

Social Interaction Across the Ocean: Conflicting Perspectives

In the first issue of 1983, the *Newsletter* opened an important debate on the *Obstacles to International Communication in Developmental Psychology*. It examined several problems that seem to be well represented in the concrete case we wish to discuss here. In doing so, we will also suggest a further hypothesis concerning the processes underlying these problems.

As we had published research in several languages (English, French, Italian, Dutch, German, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, and Hungarian), we were particularly interested by a paper in the same field published in a major North American developmental journal reporting the results of an experiment testing a particular hypothesis. It was quite satisfying for us to read in this paper that this hypothesis, which we had already verified several times in the mid-seventies, was confirmed once more.

However, we were slightly surprised to find that the article lacked all reference to our previous work. We considered this to be a shortcoming since we entertained the modest claim that readers of the cited article, especially those who might wish to carry on further research in this area, could benefit from becoming acquainted with our previous experiments involving a larger range of paradigms and a more elaborated framework. So we decided to write a four page theoretical rejoinder that would sum up the essential part of our work. We felt this enterprise to be all the more legitimate because the authors knew of our work before writing their paper. In fact, one of them had mentioned it in her Ph.D. thesis which was at the source of this article and therefore the resemblance between their experimental paradigm and one of ours did not seem entirely fortuitous.

But then, communication problems started. Beginning with material problems: our first mailing of three copies of this rejoinder most probably got lost. Our second mailing, five months later, was acknowledged rapidly by an associate editor of the journal to which it was sent. But it was not accepted for publication because, as was pointed out, it did not meet the following two criteria: "a) Does the rejoinder present a theoretical and empirical contribution? b) Does the rejoinder uncover and correct a fatal flaw in the original article, that if left unaltered would deform future research in the field?"

We do not question such criteria and we admit that, *in a certain sense*, they have been rigorously applied to our rejoinder. But in a certain sense only. For it is true that, *strictly speaking*, neither of the two criteria is met if one considers that the paper eliciting this rejoinder presents ideas that are similar to ours and furthermore that they use an experimental paradigm that is also similar to one of ours. Still, we believe that the case is more important and that too narrow a conception of these criteria may hinder

the normal development of scientific cooperation and even cast doubts on the universality of its enterprise.

We are conscious that our point can hardly be understood by those researchers who tend to think that a scientific fact has no historical reality and that its meaning is completely independent from the context of all the exchanges, discussions, and controversial debates that take place among scientists. In such a perspective it is quite coherent to reject the publication of our proposed rejoinder (and it would even be logical to reject a rejoinder that would demonstrate that a published experiment is nothing but the exact replication of a previous experiment unknown to the authors of the publication).

But our conception of the process of scientific investigation and of the construction of scientific facts is quite different. We consider that the scientific pursuit of understanding, just as the development of cognition in children, takes place within social relationships which can also extend across the ocean. In such a perspective, even a simple reference may be an important source of information, considering that it gives the reader access to a set of past researches that widen his understanding of the phenomena under study.

Perhaps this is a question of faith: either one believes that the international scientific community is not a myth but an ideal to be pursued, and then all reasonable measures (including perhaps the publication of abridged versions of rejoinders) should be taken to show the interconnections existing between different researches; or one believes that such a universalistic conception of the scientific community is essentially a myth, and then one must admit that some scholars may be content with establishing a communication network that is limited to those colleagues who share and adhere to the same basic principles.

The story of this rejoinder has the merit to draw our attention to the existence of different conceptions of the nature of scientific communication. And this is why we now propose the hypothesis that one of the main obstacles to scientific communication is precisely the existence of these different conceptions of scientific communication, of scientific community, and perhaps even of the scientific undertaking in general.

The reader will be kind enough, we grant, to excuse the immodesty by which we have transformed our personal story into a general issue.

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