

**ASPECTS OF THE INTERCULTURAL  
COMMUNICATION IN THE TOURISM SERVICES:  
COMPARING THE VIEWS AND PRACTICES OF  
CUBAN AND FRENCH PROFESSIONALS**

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Abstract

Between 1994 and 2000, the authors of this article took part in the design of a French language teaching material for the training of tourism professionals in Cuba. In this material, special importance is given to the building up of an intercultural competence through awareness raising procedures, based on the principle of a direct link between conceptual and behavioural change. The article presents the results of the qualitative study the authors led in 2005 in order to evaluate the effect of intercultural awareness activities on former trainees's professional conception and practice.

The first part of the article, based on the interviews of eight Cuban and five French professionals, compares their respective visions of their occupational role and discusses the differences in terms of priority, conception of expertise and role, and interpersonal relationships. The second part focuses on the results of observation of the actual practices of five Cuban professionals interacting with French tourists. The analysis points to some limits of awareness raising methodology to promote efficient behavioural change in terms of intercultural adaptation.

In their conclusion, the authors suggest that “practice analysis”, as developed in ergology research, may offer interesting methodological tools for securing action change.

### Résumé

De 1994 à 2000, les auteurs de cet article ont participé à la conception de matériel didactique en français langue étrangère pour la formation de professionnels du tourisme à Cuba. Cet outil attache une importance particulière à la construction d'une compétence interculturelle à travers des procédures de sensibilisation, en s'appuyant sur le principe d'un lien direct entre les changements conceptuels et les modifications comportementales. Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude qualitative que nous avons menée en 2005 afin d'évaluer l'effet des activités de sensibilisation interculturelle sur les conceptions et les pratiques professionnelles des anciens stagiaires.

Une première partie rapporte des entretiens avec huit professionnels cubains et cinq français ; nous comparons leurs perceptions respectives de leur rôle professionnel et analysons les différences en termes de priorité, de conception de leur expertise et de leur rôle, ainsi que des relations interpersonnelles. Une deuxième partie se concentre sur les résultats d'observations des pratiques réelles de cinq professionnels cubains en interaction avec des touristes français. Cette analyse laisse apparaître quelques limitations d'une approche de sensibilisation qui vise à promouvoir un changement de comportement en termes d'une adaptation interculturelle.

En guise de conclusion, nous suggérons qu'une « analyse de pratiques » développée en ergologie pourra fournir des outils méthodologiques intéressants pour assurer des changements de pratiques.

## Introduction

Between 1994 and 2000, the authors of this article took part in the reassessment of the French foreign language training programme offered at the *Escuela de Altos Estudios de Hotelería y Turismo* (EAEHT- School of Higher Education in Hotel Trade and Tourism) of Havana (Cuba), which trains Cuban professionals of tourism at post-secondary level. The reassessment was justified by the high-speed development of the Cuban tourism industry during the nineties, which required the training of tourism professionals able to carry out their tasks in a intercultural context. For Cuba, as well as for many developing countries of the tropical zones, tourism industry is now mainly targeted at holiday makers originating from the rich countries, more particularly from Europe and North America. French-speaking holiday makers, primarily from metropolitan France and Quebec, now form a significant share of the tourists who choose Cuba for their holidays.

The reassessment research project led to the designing of a learning/teaching material<sup>1</sup>, entitled *Vacances Cubaines* ("Cuban Holidays"), consisting of three books and 6 cassettes. The overall objective of *Vacances Cubaines*<sup>2</sup> is the building-up of a communicative competence in French for Cuban professionals carrying out tourism services for French tourists, including a dimension related to the specific aspects of tourism interactions taking place in an intercultural context. The didactic options retained for the development of a professional competence for interactions in an intercultural context are as follows:

a/ The objective was to allow the future tourism professionals to develop, not so much the monocultural competence of a native French speaker, but an intercultural competence, which was defined as the set of knowledge and know-how which allows individuals from a given culture to interact in a suitable and appropriate way with individuals from another culture. This set of knowledge and know-how entails certain abilities for the persons concerned, in particular:

- The ability to view objectively their own behaviour as determined by the cultural group to which they belong, and thus to be conscious of the relativity of the schemes selected in this culture for the perception of reality;
- The ability to analyze, at the moment of intercultural contact, the difficulties which may occur in the interactive events in terms of cultural differences as much as in terms of individual differences;

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<sup>1</sup>Designed through a joint project by members of the CRAPEL (Université Nancy2, France) and EAEHT (Havana, Cuba) research teams, this material has been used in the Cuban tourism schools since 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The materials are designed around professional tasks for tourism which have been categorized in 3 main domains, *Fonctions d'animation* (directed at professionals leading leisure activities), *Relations avec la clientèle* (for those working in sale situations) and *Fonctions de service* (for hospitality management and services).

