異文化理解に必要な言語能力とは何か　　Peter Ackermann

What does language competence mean in the context of intercultural understanding?

Obviously, the number of languages a person can become familiar with is extremely limited. The number of languages that any one institution can teach is even more so, particularly in the face of the costs involved in providing language instruction, and with regard to the increased pressure to internationalize, which is almost synonymous with concentrating on the acquisition of the one single language highest up on the ranking ladder of expected return on investment: English.

Process on the road of transcultural understanding demands a different way of looking at language. To start with, we need to acknowledge that English is the single most useful language for international communication and for access to figures and facts as well as cultural insights provided by research the world over. However, at the same time we need to gain a sharper awareness of what levels of encounter and knowledge cannot be reached by resorting to English as a lingua franca. This holds true also for English itself when it "lives" in its many regionally specific and socially distinct shapes.

For us in Europe, acquisition of the Japanese language is costly in terms of time, energy and money, for which we get more surprise than reward. Thus we very acutely feel the need to be as precise as possible in defining our aims and expected fields of operation. These, I propose, can be described as gaining understanding of how culture functions, moves, changes and is constructed, reconstructed and debated on the micro level, both within existing groups and when confronted by what is foreign and strange to it.

In my paper, I will discuss some of the present-day approaches to the acquisition of language and cultural competence through considering processes on the micro level, that is, on the concrete level of individual social actors who have learnt, through adoption, imitation as well as conscious structured and unstructured teaching, to habitually make use of only a limited number of techniques to cope with life. Still, these processes of coping are much too complex for us to grasp merely through speech and language, and they include both emotional and cognitive elements, being heavily shaped by deep-lying views of the world and of human dignity that over centuries have worked to legitimize understandings of "self" as an individual and as a member of a group or nation state.

Moreover, we are not only interested in understanding patterns of coping within a group using the same language and the same type of communicative aesthetic, but also and above all in situations of contact with the outside, where "other" people bring in ideas, assumptions, beliefs, associations and expectations. Thus we even more urgently need to focus on how all types of human signals end up contributing to the emergence of new structures of interaction that are invented on the spot. Obviously, the single most important prerequisite for this to function is the competence to create trust, in effect, to operate with linguistic signals that accommodate the world view of the other side.

Taking intercultural understanding to be an emotional and cognitive process that can never be completed I would like to present some of the corresponding ideas pursued by educational anthropology, focusing as it does not on knowing but on learning, and not only on competence in language but also on competence in doing, behaving, and being (and, of course, also writing/reading). Within the framework of personal learning processes we need to increasingly consider situations of encounter as border situations, in which no "correct" use of any language is possible. Border situations may include persons speaking the same language but socialized quite differently (e.g. Japanese who have lived abroad), or persons with different concepts of spiritual and bodily "self", such as is often the case when different religions or confessions, or when differing sets of taboos meet, making straight-forward language communication impossible. Also, as present-day technology makes simultaneity of different cultures, but also escape from cultures, possible, we very urgently need to gain a deeper understanding of constructions of, and coping with, identity. Communicative competence must be used as a tool for grappling with the unknown, not for acquiring what is supposedly known.

In my paper I will expand on these aspects of intercultural encounter and discuss the specific kinds of insights and types of competence language acquisition provides us with, link the processes of language acquisition to some of the arguments being put forth in anthropology, and discuss concrete examples of Japanese-European intercultural communication, asking why certain cases were successful, while others were clearly not. What remains, however, is the difficult task of both legitimizing and structurally accommodating language learning and language training focused on micro levels and micro constellations, all of which, both as human phenomena and as expressions within a framework of any specific language are equal in value and can definitely not be ranked following a cost and benefit analysis.