

# Book and article reviews

Objekttyp: **BookReview**

Zeitschrift: **Studies in Communication Sciences : journal of the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research**

Band (Jahr): **4 (2004)**

Heft 2

PDF erstellt am: **21.07.2024**

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## BOOK AND ARTICLE REVIEWS

Reiner Meyer: *Ein Friedensprozeß ohne Versöhnung. Der Israelisch-Palästinensische Konflikt und die Oslo-Verhandlungen als Beispiel für die Probleme des Konfliktmanagements*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004, 252 pp.

“*A peace process without reconciliation*”: the title of this book, which appears quite critical with regard to the Oslo peace process, suggests us that an effective and durable conflict resolution process should foresee the *reconciliation* of the conflicting parties, who, having perceived each other as enemies throughout the conflict, must re-learn to collaborate peacefully after the ceasing of hostilities. The enormous task of conflict resolution starts the moment the violent conflict ends: this is one of the fundamental assumptions of this text, supported by the evidence examined in conflict management literature after 1989 (the so-called *post conflict peace-building*, see p. 23).

The first part of this volume is a detailed and well-structured study of the notion of *reconciliation* (*Versöhnung*) within conflict management in international relations and, especially, the possible advantages of establishing *truth commissions* in territories that have experienced complex conflicts, whose central issues might still be unresolved after the cease-fire. In fact, the main aim of truth commissions is promoting re-conciliation, i.e. fostering the ability of parties who have been involved in a conflict to live side-by-side. The process of reconcili-

ation implies that the issues at the origin of the conflict are thematized and thus (possibly) resolved. From the point of view of communication sciences, the method of truth commissions is particularly relevant, since it is based on a communicative process where selected people who participated in the conflict are asked to tackle the issues that might have given rise to it, to investigate its causes and responsibilities, and eventually, to find out which interests and concerns of both conflicting parties are still unresolved. The goal of this group investigation is to describe the conflict phase and to communicate a possible basis for future joint enterprises to all actors involved in the reconciliation and reconstruction phase. In terms of a theory of communication, one could say that truth commissions, through their effort of historical investigation of the conflict causes, and, in particular, through the identification of the main *contextual* features of the conflict, increase the quality of information available to the community (see Eppler 2003, in particular pp. 124-138). Thus, truth commissions contribute to the establishing of a *common ground*, i.e. a set of shared experiences, knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, and values (see Stalnaker 2002 for an introduction to this notion) among the relevant interlocutors of the post-conflict phase. Building on this common ground, the conflicting parties may engage in joint actions (Clark 1996), including both collaborations and interactions (see Rigotti 2003 for this distinction).

Going more into detail concerning the structure of the theoretical approach, the first chapters of the

book (chapters 1-5) explore the notion of reconciliation, relying on international literature on conflict management. Among the authors whose models are at the basis of the writer's approach to conflict resolution, a particular place is devoted to Johan Galtung, Jean-Paul Lederach, and Herbert C. Kelman.

Regarding Galtung's approach, it is particularly interesting to underline that he considers the presence of a third instance necessary for successful resolution of conflicts. This consideration leads us to acknowledge the importance of *mediation* as a kind of conflict resolution practice, where a third party is involved with the aim of helping conflicting parties to reach an agreement. The importance of mediation is also acknowledged in Kelman's studies (pp. 56-57). According to Galtung, the third instance might also not be directly involved in the discussions, but it may function as an external point of common reference for the parties: "Dazu bedarf es meistens einer dritten Instanz oder Partei als übergeordnete moralische Struktur, welche Gott bzw. die Kirche, der Staat oder die internationale Gemeinschaft bzw. die Gesellschaft, in Form der Bevölkerung, sein kann" (p. 32).

However, Meyer's theoretical framework of reference is probably most indebted to Lederach and Kelman.

From Lederach he takes the so-called *Pyramidenmodell*, which focuses on the identification of "stakeholders" who should be directly involved in the post-conflict negotiations in order to achieve reconciliation (p. 42). The model considers the different levels of population that might have been touched by the conflict, and thus

become relevant decision-makers in the resolution process.

The author also takes over the *interactive problem-solving approach* from Kelman, which, again, appears particularly relevant to communication sciences, in that it is based on group discussions that have the explicit goal of breaking the conflict-based relation between parties, and giving them the chance to achieve a real interaction based on trust. We may add that the argumentative dynamic at the heart of this approach is the strength of the *example*, which has the task of showing that a certain event could occur. If communication and interaction have been possible in the problem-solving team, they will also be possible in the future of the community: "Wenn es hier geschafft wird, eine neue Basis des Vertrauens und der positiven Beziehungen zu konstruieren, hat dies auch positive Auswirkungen auf die Makroebene des Konfliktes" (p. 58).