- The ability to use behaviour strategies which enable them to adapt to cultural differences.

b/ The intercultural competence for the tourism professionals was defined in relation to the professional situations which the trainees were going to meet: it was thus a question of developing an intercultural competence within a specific framework, the framework of the tourism services, which was defined as the occupations which aim at making it possible for people to travel with ends of leisure to places out of their usual environment, and for short periods. The intercultural competence dealt with in the language training at the EAEHT is thus defined as “the ability for a professional to carry satisfactorily out occupational tasks in the tourist services with individuals coming from cultural groups different from his/her own” (Gremmo 1997: 64-66) . In order that the chosen options of research be fully clarified, it may be important to briefly specify certain characteristics of the tourism services in the Cuban context:

- the professionals whom the EAEHT trains will mainly work within the framework of hotels of higher categories. These hotels meet the classic needs for accommodation and catering (reception, restaurant, and room service), but they also provide leisure activities for their guests (excursion-selling, spectacle ticket-office, car-hire, to name but the main ones). In fact, these are the hotels which, in terms of places, concentrate practically all the proposals for service to tourists. Even if in institutional terms, some professionals are not direct employees of the hotel, this characteristic is generally not perceived by hotel customers: for example, excursion agents will often be employees from a local tour operator and be simply hosted by the hotel but tourists will consider that they deal with the hotel’s touring agency.
- as mentioned above, most of the customers of these hotels come from outside of Cuba. However they generally come by means of package tours, with the result on the one hand that they often come in groups of the same national origin (and sometimes even from the same region), and on the other hand that the hotels tend to specialize in certain countries of origin, according to the trade agreements that the hotel or the chain to which it belongs have passed with overseas tour operators.
- the tourists generally remain between 1 and 3 days in a hotel, and some can stay there twice (at the beginning and end of their stay).

c/ The teaching option chosen for the cultural dimension of the professional communicative context is that of awareness raising procedures. Awareness is developed through targeted and specific activities, and in the *Vacances Cubaines* materials, the phases for intercultural work are clearly specified. These activities, based on work with written or oral resources such as press extracts, questionnaires or interviews, are planned to stimulate questioning and to bring the students to explain their representations and behaviours, so as to make them more conscious of the cultural dimensions of these representations and behaviours. This pedagogical

approach, which is currently rather classical in foreign language didactics<sup>3</sup>, rests on the idea that there exists a direct bond between conceptual and behavioural change. According to this principle, awareness-raising activities bring about an evolution of the representations of the people concerned on the subject discussed. Since representations act as decision criteria for action, their evolution has a direct impact on action: if representations change, decisions evolve, and thus, in a logical way, actions change. Thus, sensitization activities allow for the development not only of knowledge about acting, but also of knowledge for acting. Through specific activities about intercultural differences in tourism services, tourism trainees will develop intercultural awareness which will then enable them to develop adaptive or compensatory behaviours. This will lead them to develop a set of specific actions favouring the efficient accomplishment of their professional service activity in intercultural contexts. Some of these actions may be specific to the intercultural situations (explaining certain aspects), others may be adaptive in their forms (using specific linguistic forms or gestures), some may be verbal (asking certain types of questions), others non-verbal (keeping a certain distance), some may be preventive (anticipating certain reactions), other reactive (apologizing).

At the end of several years of implementing this didactic approach in the training of tourism professionals, we felt the need to evaluate the effects of intercultural awareness-raising: how did the EAEHT trainees, once working as professionals, really fare in intercultural tourism situations? We led a qualitative study, centred on the one hand around the comparison of the visions of Cuban and French professionals of their occupational role, and on the other hand on the analysis of the actual practices of Cuban professionals in their service activities of in an intercultural context, with again a comparative aspect with French practices.

The methodological procedure we adopted for the collection of data was as follows:

- we conducted semi-directive interviews of Cuban professionals who had all followed, whether in initial or continuing training, intercultural awareness activities from the *Vacances Cubaines* material. We chose to focus more particularly on hotel receptionists and excursion sales agents, as these are two relatively frequent occupations for the students trained at the EAEHT.
- we also conducted observation sessions of Cuban professionals in intercultural situations for excursion sales, using the following procedure: a Cuban observer and a French observer<sup>4</sup> observed simultaneously and separately the course of the interaction, and noted down all the elements which, according to them, had an intercultural dimension. Afterwards, they compared their notes, cross-examining and questioning their points of view. In parallel, at the end of the interaction observed, the professional on the one hand, and the tourist on the other hand were invited to make

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<sup>3</sup> See Byram (1992).

<sup>4</sup> The observers were the authors of the article

an oral report of what happened, in terms of incidents or satisfactions. This report was recorded and transcribed. Finally, the different sets of data were compared.

- following the procedure developed in Cuba, a data collection session was organised on similar lines in France : semi-directive interviews of French professionals, and observation sessions. It is to be noted that the observation sessions in France were realised only by the French member of our research team and did not include cultural cross-examination.

