

"Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication"
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internationalization; advances in transportation and communication technologies; changing demographics; the rise in populism, localism, and xenophobia; conflict and peace; ethics; and personal growth and responsibility. We then review the characteristics of an ethical intercultural communicator.

DEFINITIONS

There are many definitions of intercultural communication. Each reflects the author's disciplinary roots and understandings of communication and culture, core elements that are explored in more detail in the next three chapters.

Intercultural and interpersonal communication

Speech communication specialists have offered various definitions of **intercultural communication**. Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) define it straightforwardly as 'the exchange of information between individuals who are unlike culturally' (p. 1), while Jandt (2018) refers to it as 'communication between people and groups of diverse culture, subculture, or subgroup identifications' (p. G-4). Samovar and colleagues (2012) provide a more precise definition, drawing attention to elements in the communication process: 'Intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems differ enough to influence the communication event' (p. 8).

Applied linguists have also offered their understandings of intercultural communication, accentuating the linguistic dimension. For Müller-Jacquier (2004), intercultural communication denotes 'a peculiar communication situation: the varied language and discourse strategies people from different cultural backgrounds use in direct, face-to-face situations' (p. 295). Jack and Phipps (2005) understand intercultural communication to be 'a participatory set of actions in the world', that is, 'dialogical and material exchanges between members of cultural groupings' (p. 181). Their definition highlights the interpersonal, dynamic nature of intercultural dialogue and interaction. For these applied linguists, **cultural membership**, or affiliation with a cultural group, is 'marked variously by race, ethnicity, nationality, language, class, age and gender' (p. 181). (The complex relationship between language, culture, and identity is explored in Chapter 5.)

An example of intercultural communication is a South Korean university student in Seoul interacting in English with a Swedish exchange student. In this intercultural situation, neither of them is using a first language and both have been socialized in a different linguistic and cultural environment. In another example, an American exchange student in Oxford is chatting on Skype with an Australian friend in Brisbane. While both speakers are using their first language, they have been socialized in different cultural contexts and are using a different variety of English, so this, too, is an intercultural encounter. In another scenario, an elderly Buddhist monk in Siem Reap is conversing with a young Cambodian female who is a devout Christian and a chef by profession. While they share the same nationality and ethnicity, these interlocutors have different religious backgrounds and also differ in terms of age, occupation, and gender. This, too, is an example of intercultural communication.

Conceptions of intercultural communication have shifted over time, and today more scholars are embracing critical notions of both culture and intercultural communication. **Critical**

intercultural communication studies examine the role of power and positioning in language and intercultural communication within a particular context (e.g., sociopolitical, historical, linguistic, cultural). Critical intercultural communication scholars (e.g., Adrian Holliday, Ingrid Piller, Kathryn Sorrells) reject static notions of culture and cultural groups. Advocating broader, more flexible conceptualizations, they rally against the **culture as nation perspective**, in which nations (or large communities) are depicted as homogeneous, largely ignoring the diversity within.

For this text, **intercultural communication** generally refers to interpersonal communication between individuals (or groups) who have been socialized in different cultural (and, in most cases, linguistic) environments. Cultural differences may include such aspects as age, class, gender, ethnicity, language, race, nationality, and physical/mental ability. **Interpersonal communication** denotes 'a distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence, usually for the purpose of managing relationships' (Beebe *et al.* 2018: 3). Therefore, this form of communication is concerned with the personal dimension in human interactions such as how people use verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., discourse strategies, gestures) to communicate their ideas and feelings and accomplish their personal and relational goals (e.g., develop and maintain friendships).

Intercultural interaction may occur in face-to-face encounters, through written discourse, or online (e.g., Skype, Facebook, WeChat) through the use of innovative technology and social media. Intercultural communication often involves a second language, with either one or both interlocutors using a language that is not their mother tongue. Even if the individuals speak the same first language, if they have been socialized in different communities in different parts of the world, variations in accents, expressions, politeness norms, and worldviews may influence the communication process.

Genuine intercultural communication goes well beyond narrow, simplified notions of cultural membership. In the 'culture as nation' orientation, people from a particular country (or community) are assumed to possess the same characteristics. This reductionist stance can easily lead to overgeneralizations (e.g., the Japanese are modest; Germans are overly direct). For mutually satisfying intercultural relations, it is vital for us to regard ourselves and others as complex cultural beings with multiple identities and attributes. (Chapter 6 delves into the 'dark sides of identity', including the harmful effects of stereotyping.)

Cross-cultural and intercultural communication studies

While the terms 'cross-cultural' and 'intercultural' are often used interchangeably, different research foci are associated with each. **Cross-cultural communication research** typically compares and contrasts native discourse and communication behaviors (or styles) in one cultural context with those in another (Gudykunst 2003). For example, the conflict negotiation strategies employed by Japanese administrators in a hospital in Tokyo may be compared with those of Irish administrators in a Dublin hospital. In another cross-cultural communication study, a researcher might examine the discourse communication strategies of Dutch business students in English-medium case discussions in Amsterdam and compare them with the discourse communication strategies of Taiwanese business students in English-medium case discussions in Taipei.

In contrast, **intercultural communication research** typically investigates interpersonal interaction between individuals (or groups) from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This intercultural contact may be face to face or involve communication through

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written discourse. With advances in technology, more researchers are also investigating intercultural interactions that take place online (e.g., Skype calls, chat groups, email, second language classes with online intercultural exchange). In their research, scholars may examine the verbal or nonverbal behavior of people engaged in intercultural communication or perhaps focus on the language and intercultural attitudes and perceptions of the interlocutors.

Using a variety of techniques, intercultural communication researchers may also observe and analyze classroom interactions involving students from diverse backgrounds. At a university in Finland, for example, academic discussions between Chinese, Dutch, and Finnish business majors in English-medium classes may be video recorded. To better understand elements that appear to influence the communication process, transcriptions of this intercultural event may then be subjected to **discourse analysis**, that is, 'the close study of language in use' (Taylor 2001: 5). Paltridge (2012: 2) offers a more detailed explanation of this mode of research:

Discourse analysis examines patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between the social and the cultural contexts in which it is used. Discourse analysis also considers the ways that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourse.

As they examine transcripts, discourse analysts may seek to understand how intercultural communication is facilitated or hindered by the discourse (e.g., communication strategies) of the participants. Alternatively, scholars may review the videotapes and focus their attention on nonverbal dimensions (e.g., gaze, gestures, touching).

An intercultural researcher could also track the language and intercultural learning of young people who move temporarily from one geographic setting to another in the pursuit of higher education. Cultural adjustment/adaptation, social networks, intercultural friendships and romance, identity negotiation, and culture/language learning strategies in a new environment are just some of the many interests and concerns of interculturalists. All of these topics (and many others) are explored in this text.

IMPERATIVES TO STUDY LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

There are many reasons to become more knowledgeable about intercultural communication and the role(s) of language in intercultural relations. Because of globalizing forces, internationalization, transportation and technological advances, conflict situations, changing demographics, a rise in populism, and the fear or hatred of foreigners, ethical intercultural communication is more imperative than at any time in the history of humans. We need to learn how to adapt and thrive in unfamiliar situations and contribute to our planet in a constructive, peaceful manner. Through interactions with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, we can learn more about ourselves, reduce our fear of the unfamiliar, and discover respectful ways to build and nurture constructive intercultural relationships.