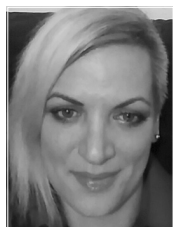


IS MILTON BENNETT'S MODEL OF INTER CULTURAL SENSITIVITY REALLY INTER CULTURAL?

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Abstract. Milton Bennett's model of inter cultural sensitivity development is one of the most common and acknowledged models in non-formal education and training. Partially being based on its author's personal overseas living and working experience (US Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia from 1968–1970 and fifteen years of teaching and training experience in inter cultural communication), it resides theoretically on wider phenomenological approach to the construction of different cultural

meanings. The founding hypothesis of the model in question is dynamical. Cultural differences are understood not as posited but as constructed processes and therefore may be subjected to further development. In an ideal case, it is presupposed that development occurs beginning from stage of an utter ethnocentrism and moves forward towards an ultimate ethno-relativistic point of view. The latter stage is reflected in cultural and moral relativism, as well as in capability for fully intentional, (auto-)reflexive empathy. Bennett's model designates six stages of inter cultural sensitivity development. These are: 1) denial of cultural differences; 2) defense of the culturally binary world-view; 3) minimization of differences; 4) their acceptance; 5) adaptation; 6) integration of cultural differences into one's own, constructed and ever constructing self.

We analyze all of the stages proposed by Bennett, especially concentrating our attention on the final, integrating stage. Founding our argumentation on theoretical reasons, as well as on personal significant overseas living experience, we question the alleged cultural and moral "statelessness" of this stage. Contrary to Bennett's conception, we show that the so-called integrative stage of inter cultural sensitivity is no more than a pseudo-universalistic outgrowth of one specific type of culture.

Key words. Milton Bennett's inter cultural sensitivity development model, ethnocentrism, ethno-relativism, cultural differences, construction, Western culture.

Milton Bennett's model of inter cultural sensitivity development is one of the most common and acknowledged models in non-formal education and training. Partially founded on its author's personal overseas living and working experience (US Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia from 1968–1970, plus fifteen years of teaching and training experience in inter cultural communication [1, p. 182]), it resides theoretically on a wider phenomenological approach to the construction of different cultural meanings. The founding hypothesis of the model in question is dynamical: cultural differences, as well as culture itself, are understood not as posited but as constructed and constructible process, wherein the subjective aspect of experiencing is strongly emphasized. In Bennett's words, the fact of the matter should be "de-reification of culture", as culture for him is "not a thing" but a "human produced activity", "human authorship". Bennett defines culture as an "*observation* about the human behavior of coordinating meaning and action in a group" [3]. Similarly, inter cultural competence – which he understands as "being competent in participating in another cultural context, in the coordination of meaning and action that works better in that other context than it does in your own" – is defined as an *observation* about human meta-behavior involving coordinating meaning and action across cultures; therefore, inter cultural competence is "a meta-coordination of coordinating systems" [3 – underlined by V. K. & B. B.]. For Bennett, neither culture nor inter cultural competence is something that we have, it is something that we do. Cultures differ fundamentally in the way they create and maintain world views, the world view of a culture constitutes a culturally constructed horizon of meaning. It is its own world [1]. Being ultimately fluid and dynamic, both culture and cultural differences, as well as intercultural competences, may be subjected to further change and development. This is the main aim of Bennett's model of inter cultural sensitivity development.

In an ideal case, it is presupposed that development of inter cultural sensitivity occurs in a continuum of stages of personal

growth, beginning from utter ethnocentrism and moving forward towards an ultimate ethno-relativistical point of view. The latter standpoint is ideally reflected in cultural and moral relativism, as well as in capability for fully intentional, (auto-)reflexive empathy. The model designates six stages of inter cultural sensitivity development. First stage is the denial of existence of cultural differences: difference has not been encountered – therefore, meaning/ categories have not been created. This stage occurs when physical or social isolation precludes contact with cultural differences (e. g., some Amazonian tribes) [1]. In its most common form, parochialism, denial is associated with empty and superficial categories for difference (the recognition that Asians are different from Westerners, without recognition that Asian cultures are different from one another – Bennett's example). In more extreme cases, it is associated with attributing subhuman status to those that are perceived as different (early white settlers' attitudes towards American Indians, Nazi attempts to eliminate the "undesirables" etc.) [1].