The article will concentrate on two aspects of our analysis :

- first, the comparison of the representations that Cuban and French professionals display of the role of professional in tourism services,
- and an evaluation of the effect of intercultural awareness training in terms of actual practices of the Cuban professionals.

## 1. Comparing visions of the professional role

This part rests on the analysis of the semi-directive interviews, i.e. eight interviews carried out with Cuban excursion agents in December 2004, and five interviews with French professionals, carried out in April 2005.

We started from a schematization of tourism services as a triangular relationship between professional, product and tourist<sup>5</sup>, as is shown in Fig. 1 below.

*(Fig. 1, given at the end, after the bibliography references, should appear here)*

Thus the service rendered by the professional concerns the selling of a product which corresponds to the tourist, the product being here the organized excursion. We then focussed our attention on the professionals' point of view (as the arrows on the diagram show): their role is to establish a link between a set of available products and tourists, getting and giving information to fulfil the commercial objective. In this aspect, satisfaction comes from selling a tourism product to tourist customers.

But for sociologically based analyses of the notion of service (Zarifian 2000), satisfactory service also implies satisfying the objectives that the tourist seeks to fulfill by buying the product. Buying an excursion often implies wishing to have a pleasant time and not to meet problems : for some tourists, this may mean not to have to wait for the tour bus, for others, to visit something exceptional. In other terms, tourists tend to try and use the time allotted to their leisure activities to the full, without clash nor delay, according to the meaning they give to these satisfaction criteria. To take another example, on the tourists' side, requesting information also implies getting

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<sup>5</sup> which echoes Goffman's vision of service as a triangular relationship (Weller, 1998) and the notion of *triangle didactique* (didactic triangle) used in educational research. See Champy, Philippe et Christine Etévé. 2005. Dictionnaire encyclopédique de l'éducation et de la formation. Paris : Retz.

acceptable and recognizable answers to one's questions, getting reassurance for the anxiety one may feel, or feeling that one is taken into account, etc.

We then used this enlarged view of service to build the interview questioning guide and our analysis categories. The interview questioning guide aimed at making explicit the representations which the interviewed professionals have on the notion of tourism services, on their professionalism, in particular in connection with the training they had had, on the relationship that they want to establish with their customers and the way in which they set it up.

We will now discuss three of the aspects which appear to differentiate the conceptions of the two cultural groups of professionals: (a) which apex of the triangle was given most importance, (b) what type of expertise was described, and (c) what role was given to interpersonal relationships.

### 1.1. The fundamental dimension of the triangle

The interviews seem to show that the priority granted to the triangular organisation differed according to the professional communities.

The Cuban professionals that we questioned tended to give preference to the product, whereas the French professionals paid more attention to the person. In other words, the Cuban professionals tended to adapt the tourist to the product, and the French professionals to adapt the product to the tourist. The following two quotations are representative of this difference in priority. One Cuban professional declared:

(1) (CE4) :

*« je connais bien toutes les excursions que nous avons, je sais celles qui plaisent, et je propose en fonction de cela (..) je sais que les Français aiment bien aller à Pinar del Rio, les Italiens préfèrent le bord de mer.. et donc je propose comme ça et ça marche bien »*

("I know all the excursions we offer quite well, and I know the ones that the tourists prefer, and I make my offers accordingly (..) I know that the French like to go to Pinar del Rio, the Italians prefer the beach.. and so I make offers in this way and everything goes well"),

whereas one French professional explained :

(2) (FE2) :

*« d'abord j'essaie de voir avec la personne ce qui lui plairait, si elle préfère voir des monuments, des paysages, si elle est prête à faire beaucoup de route.. et puis on construit ça ensemble.. Bien sûr j'ai des excursions toutes*

*prêtes mais j'essaie toujours de proposer quelque chose d'assez personnalisé »*

*("to begin with I try to see with the persons what they would like, if they prefer to visit monuments, landscapes, if they are ready to drive a lot. And then we build the offer together. Of course I have ready-made excursions but I always try to offer something which is specific").*

## **1.2. The nature of the expertise**

A second aspect of the professional role, made obvious through the interviews, softens this first differentiation which could appear too schematic. The interviewed Cuban professionals justified their "product-targeted" approach in terms of their expertise: they explained that they knew their country and its tourist proposals, and they were thus the best persons to choose what was appropriate for the tourist. They implicitly asked the tourists to have trust in their professionalism. One can thus highlight here a posture which we have termed educational, founded on a vertical conception of expertise. Their idea of professional expertise relates to contents, and some of our interviewees clearly state that they acquired their professional expertise in a autonomous way, devoting their own time and effort, as they judged that their initial training dealt mainly with book knowledge such as is found in history and geography schoolbooks. Most of the Cuban professionals indicated that they had visited the places of the excursions by themselves, often during family holidays, in order to have their own idea of the product.

