and verb, object and complements. In contrast, a text produced by an Italian tends to fuse all the segments, using pronouns, verbs and their many marked forms, building a much more complex, less direct structure.

Greek, and Algerian and Southern Italian texts contain many descriptions and digressions, and the main point of the argument often only comes after a long opening. Usually the speaker shows little if any desire to synthesize, and is even less willing to get to the point of the matter in the short term. The approach is much more subjective, relative, than objective and abstract.

The style of a Greek text is mainly direct, using less conditional and far more imperative modes, the sentences contain plenty of subordinates. Greek people place more value on enthusiasm and spontaneity than do Italians, especially Northerners, who may feel this style of very direct conversation of being rather direct and not always acceptable because, to an unaccustomed ear, the conversation may seem and appear rude and aggressive, almost an argument. Sometimes the substance of a conversation is less important than the style, it is the communication that counts.

In interpersonal relations, both Greeks and Italians tend to switch easily back and forth from personal to business matters. As already mentioned, both Greek and Italian people need a space to share, be it in the office or outside, such as a bar or an open space like a piazza, where they can talk, argue, and solve conflicts.

Most of the time when Greek people are communicating and preference is expressed there will be a burst of enthusiasm expressed in tone and many exclamations. If unwillingness is expressed further dis-

cussion will be cut short, exactly as in the adage: ‘if you can’t say something good, don’t say anything at all’ – and objections are usually not directly expressed.

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#### CONCLUSION

Intercultural communication is a central process in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, and I have presented a practical model offering some principles that could be useful to the development of appropriate skills and methods to improve communication in the Region.

This study seeks to extend the understanding of cultural differences and to contribute to the current literature on intercultural and cross-cultural studies applying the concept of intercultural communicative competence to the development of a model that can be generative, and produce behaviour.

To achieve this, managers and leaders should both become aware of the model of intercultural communicative competence described, and must continue to add the contents of the three icons on the basis of their experience of life, the books they read, the movies and TV programs and advertisements they see.

The long recognised fact that only when rules are broken do people become aware of their existence can be overcome with the development of an adequate cultural awareness related to people’s own culture, and the development of an appropriate intercultural communicative competence based on their experience of conventions and practices.

However, it is important to state that the influence of culture is impossible to quantify and this paper is dealing mainly with culture as expressed within, in the way it affects, interpersonal communication as each person is the representative of his/her own cultural patterns that can be congruent, but sometimes not homogeneous, with that of the dominant culture.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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#### NOTES

- 1 European Neighbourhood Policy, see [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index_en.htm).



- 2 Euromed Heritage Project, see <http://www.euromedheritage.net/index.cfm?menuID=13>.

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