Second stage of ethnocentrism is that which Bennett calls defense: cultural difference is perceived, but it is fought against. Essentially, it is the defense of a culturally binary world-view given through opposition of "us" and "them", followed by negative stereotyping and denigration of difference [1]: "we" are culturally superior, "they" are culturally inferior – not necessarily by themselves but in comparison to "us". The underlying supposition is that of cultural superiority of one's own culture. Bennett denotes this stage as ethnocentric, but he underlines that it represents a development in inter cultural sensitivity beyond denial as in defense one recognizes the existence of difference and thus gives it meaning, albeit a negative one. This stage is the main characteristic of modern European colonialism, but it is non the less present in contemporary neo-colonial US and NATO practices, especially in the concept of an "exceptional" US nation, whose aim and duty is "bringing democracy" to the rest of "undeveloped" or "suffering under dictatorship" world. What Bennett does not say is that defense always implies denial in

some degree. When African Americans were given the right to vote, their vote was valued 5/6 of a regular WASP vote. Giving them the status of 5/6 of the citizen practically meant considering African Americans as not completely human. American "liberating" other nations from dictatorship implies, at the very least, NGO "missionary work" (very often followed by bombs) with the aim of "raising consciousness" and "educating" the partly "unconscious" or "not so politically conscious" (= just a bit under human) humans. If "we" consider ourselves cultural – and culture is a trait exclusive to human *modus existendi* – then "they", who are "less cultural" than "us" are in a way denied their humanly status. "They" are humans, just not as much as "we" are. *All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others*. Precisely this attitude forms the core of the dialectics of European ethnocentric subjectivity versus his "non" European Other.

One more important thing is to be noted here. Ethnocentrism, which Bennett scrutinizes is not so much ethnocentric as it is culturally centric. Strictly speaking, it is not the nation that is "exceptional". Rather, its members consider themselves to be "exceptional" for the reason of their "exceptional" political culture. The core of that culture are values – indeed constituted through processes (occupation of American Indian territory, genocide and slavery) but since then fixed, or at the very least, *observed* and *understood* as fixed. Fixed values are not fixed by themselves – in that we do agree with Bennett. It is the ever perpetuating processes, the constant repetitions that fixate them. If we say that a culture has such-and-such trait, what we are in fact saying is that its members do not diverge from a particular set of cultural actions or practices, or processes, if one wishes to put it that way. It is not the wrong metaphysics or ontology to blame, as Bennett would suggest. It is those same human processes that reify. As culture, reification, too, has a human face.

Third and the final ethnocentric stage on Bennett's development scale is minimization of cultural differences. At this stage, cultural difference is acknowledged and it is not negatively evaluated, but it is trivialized:

differences are experienced as less important than the supposed cultural or human similarity. Bennett mentions two forms of minimization: physical universalism (hypothesis of basic biological similarities and common basic human patterns of behavior) and transcendent universalism (hypothesis that all human beings are products of some single transcendent principle, law or imperative) [1]. One of the characteristic phrases to be heard at this level is, e. g., "The key to getting along in any culture is to just be yourself – authentic and honest!". While this is natural in the U.S., it is considered very rude in Japan. As Milton notes, "We are all God's children" sounds hypocritical when the "children" don't subscribe to the same god as you do [1, p. 184].

Fourth stage of inter cultural sensitivity is the stage of acceptance of cultural differences. In Bennett's view, this stage constitutes the first and major shift from cultural centrism to cultural relativism, characterized by understanding (through living-through) that cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context. At this stage, particular cultural differences are not evaluated any more – they simply exist. One accepts the existence of verbal and non-verbal behavioral differences, as well as the underlying cultural value differences. From subjective point of view, at this level of inter cultural sensitivity, people belonging to another culture are no longer evaluated, passive objects. They are now seen as subjects, dynamic co-creators of their realities. This, in Bennett's words, means beginning to reconstruct cultural difference from a "thing" to a "process" [1, p. 185]. At the next stage occurs adaptation to cultural differences. This stage manifests itself primarily through ability to shift into two or more cultural world views (cultural pluralism). A new behavior, appropriate to a different culture, is learned and added to one's behavior; new styles of communication are developed and the subjective self is culturally expanded. In practice, this means that within another cultural frame one acts as if he or she were a member of that, different culture, setting for a moment aside the

culture they originally belong to. If there is no major psychological resistance impeding the process, adaptation naturally comes to all the people having significant overseas (or other culture) living experience (so-called SOLE). As its name implies, one is completely adapted into another cultural frame, and values and acts from it. That does not mean that the original ethical frame is negated or even changed. It only means that, while being present, it is at the same time “put aside” or momentarily “out of action”. Bennett correlates the stage of adaptation with conscious, intentional linking of subjective experience to particular context [1]. This means that the act of cultural shift within oneself is to a certain extent spontaneous, but not unconscious. It is the act of volition. And this is fairly true.