The French professionals act much more according to a posture which can be described as facilitating. They explained that they above all suggested ideas and destinations, but left the final decision, and, one could add, the responsibility for the decision, to the tourist. The French professionals seemed to refer thus to a more horizontal vision of the expertise, in which their main functions were to provide comparative analysis between existing offers, which they must try to make explicit in the most precise possible way (this meant that they must have detailed knowledge on these offers), and to adapt the offers according to the tourists' requirements,. It seems to us that French professionals tried to create not so much a relationship based on blind trust as a relationship based on complementary exchange in which their occupational expertise interacted with the tourists' characteristics, in particular the knowledge that these have on their own tourist objectives.

This point can be exemplified by analysing the use excursion agents make of an emblematic professional object, the catalogue. This analysis was based on observation data. French professionals tended to give the catalogue to the tourists very early during the transaction, telling them to look at the offers by themselves. This determined to a great extent the type of interaction which followed, as the agents were expecting to answer information requests and give advice. On the other



hand, Cuban professionals tended to keep the catalogue to themselves and use it to check information while they asked the tourists information about their expectations and tastes. Then, they would provide tourists with the expert information which was described above and only show the tourists the catalogue pages corresponding to the products and offers which seemed appropriate.

As was observed, the catalogue is not so much a source of information as an artefact in the negotiation of expertise and role, indicating, if need may be, that the cultural dimension inherent to the various situations referred to as tourism services is at play in all the situational elements, whether abstract or concrete ones.

### **1.3. Interpersonal relationships**

A third aspect that our interviews highlighted deals with the importance given to the building of an interpersonal relationship, i.e. with the specific relationship which can develop between a given professional and a given tourist or group of tourists.

In their interviews, the French professionals expressed that their objective was to treat all customers in an equal fashion as to provide a product whose main quality was to fit the person. This equal treatment enabled them to give professional satisfaction, in terms of Zarifian's analysis mentioned above, i.e. also meeting their customers' implicit objectives. The relationship that our French interviewees described was above all professional, that is to say it appeared to be a relationship in which tourists were fully, but very often only considered in their identities as "tourists". For them, the quality of their service seemed to be based on the adoption of a "professional" identity free of any other identity characteristics. This posture led to specific interaction features. They very rarely used the informal French form of address (*tu*), even with people of their age with whom they would use such forms if they met them outside the professional area. They did not use Christian names (although they knew them), and even the use of family names was restricted to signal a longtime relationship, with a regular customer. They tended to avoid discussing personal matters, although, as one interviewee recorded, they sometimes got to know some "regular" customers quite well in terms of family or personal aspects. They all underlined that they did not see it "correct" to partake aspects of their own personal life with their customers, even if some customers tried to venture on such subjects.

On the other hand, individual characteristics played a fundamental role for them in the setting-up of the tourism networks (with airlines agents, hotel representatives, etc) which are necessary for them to give the "person-fitted" tourism offer they consider quality offer. The five professionals in the inquest all quoted the importance of having "their own network", i.e. a network of professionals with whom they have relationships if not of friendship, at least of co-operation and complicity. One of the interviewees described things as follows:

(3) (FE5)

« après j'ai tendance à conseiller les offres des gens avec qui j'ai un bon contact, par exemple, il y en a certains, je sais que je peux vraiment compter sur eux, qu'ils vont toujours arriver à m'arranger les choses »

([between 2 offers which seem to catch the customer's interest] "I tend to give advise for the offers coming from the people [*i.e* tour operators] with whom I have a good contact, because I know that I can really count on them, that they will always arrange things for me" <sup>6</sup>

Most of these contacts are made on the telephone, and these relationships based on cooperation and trust are often built without the professionals ever seeing one another. Nonetheless, the observation data showed that in their telephone interactions with colleagues from their networks, the five French professionals used informal discourse and linguistic forms. They used first names and *tu* forms, for example, as is revealed the following extract:

(4) (FE5)

- *allo c'est Thierry ? salut ici c'est Manue de XXXX [name of the agency] de Nancy*
- (...)
- *oui ça va je te remercie en ce moment on peut pas se plaindre bon je t'appelle parce que j'ai un client qui ...*
- hello is it Thierry? Hi here it is Manue of XXXX in Nancy
- (...)
- yes I'm fine thank you at this moment I can't complain well anyway I'm calling you because...

For the French professionals that we interviewed, personal relationships were specifically intraprofessional, *i.e.* within their tourism network. They saw these person-to-person relationships, in which they showed their individuality, talked about themselves and established personal contacts, as essential to the development of their professional competence, since it is through the cooperation and trust generated from this insider's solidarity that they are able to offer satisfactory tourism services.

The Cuban professionals displayed a very different conception of relationships between professionals and tourists. First of all, they made very little mention of a professional network that they would need to set up individually. They referred most

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<sup>6</sup> It is also interesting to point how the interviewee here uses 1st person singular forms (*I* have contact, *I* can count on, for *me*).

of the time to the existence of a secure logistical organisation which they did not have to check nor adapt (while mentioning that there could be hazards) when selling excursions.