Chapters 6 and 7 respectively focus on the notion of *truth commission* as a particular instrument for "dealing with the past" (p. 72) and achieving reconciliation, and on some examples of conflict resolution realized with the help of truth commissions. The survey of past truth commissions includes a wide range of cases, from the truth commission on 'disappearances' in Uganda at the beginning of the 70s, going through the first cases in South America (1982, Bolivia) up to the well-known truth and reconciliation commissions in South Africa (at the beginning of the 90s).

The second part of the book concerns a case-study in conflict resolution: the Oslo peace process in the framework of the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict. Chapter 8 and 9 provide an historical overview of the conflict from the foundation of the State of Israel (1948) up to the time of the Oslo process (at the beginning of the 90s).

Chapters 10-13 concentrate on the question of reconciliation in the Oslo negotiations. The claim that Meyer advances is that there has been no realistic effort towards a reconciliation initiative in those negotiations; and that the lack of a reconciliation process was at the origin of the final failure of the whole process.

One of the core problems that Meyer analyzes within this framework is the voluntary omission in the negotiations agenda of the issues that had probably generated the conflict and on the past responsibilities of both parties. The prevailing commitment of Oslo negotiators was founding an economic cooperation between the Israeli and the Palestinian sides: "Dies war das Leitbild der beginnenden neunziger Jahre, die Hoffnung, daß sich durch die ökonomischen Rahmenbedingungen die anderen Dinge ableiten ließen" (p. 128); "Bewußt hat man die Fragen um die Vergangenheit ausgeklammert, da insbesondere hier ein Schwerpunkt des Israelisch-Palästinensischen Konfliktes liegt" (p. 129). Here, for instance, the issue of *security*, which was a keyword (see Rigotti & Rocci 2003) on the Israeli side, and an essential presupposition for trusting the Palestinians, has not been tackled (p. 128). But the lack of consideration of the conflict core issues caused the failure of the economic agreements, since the latter were not anchored to the solid basis of a common vision on what had happened. As we have previously seen, the

establishment of a common vision on the past is the first necessary step towards a future collaboration. Meyer also proposes the introduction of a truth commission, possibly financed by the European Union, as a way of building trust between the parties.

Given the relevance of communicative processes in conflict resolution, it would be interesting to develop the analysis further and to integrate it with some insights from communication and argumentation. Apart from the previously mentioned concept of *common ground*, take for instance the argumentative notion of *éthos* (this notion, first introduced by Aristotle, refers to the speaker's authority; see Rigotti 1998 for an explanation), which could help understanding the inadequateness of official negotiators in the Oslo process, who were not representative of the whole population, as the author points out (pp. 114-115). Another possible research development concerns the problem of *intercultural communication* between Israeli and Palestinians. The author himself suggests for instance that the concept of reconciliation, although he finds positive evidence of its presence in both the Jewish and in the Islamic religion, might nevertheless be interpreted differently in different cultures, and therefore cannot be applied without considering possible differences (pp. 67-71).

In conclusion, some points must still be mentioned that can be found in this book:

- An English summary (pp. 192-197, Chapter 15);
- A very rich and comprehensive bibliography on the topic (pp. 198-235);
- An annex regarding the author's direct sources regarding the topic, in

particular interviews and correspondence with direct participants to the Oslo peace process and with international experts on conflict management (pp. 236-237).

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Sara Greco  
(sara.greco@lu.unisi.ch)  
Università della Svizzera Italiana

Maria Chini (a cura di). *Plurilinguismo e immigrazione in Italia. Un'indagine sociolinguistica a Pavia e a Torino*. Pavia: Materiali Linguistici Università di Pavia, Franco Angeli, 2004.

Negli ultimi 25 anni la linguistica europea si è interessata alla situazione linguistica degli immigrati, in particolare dei processi d'acquisizione della seconda lingua, ossia della lingua utilizzata nel contesto d'arrivo. L'altro versante del problema concerne il mantenimento della lingua d'origine, molto studiato negli USA: il presente lavoro si occupa di entrambi i versanti, delle dinamiche e della configurazione dei repertori linguistici in situazione migratoria in un'ottica sociolinguistica della migrazione.