Bennett emphasizes that empathy is the key for adaptation to be successful: “Where no intentional empathy has preceded the pluralism, inter cultural sensitivity cannot be assumed automatically” [1, p. 186]. As someone who has experienced SOLE more than once, we might add that intentional empathy is not so much a precondition for successful adaptation as it is its manifestation. When intentional empathy occurs, one is successfully adapted – not vice versa. For ability to intentionally act outside one's native cultural world view, one previously has to adapt to it, meaning: one has to except it. The other key condition for successful adaptation is mastering the language. This is much more than simply saying that understanding other culture begins from understanding its language, and not only for the reason that culture constitutes a system of signs, as well as language does. As it is well known even before Benjamin Lee Worf, language frames the mind set. Its categories are the categories of thinking, its grammar is the grammar of mind. In consequence, language – albeit always seizing general concepts, and perhaps for that very reason – constitutes reality. What we do not name, that has no existence whatsoever for us. The way we name it, the way we organize our sentences/ thoughts is the way we organize and understand reality, which cannot be separated from the way we live it through.

So far, Bennett's model has shown to us to be more or less fair. Truth be said, it lacks conceptual accurateness and exactness for it tends to identify ethnocentrism with cultural centrism and ethno-relativism with cultural relativism, which is simply not correct. It does not emphasize enough the importance of language, although its author is more than familiar with it (being himself a psycho-linguist) and regarding culture, it lacks a firm conceptual framework and reference to any theoretically relevant theory of culture (Bakhtin, Losev, Lotman, Levi-Strauss, Leach, Mauss etc.; Boas, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Geertz, Sahlins). More importantly, it commits a fallacy in deducing moral relativism from cultural relativism. It is very loosely founded on popular ideas about phenomenology and kantianism, it touches the dialectical approach but fails to conduct dialectical reasoning. Insisting on critical thinking, it lacks substantial criticism of author's own culture. Nevertheless, Bennett's model of inter cultural sensitivity is heavily induced from experience, and that is what makes it more or less fair. Despite of the theoretical deficiencies, this model is operable, which is its biggest quality. The real problem, however, manifests itself with Bennett's explanation of the final stage of inter cultural sensitivity, the so-called integration of cultural differences. At this point we notice a complete shift from empiricist approach and falling into ideological, or in Bennett's own terminology, ethnocentric discourse.

Namely, the integration of cultural differences is defined as the application of ethno-relativism to one's own identity: “A person who has integrated difference... can construe differences as processes, ... can adapt to those differences, and ... can additionally construe him or herself in various cultural ways” [1, p. 186]. In this stage, ethical judgment supposedly “are no longer ethnocentric, they simply become statements of *appropriateness* to one or another cultural frame of reference” and “in terms of individual ethics, actions are evaluated relative to the created culture context one has developed for one's self” [1, p. 186]. In other words, integration implies moral

relativism. What differentiates this stage of inter cultural sensitivity from the previous one is that in it different world views cease to simply peacefully co-exist. Rather, the subject occupies an active position of constant re-definition of their own identity in terms of lived experiences. Various cultural frames integrate into one, which is flexible, fluid and always in process of construction. It is not a re-establishment of the original cultural frame. Bennett names this stage alternatively as “constructive (= conscious, reflexive, intentional and non-alienated) marginality”. An inter cultural subject is, in his words, a subject who experiences difference as an essential and joyful aspect of life, and for whom “everywhere is Rome”.

Oddly enough, we find a similar explanation of liberated subjects in Negri and Hardt. Their alter-globalist concept of multitude, eventually leading to liberation from empire is also of nomadic nature (“new barbarians”, “new nomads”) [4]. Therefore, one may ask: How is it possible that two politically and ideologically opposed standpoints suppose the same type of subjectivity as the bearer of change? One might respond that their motives for the alleged cultural and moral “statelessness” has different, even opposed motivations. Freedom from empire (NWO) on the one hand – integration into empire, on the other. However, we feel that the answer is not so simple.