On the other hand, the interviews showed the importance that they gave to the building of a personal relationship with the tourists themselves. Personal relationships were in this sense extraprofessional, and made it possible for the professional and the tourist to change from a "professional role" status ("excursion agent" on the one hand and "tourist" on the other hand) to a "individual subject" status. The majority of the Cubans professionals we interviewed talked about the pleasure they drew from establishing links of friendship, as they qualified them, with their customers. In these relationships, they found a personal benefit, such as "knowing people from different horizons", "exchanging points of view", or "spending good times among friends". It was, for some of them, their main reason for choosing to work in tourism<sup>7</sup>. It was once this person-to-person relationship was established that they would feel like offering an "individualized service", with a more qualitative satisfaction scope in terms of Zarifian's definition.

There again, the development of this interpersonal relationship was marked through the language used. The use of informal address forms of *tu* (possible as in Spanish as in French) or of the tourists' first name, for example, signalled not an excess of familiarity which the professional had forgotten to negotiate, but the offer to pass onto the level of the individual, as, in the same way, did the presence in the interaction of conversation moments whose contents dealt with private aspects (interest for the tourists' families and work, or for their opinions) and in which the two participants had equivalent statuses (the tourist being thus supposed to give personal information but also to listen with interest to the personal information provided by the professional).

For the Cuban professionals, an individualised tourist service was a plus they reserved to their "friends". One can see there an enlarged vision of service, passing from a conception of specific "tourism services" to a more social vision of "service" set in a complementary exchange, in the sense of "rendering service", "doing a favour". This exchange of service is not to be understood as necessarily commercial (in terms of the tourist coming from a rich country helping a friend from a poor country), as can be particularly highlighted, in the speech of the Cuban interviewees, the importance for the tourists to be *buena gente* (nice people)<sup>8</sup>, i.e., good-humoured in spite of the problems, ready to joke, offering a bottle of rum from time to time. One can also understand why French tourists are in general considered to be difficult and "not nice people", an opinion which the professionals we interviewed did not hide from us and can undoubtedly be explained, in part at least, by the differences in the

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<sup>7</sup> The French interviewees mentioned primarily « an interest in travelling ».

<sup>8</sup> «buena gente» in Cuban Spanish refers to a quality that links being "likeable", "serviceable", and "good-humoured".

conception and practice of service we have just discussed<sup>9</sup>. In other words, the Cuban professionals found it perfectly acceptable and valid to treat customers differently, according to their own likings, because it meant that they worked with and for friends, i.e people they knew and recognized as belonging to their “community”. It is this person-to-person relationship, which we have termed extraprofessional, which brings the complementarity which the French professionals place at the very base of their professionalism.

To conclude this first part, it seems to us that the analysis presented helps to clarify the way in which :

- the concept of tourism services refers partly to a cultural and socially shared understanding of the relationships between people, and of the relationships between products and people,
- each professional is brought to define a specification of "self" which takes into account the general framework of the cultural sub-domain that professional relationships determine.

The consequences are important for professionals who work in “international tourist services” such as those for whom we want to devise language training. The transformation of "self" which the development of an intercultural competence implies for them thus challenges various layers of the conceptual systems which constitute the basis for their behaviour, whether as professionals or as individuals. The question that rises then is how efficient the training they receive is in helping this multi-layered conceptual and behavioural reorganisation.

## **2. Does intercultural awareness lead to interculturally adaptive behaviour?**

Can one develop an “efficient” intercultural behaviour through developing an awareness of the intercultural dimensions of one’s professional situations? We have been led to question the direct link between awareness and behaviour postulated for the design of *Vacances Cubaines* described above. This interrogation had three sources:

- on the one hand, the observation, carried out in an empirical way by the EAEHT colleagues, that the intercultural aspects of international tourism interactions still caused problems in the effective practice of their former trainees;
- on the other hand, questions coming from some professionals themselves, who felt that they did not always interact as well as they wanted to ;

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<sup>9</sup> Another reason could be the difference in treating problems : by showing anger and frustration in terms of French customs (thus. putting oneself above the other), by appealing to understanding and help in Cuban terms (thus putting oneself below the other)

- thirdly, the interest in educational science approaches aiming at the training of teacher professional competences, in particular the approach known as "practice analysis".

We thus devoted part of our fieldwork to the observation of actual tourist/agent transactions in both contexts<sup>10</sup>. The observations for the French professionals concerned dealings with French people planning holidays abroad and took place in various tourist agencies in the French town of Nancy. On the Cuban side, the observations concerned five of the interviewed Cuban professionals while dealing with French tourists and took place in different hotels of the Cuban capital. Depending on the hotel, the excursion agent's desk was sometimes located in the hotel lobby, sometimes in a small office in the hotel ground floor area dedicated to commercial transactions (car rent, excursion selling, souvenir shops mainly).