L'indagine sul plurilinguismo degli immigrati dell'Italia nord-occidentale privilegia un approccio quantitativo su metodi più qualitativi (osservazione dei comportamenti linguistici) poichè, a parere degli autori, manca al momento un quadro sociolinguistico d'insieme per il contesto indagato. Gli obiettivi sono i seguenti:

- Svolgere un'indagine sulla presenza delle lingue immigrate in due realtà urbane dell'Italia nord-occidentale piuttosto diverse: Pavia, capoluogo di provincia di medie dimensioni, attiva nel settore terziario e nei servizi, caratterizzato da immigrazione debole e Torino, importante capoluogo di regione e centro industriale, meta di considerevoli flussi migratori.
- Indagare le modalità d'utilizzo delle lingue e dei dialetti del repertorio degli immigrati nei vari domini e nei rapporti con connazionali, con italofoeni e

con immigrati di altra provenienza, per individuare i processi in atto di mantenimento o *shift* linguistico.

- Individuare possibili correlazioni fra variabili legate all'uso e alle competenze delle lingue d'origine e d'arrivo (L1 e L2) e variabili socio-anagrafiche (provenienza, età d'arrivo, frequenza scolastica) e variabili socio-culturali (grado d'integrazione nel contesto italiano, costituzione di reti amicali).

- Delimitare il tipo e il grado di plurilinguismo ed eventuali indicazioni d'incipiente *attrition* o logorio linguistico.

- Fare luce su alcuni aspetti sociolinguistici/socioculturali e psicosociali che permettano la programmazione d'interventi adeguati da parte delle istituzioni riguardo al dialogo interculturale e all'educazione linguistica in italiano L2, nelle L1 e nelle lingue di comunicazione internazionale.

Lo strumento dell'indagine è costituito da due questionari di una cinquantina di domande per lo più chiuse, somministrati dai ricercatori stessi o da insegnanti, autocompilati dai soggetti, diversi per i due campioni d'immigrati di prima generazione: 414 ragazzi in età scolastica e 171 adulti che frequentano corsi pubblici di lingua italiana nella provincia di Pavia e nella città di Torino nella primavera del 2002. Il questionario rileva le caratteristiche socio-anagrafiche e le competenze linguistiche degli immigrati come anche gli usi relativi alle lingue del repertorio.

Alcune particolarità di quest'indagine sono dovute allo strumento utilizzato, un'autovalutazione che presenta il punto di vista dei soggetti interpellati. Inoltre il *corpus* dei minori è più rappresentativo e ampio rispetto a quello degli adulti.

In entrambi i *corpora* si sono contati una quarantina di lingue d'origine, fra cui, per numero di parlanti: albanese, spagnolo, arabo marocchino, rumeno, cinese, francese, inglese (e le loro varietà e dialetti). Già il repertorio di partenza risulta molto ricco, la metà degli adulti e un sesto dei minori erano bi- o plurilingui prima dell'immigrazione in Italia. Particolare attenzione è stata prestata a fenomeni di mantenimento di L1 e di *shift* verso l'italiano. In ambito scolastico lo *shift* è molto più avanzato che in famiglia. Quest'ultima, tutt'altro che refrattaria a L2, resta in ogni modo il luogo in cui l'impronta identitaria d'origine risulta più profonda.

I processi di *shift* non sembrano derivare solo da necessità comunicative (l'italiano è usato anche in famiglia o fra amici connazionali). Nel contesto di questa ricerca sono state considerati interlocutori e domini, ma i parlanti si sono rivelati, almeno in parte, sensibili anche a fattori legati alla configurazione situazionale, all'argomento e allo scopo dell'interazione che andrebbero considerati in modo più approfondito per spiegare le scelte di lingua. Altri spunti per future ricerche sarebbero un'indagine qualitativa delle competenze degli immigrati nelle varie lingue del repertorio, dello *shift* verso l'italiano come anche di eventuali fenomeni di logorio linguistico (*attrition*) di L1.

Sabine Christopher Guerra  
(christopher.guerra@bluewin.ch)  
Università della Svizzera Italiana



Martyn Sloman: *The e-Learning Revolution. How technology is Driving a New Training Paradigm*. New York: Amacom, 2002, 216 pp.