The concept of nomadic type of subjectivity is not philosophical; furthermore, it is not even political, let alone ethical. It is a cultural concept residing on the opposition of nomadic versus sessile cultures. Therefore, such a concept cannot be universalis-

tic. Rather, it is a cultural projection, characteristic of one particular nomadic and adventurous culture – the Western one. Thus, the observation that it is not possible to step-out of one's own culture, especially while striving to grasp the complex concept of culture by and for itself, proves to be true. Paradoxically, by intending to elucidate the ultimate culturally relative stage of sensitivity, Bennett falls back into cultural centrism. We might add that this is another trait, typical of Western demand for universalism. Discourse about culture should not and cannot evade the dialectics of subjectivity and The Other – that is, if it intends credibility. It means having the theoretical courage for criticism and auto-criticism, especially if a culture is well known for its conquering history. Otherwise, any discourse about inter culturality will end up, one way or another, in cultural centrism. Bennett's insisting on empathy is really the key concept. However, it seems that he himself missed the chance to fully integrate it, as it cannot be left out of dialectics of subjectivity and the Other – the dialectics Bennett's theory substantially lacks.

In the end, one might argue that even philosophy, understood as constant and everlasting search for truth, is of “nomadic” nature. Nevertheless, there is a slight difference: for philosopher, not everywhere is home, it is where the truth is. Philosopher's search for truth in a way resembles Odysseus' return to Ithaca: adventures were many but only Ithaca is home. “Everywhere is Rome” means “every where is home” only for Romans. The rest of the world has a different understanding of home.

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МОДЕЛЬ РАЗВИТИЯ МЕЖДУКУЛЬТУРНОЙ СЕНЗИТИВНОСТИ МИЛЬТОНА БЕННЕТА – ДЕИСТВИТЕЛЬНО МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНАЯ?

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Аннотация. Модель развития межкультурной сензитивности Мильтона Беннета – одна из самых известных и признанных моделей в так называемом «неформальном образовании» (то есть образовании, имеющем место вне специализированных образовательных институтов) и тренинге. Частично данная модель основана на личном опыте жизни и работы ее автора за рубежом (в 1968-1970 гг. он был волонтером миротворческого корпуса США в Микронезии, к тому же у него есть опыт пятнадцати лет преподавания и организации тренингов в области межкультурной коммуникации у себя на родине и за рубежом). С теоретической точки зрения идеи Беннета опираются на сочетание феноменологии и конструктивизма: расширительное применение феноменологического метода комбинируется здесь с процессом конструирования культурных значений, что позволяет реализовать цель «конструирования идентичности». Подобное моделирование опирается на динамический подход: культурные различия понимаются не в качестве неких «данностей», но именно как процесс конструирования. Поэтому могут (и должны) становиться объектом целенаправленного воздействия. В идеальном случае предполагается, что стартовой точкой личностного развития по такому сценарию может выступать крайний этноцентризм; тогда как перспектива обратной крайности – тотальная релятивизация этничности. Последняя может стать предметом рефлексии в культурном и моральном релятивизме, который ставит своей задачей формирование рефлексивной (а не спонтанной) эмпатии. Модель Беннета описывает шесть стадий развития межкультуральной сензитивности. Эти стадии: 1. Отрицание культурных различий; 2. Защита бинарности как основания культурных различий; 3. Установка на стирание культурных различий; 4. Принятие неизбежности культурных различий; 5. Адаптация к культурным различиям; 6. Интеграция культурных различий в постоянно конструируемую самость.

Анализируя каждую из этих стадий, имеет смысл отдельно остановиться на последней – стадии интеграции. Опираясь как на сугубо теоретические аргументы, так и на столь ценный в рамках «неформального образования» личный опыт жизни за рубежом, автор статьи уделяет особое внимание вопросу о культурной и моральной «апатридности», - состоянии, которое, согласно Беннету, переживает личность в стадии интеграции. В результате детального анализа обоснован вывод о мнимом характере универсализма подобного переживания: поскольку оно получено в рамках специфического типа культуры, теоретическая корректность его тотальной экстраполяции на другие культуры остается под большим вопросом.

Ключевые слова. Модель развития межкультурной сензитивности Мильтона Беннета, этноцентризм, этнорелятивизм, культурные различия, конструирование идентичности, западная культура.

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