The observation criteria for the two contexts were slightly different. For the French context, we aimed at registering the different "events" that built up a complete transaction between the agent and his/her customer, and the communicative tools (whether linguistic or kinetic) used by the agent to cope with these events. Our aim was to build detailed knowledge of tourist transactions situated in a monocultural context. For the Cuban observations, we selected transactions in an intercultural situation between a Cuban agent and a French tourist. We noted down both the events and the communicative behaviour of the two participants. As was mentioned at the beginning of this article, we recorded oral accounts which we asked the agents to give about the transactions observed, and, when they agreed to do so, the oral accounts the tourists themselves could give, trying to get the tourist's "evaluation" of the agent's communicative behaviour in terms of professional competence.

We then analysed the collected data to see whether the Cuban excursions agents actually activated some aspects of intercultural competence, more particularly in terms of the last two points of the definition given above:

- The ability to analyze, at the moment of intercultural contact, the difficulties which may occur in the interactive events in terms of cultural differences as much as in terms of individual differences;
- The ability to use behaviour strategies which enable them to adapt to cultural differences.

The comparison between data provided by the interviews and data provided by the observation sessions highlights how difficult it is for the Cuban professionals to transform declarative knowledge into strategic actions situated in the specific context of a specific social interaction. The knowledge acquired through awareness activities often seemed to remain just "words" for them. In the interviews, they did pay lip

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<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately we were not allowed to videotape the transactions. We observed by being present at the side of the professionals.

service to intercultural awareness, but their actions often had a monocultural basis, founded in their own cultural behaviour.

We will exemplify this point with the description of an professional situation observed in a Cuban context and compared with an equivalent situation which took place in a French context.

In Cuba, the scene occurred inside a three-star hotel, in a tourism services office which comprised 2 desks. At the beginning of the scene, the desk on the left was empty. At the right-hand side desk, a female excursion agent, Mayra, was engaged in a professional interaction with a French tourist who wished to register for an excursion. The interaction was in French. Then a woman, who was obviously Mayra's colleague as she was wearing the same clothes, walked into the office. While entering, Anita greeted out loudly in Spanish, then went up to Mayra, still engaged with the French tourist, and gave her a kiss. She greeted the tourist with the head, and he gave her a greeting sign back. Anita then put her handbag on Mayra's desk, smiled a broad smile to the tourist, and started telling Mayra, in Spanish, the problem of transport which led her to be late. Mayra turned to the tourist, told him "*c'est Anita, ma collègue, elle est en retard à cause des bus*" (This is Anita, my colleague, she is late because of the bus), then interacted in Spanish with Anita on her problem. Meanwhile, the French tourist first gazed at the posters on the walls, and then tried to look at the catalogue which lay open on Mayra's desk. While continuing the exchange with Anita, Mayra then prevented the tourist to take the catalogue, with a smile and a Cuban hand gesture (hand raised, palm directed to the interlocutor, fingers stretched) which means "wait". The exchange between Mayra and Anita lasted nearly one minute. Then Anita said, still in Spanish, "well, I will work now"<sup>11</sup>, turned with a smile to the tourist and settled at her desk. Also with a smile, Mayra turned to the tourist and told him "*la pauvre, elle a attendu son bus pendant deux heures et il n'est pas passé, elle a dû faire du stop*" (Poor girl, she waited for her bus for two hours but it did not show up and she had to hitchhike her way here). She then resumed the interaction about his registering for an excursion.

The observation of a similar situation in a tourist agency of French tourism witnessed the following events. Michelle, the agent who arrived late, entered the office. It was her state of hurry and the fact that she seemed to know her whereabouts that indicated that she was from the agency, as her clothes were not specific. She greeted a general "*bonjour*", passed in front of her colleague Patricia's desk, but behind the back of the tourist with whom Patricia was engaged. Without stopping, she met Patricia's eyes, and she then pointed at her watch and made a hand gesture (waving the hand sideways vertically) which indicates "I am in a difficult situation" for French people. This kinetic "discourse" was made without the tourist

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<sup>11</sup> « bueno, chica, me voy a trabajar »

witnessing it. Michelle then settled at her desk, her glance directed towards the papers that were there. Patricia, who was viewing a catalogue with the tourist when Michelle arrived, had raised her eyes on Michelle's arrival and seen her. She reacted to Michelle's kinetic discourse with a smile and a small movement of the face, which in French can mean "I sympathise". She then resumed her explanation to the tourist. The tourist briefly turned his head to look at Michelle while she was settling down at her desk, then brought his attention back to the interaction with Patricia.