The eLearning phenomenon is largely studied by different disciplines like Pedagogy, Psychology, Knowledge Management, Informatics, Economics and it is also increasingly interesting for Communication Sciences. In this research area, case studies are particularly useful to describe and better understand the interaction model of this new form of education. Technologies have been introduced in training activities but actually there isn't a suitable model or theory guiding their integration. In fact uncertainty hinders organisations which are basing their actions on parameters consolidated before the arrival of eLearning.

In this framework, Sloman's book stands out by its informative and numerous case studies as well as by its content organisation. The book is constructed around 21 key propositions that guide the reader in the comprehension of the revolution carried by eLearning within companies; the eight chapters are followed from real case studies of eLearning experimentations within important companies. Examples and comments are intended to consider eLearning within the knowledge society and to underline its key role in the integration process of organisations and companies. The main contribution undoubtedly comes from the author experience, in view of his many years as director of management education and training in many companies such as, for instance, Ernst & Young.

In the first chapter Sloman outlines the main aspects of a connected economy created by the convergence of many technologies. The second and the third chapter show how training is changing while the implications for organisations agenda are illustrated more in detail in the following chapter. New skills and attitudes required for learner and trainer are respectively illustrated in the fifth and the sixth chapter. The two last sections are intended to summarise the steps made by the author establishing their relevance in a wider framework.

Thus, moving from the assumption that connectivity is blurring social boundaries and that it is deeply shifting business models, Martyn Sloman invites training managers to face and to exploit this challenge. The originality of his approach lies in the conviction that it is necessary to be concentrated on the use of new technologies rather than being seduced by their functionality. According to Sloman, the real questions about eLearning are not about its efficiency and effectiveness, but rather about its acceptability by the learner. In a time in which companies recognise people as a source of competitive advantage, a new paradigm for training is emerging, described, by the author, as *learner-centred interventions*. In this sense it's important to understand the right time and place in which people can learn, to support their personal motivation and to communicate eLearning properly. ELearning can bring an added value only in a context in which the distinction between learning, which, according to the author, lies in the individual domain, and training, which lies in the organisation domain, is appreciated.

The new paradigm affects also the trainer's role. Sloman underlines that her main functions will be design, delivery and learning support. The individual trainer is not going to lose her responsibility because there are still huge opportunities for enhancing the position of the profession and for increasing job satisfaction. The trainer has to invest on soft technology constituted by those skills, promotion, scope, fit, support and evaluation that accompany the introduction of each hard technology, while persisting after its decline.

For academia the book represents an open window on what is going on in business training and for people in the field it helps increasing the awareness of the many facets of the eLearning issue.

The main value of the book resides in the clarity with which the author outlines the areas worth of investigation, the merits and the main challenges of a sector too often plagued by illusions and false promises: "More honesty and less hype are required if the training profession is to grasp the new opportunity to maximum effect" (p. 207).

*Chiara Succi*  
([chiara.succi@lu.unisi.ch](mailto:chiara.succi@lu.unisi.ch))  
*Università della Svizzera Italiana*

## CONFERENCE REPORT

"PRESENCE 2004"

Technical University of Valencia, Spain.  
October 13, 14, 15.

Si è appena svolto il settimo workshop internazionale sulla "presenza", organizzato quest'anno dall'Università Politecnica di Valencia, in Spagna. Il workshop si tiene annualmente in varie località europee con il patrocinio dell'*International Society for Presence Research (ISPR, <http://www.ispr.info>)* e del programma di ricerca *Information Society Technologies – Future and Emerging Technologies* istituito dalla Comunità Europea (EU-IST/FET area, <http://www.cordis.lu/ist/fet/home.html>). L'ISPR sostiene la ricerca universitaria rivolta all'analisi del senso di presenza esperito nell'interazione con ambienti simulati in realtà virtuale (VR). Comprende al suo interno aree di ricerca strettamente legate all'ingegneria, informatica, ergonomia, comunicazione e psicologia cognitiva. Contemporaneamente l'area EU-IST-FET si propone di sostenere progetti di ricerca altamente innovativi in area tecnologica e di delineare scenari applicativi emergenti per l'*Information Society Technologies*. All'interno di quest'area sono finanziati la maggior parte dei progetti di ricerca sullo studio del senso di presenza in VR.

Ma cosa si intende per presenza? L'interazione con un ambiente VR è in grado di creare una illusione percettiva in cui i sensi sono stimolati al punto da permettere lo svilupparsi di modelli cognitivi ed emotivi coerenti con l'ambiente che si sta esplorando. In questo modo si sviluppa quella che viene definita esperienza virtuale. Il