The two anecdotes reveal a lot about the difference in practices between French professionals and Cuban professionals when dealing with the daily situations which their role implies. This difference is at the heart of the interrogations to which we, as researchers and trainers, must seek to answer in order to allow professionals to develop adequate behavioural schemes for intercultural interaction. We would like to focus on 3 points:

- the tension between the intra- and the intercultural elements of a situation
- the paradoxical injunction inherent to tourism services
- the training to be set up for securing transformation of the action

## 2.1. Tensions between intra- and intercultural elements

In her interview, Mayra showed herself to be conscious of the intercultural dimension of her work with French tourists. She mentioned on several occasions that she took into account the cultural differences that her training brought her to consider "normal", and gave priority to the intercultural logic in which she was trained:

(5) (CE1)

*« notre travail à nous c'est de leur rendre le séjour agréable, pour qu'ils aient envie de revenir ou d'envoyer leurs amis, alors c'est normal qu'on s'adapte à eux, ils viennent d'un autre pays, d'une autre culture, et nous il faut qu'on soit attentif à tout cela »*

("our job is to make their stay pleasant for them so that they will want to return or send their friends, so it is normal that one adapts to them, they come from another country, from another culture, and we must pay attention to that")

However, in her daily work as witnessed through the observation sessions, her decisions for action rested on compromises which tried to solve the tensions which rose between the intracultural elements and the intercultural elements of the events that happened. In the example presented here, some communicative elements were brought about by her colleague's behaviour as she interacted along "normal", i.e. Cuban monoculturally defined colleague-to-colleague relationships. These came under stress from the intercultural communicative dimension brought by the tourist. To try and alleviate the tension between the monocultural and intercultural elements of the situation, Mayra then chose to develop compensatory behaviour : specific

communicative micro-events, such as when she introduced her colleague to the tourist, specific interactive behaviour such as when she allowed Anita's interruption to last oneminute (a relatively long time for the suspension of an interaction for the tourist, as he commented during his debriefing <sup>12</sup>), on-the-spot negotiation of her role when she prevented the tourist to freely examine the catalogue, an act which also seems to show that contrarily to what she stated, she situated herself in the status which corresponds to a Cuban monocultural conception of tourism services.

The behaviour Mayra adopted then shows that, as our analysis above indicated, she gave priority to the interpersonal relationship with her colleague rather than to the professional interaction of service, although she had told us that she always favoured the intercultural element. In comparison, our French data, limited as it may be, shows that a French professional (in a monocultural context) has a very different reaction to a similar situation, and seems to give priority to the professional elements of the communication.

In reacting in the way she did, Mayra remained coherent with the values and priorities that Cuban culture seems to favour. Compensatory elements such as the ones she used are thus potentially inadequate intercultural behaviour because they can be viewed by tourists from different cultures as lack of professionalism, as indeed did some of the French tourists we debriefed in our fieldwork. If we use, as Weller (1998) does, Goffman's analysis of the relation of service as having both a technical dimension and a social dimension, this anecdote shows how difficult it is, in an intercultural situation, to differentiate between the two to offer adequate and successful service. Mayra's observed behaviour calls upon action "repertoires" which do not correspond to the way in which she says that she acts or wishes to act. This seems to indicate that she has not developed the intercultural behavioural competence which enables her to react to the problems created by the tensions between intra- and intercultural aspects of her professional situation in ways which favour an intercultural logic, even if her interview shows that she has developed ideas on what it is convenient to do in such situations. This also indicates that neither her initial training nor her professional activity afterwards have brought her to develop such behavioural competence: we are then brought to conclude that awareness in itself does not seem to suffice when behavioural change is expected.

## **2.2. A paradoxical injunction: to adapt and remain oneself**

Another element can be discussed through Mayra's example. The professionals in tourism services are subjected to what appears to be a paradoxical injunction: they must both be adaptable and remain themselves.

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<sup>12</sup> « il y a eu cette interruption, là, quand sa collègue est arrivée, je me suis demandé à un moment si j'allais pas faire une remarque, mais bon.. » (there was an interruption, when her colleague arrived late, at one time I felt like saying something, but..).



Service to tourists implies that professionals adapt to their customers in order to satisfy their expectations. But international tourism also relates to a desire to experience difference and to a search for exoticism which many tourists clearly state. In that sense, tourism professionals are also part of the game: they themselves have to be different enough and exotic enough to let tourists experience the “otherness” they are seeking. To adapt, but to remain oneself as representative of one own’s culture: how can this be done satisfactorily?

The Cuban excursion agents that we interviewed generally dealt with individuals or very small groups (from 2 to 4 persons). This gave considerable importance to the tourists’ individual characteristics. The professionals, in coherence with the training they had received, seemed to consider any individual characteristic as a cultural characteristic, and this was often linked to a stereotyping attitude, as was witnessed in their debriefing after the observation sessions. But, for such professionals, it may be interculturally dangerous to treat all French tourists as if they all belonged to a single cultural group “The French”, all the more so in the hotels which receive great numbers of French tourists. Professionals must also learn to adapt to the intracultural variety of the groups they are in contact with, which may require equivalent variety in their compensatory behaviour. To adapt and/or remain oneself: for which degree of intercultural differentiation?

We have already shown how the culturally based answers given on one hand by the Cuban professionals and on the other hand by the French professionals to the identity tensions inherent to the service situation differ. As described in the first part of the article, the French professionals seem to define and limit very clearly the contours of the occupational identity they will put to play in the interaction, whereas the Cuban professionals try to enter as soon as possible in a relational mode which gets rid of the occupational dimension and situates the interaction as that of two persons acting within a framework of social proximity. Mayra’s compensatory actions seemed to be rooted in this positive dimension given to the person-to-person modality: her actions aimed at bringing the tourist into her social network (by introducing her colleague and explaining her problem, for example). Her colleague’s behaviour too testified of such a vision (she greeted the tourist and she smiled at him). To adapt and/or remain oneself: how can representations be separated from actions?

Our research findings have brought us to realise that awareness raising does not automatically and directly create adequate conditions for behavioural development and action change, because behavioural development entails that the person must:

- have the conceptual tools to reflect on his/her action as performed in the hic and nunc context of a specific situation, first in relation with his/her intentions for acting, then in terms of the production of “tourism services”, i.e. in relation with the tourist’s expectations and understanding of the situation,
- be able to activate the behavioural tools relevant to a given situation.

Thus, the training of a professional who must be able to perform in an intercultural context requests to go beyond awareness raising towards the development of a repertoire of action schemes available to adequate implementation. Some of these schemes may be completely foreign to the intercultural interaction itself (such as, in Mayra's case, asking her colleague to adopt specific behaviours so that she may perform her intercultural tasks satisfactorily), but most of them will directly concern the modalities and forms of the service interaction. This potential for action implies, in turn, the development of evaluation criteria in order to insure adequate decision-making for action in any given intercultural context. Some of these criteria can then be explicitly negotiated with culturally different customers, others can remain personal to the professionals.

### **Which training for behavioural and action change?**

The results of our research show that raising the professionals' awareness about the intercultural dimension of the service interaction stays short of the ultimate aim of bringing about behavioural and action change. Awareness raising does have some influence, but for most professionals this influence is limited to a declaration of intention. Then how can their action schemes be changed?

An answer to that question can be given through the approach termed "practice analysis" developed in particular by researchers in ergology<sup>13</sup>. This approach is based on theories which consider human development as a process which neither gives priority to action nor to reflection, but is based on the co-building of action and reflection. In other words, it is not through action alone that one learns how to act better, but neither is it solely through reflecting on action. If there is to be behavioural development, one needs a learning device which (1) allows for awareness, (2) gives sufficient room to activity, and (3) organizes a verbal analysis of this activity. The formalization through linguistic activity is a necessary and important aspect, as it allows for the building or the reorganization of a coherent representation system, which constitutes the conceptual framework for activity.

In the practice analysis approach, the linguistic formalization can be performed either through speaking with oneself, or through speaking with another person who, acting as an external reference, will facilitate the process of change. According to this, our project, as researchers and as trainers, is now to develop practice analysis procedures which make it possible to set up a learning environment in which the trainees are led to confront their representation systems and their action schemes in two ways:

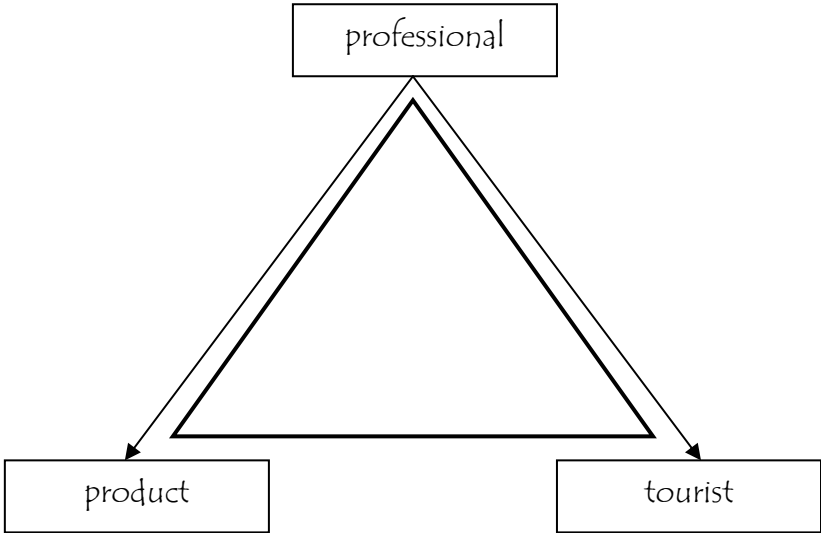
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<sup>13</sup> as described in research works such as those of Jean-Paul Bronckart and Laurent Fillietaz, or Daniel Faïta (see bibliography)

- through a confrontation with other persons, which may imply, for example, to confront the analyses that professionals from different cultures have of the same situation, or to confront the analysis of a novice and that of an experienced professional, or the analysis of a professional with that of a tourist ;
- through a confrontation with oneself, i.e. confronting the person's representation system at various moments, so that intentions and actions may gradually merge into a coherent pattern.

**ANNEXES**

Figure 1. : The tourism triangle



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