

## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: PROBLEMS AND CONSEQUENCES

**Formulation and justification of the relevance of the problem.** Nations and people of the world are increasingly interconnected and mutually interdependent. Globally, most cities and countries are becoming more diverse internally, with citizens and residents of varying races, religions, ethnicities and national backgrounds. Meanwhile, greater the risk is associated with economic or political aloofness and social isolation. All of these social forces are fostering increasingly more study of intercultural communication.

When people face a communicative (or operative) situation with an unexpectedly different «other» or «others», their deep, usually hidden assumptions may not work as well anymore. They have to form guesses on how to proceed and adapt; in other words, they form fictions. And then, more often than not, they get it wrong and that is what communication and life is all about. At best, they recognize what went wrong and correct their messages and reactions in creative ways; at worst, they deny, withdraw, become aggressive and dismissive. They form generalizations and quick judgments about the «other» which then, with a little or much help from some fear, become hardened (an obvious metaphor). On the dark (another metaphor) side, stereotyping, prejudices, stigmas, scapegoats, enemies, victims of «mobbing», etc. are the result. On the lighter side, they idealize individuals into heroes and create positive, rigid stereotypes of groups and cultures [2, p.1-2].

**Analysis of recent researches and publications.** L.Samovar and R.Porter point out that

as cultures differ from one another, the communication practices and behaviours of people will inevitably vary as a result of their different perceptions of the world. Intercultural communication, more precisely then, is defined as the study of communication between people whose «cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough» to alter their communication [6, p. 70].

Intercultural communication or communication between people of different cultural backgrounds has always been and will always remain an important precondition of human co-existence on earth. The **purpose** of this paper is to provide a framework of factors that are important in intercultural communication within a general model of human communication.

According to E.Ayee, intercultural and cross-cultural communication can be used interchangeably. However, we find it necessary to show a slight differentiation between the two [1, p. 2].

Intercultural communication involves interaction between people from different cultures whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter a communication event [6, p. 15].

**Presentation of the main material.** Intercultural communication is also characterized by the fact that the people are simultaneously similar to and different from each other [5, p. 65]. For example, the cultures differ in values, language, nonverbal behavior, and conflict resolution, etc. However, similarities also exist in the cultures involved, for example in human experiences and in the fact that

people communicate. This is why emphasizing only differences can easily lead to stereotyping and prejudice. Emphasizing only similarities, however, can lead people to ignore important cultural variations that exist [5, p. 65]. Cross-cultural communication, on the other hand, involves a comparison of interactions among people from two different cultures, such as how people in the United States communicate differently from people in China [4, p. 54].

Five reasons for studying intercultural communication include (1) better understanding your own identity, (2) enhancing your personal and social interactions, (3) helping solve cultural misunderstandings, miscommunication, and mistrusts, (4) valuing the ways it enriches the quality of our civilization, and (5) becoming effective citizens of our national communities. Intercultural communication influences the communication model first by its effect on the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview of senders and receivers; second, by its effect on verbal and nonverbal messages; and, third, by the influences it has on the historical setting, relational setting, and a person's position within a speech community.

Specifically, intercultural communication is defined as communication, and the study of it, among peoples of different cultural, ethnic and tribal backgrounds. Because of the inherent differences between the message sender/encoder and the message receiver/decoder, the risk of misunderstanding is particularly high in intercultural situations.

The symbolic aspect of communication and its reliance on encoding and decoding are particularly important in intercultural communication, which encompasses both verbal and nonverbal elements. An important aspect of intercultural communication is an understanding of social roles and expectations within various cultures. Specifically this refers to role relationships.

The manner of expressing oneself with words, of communicating with words, varies greatly from one culture to another and from one person to another in a single culture. To be speaking the same language is not necessarily to speak «the same language». Each person has a preferred way of communicating. The preferred communication style, just like more general cultural values, provides the basic strategies we use to open conversations with others and also the background standards with which we interpret and evaluate their communication – that is, our communication style shapes how we perceive and react to communication events. A variety of communication styles have been developed over centuries and generations, closely connected with cultural values, norms and behavior of associated groups and individuals. To learn about these styles, to become conscious of one's own styles, and to be able to recognize the styles used by our conversational

partners greatly contributes to better intercultural understanding. As with perception, no communication style is better than any other and all styles allow for the discussion of all subjects.

To be able to recognize communication styles and to respect each of them is the first step in developing intercultural competence. To be able to modify one's listening strategies in order to understand meanings communicated in a style different from one's own is the next step. The final step is to be able to adapt one's own communication style to different contexts and, little by little, learn to communicate in styles which match those of another.

What happens when a person chooses to live for months or even years in a new culture? At first, many people find the new world interesting and seem to function quite adequately. But eventually signs of resistance appear, especially for people who truly attempt to integrate themselves with the new culture. Such integration requires us to modify, even to abandon central behaviors, beliefs and values which give meaning to life and which help to define our identity.

Whether simple or fundamental, a huge number of changes – in communication styles, in eating habits, in language, in perceptions, in dress – surround people who live in new cultural contexts. And familiar styles, habits, perceptions, and dress are either absent or are misunderstood. Every hour, every day the person is pushed to learn, to adapt, and to develop ways to survive and function in the new world. From the moment we stop clinging to our culture of origin, we open the door to the new world which surrounds us. The process of learning and adapting in a new culture is very tiring and unsettling. It generates uncertainty, stress and resistance, and thus requires a great deal of energy and strength, especially for people who expect themselves to carry on in their work and social life. Yet this energy disappears at some stage of the process.

Until recently our nation has not learned, nor has it needed to learn, to be multiculturally competent. The study of intercultural communication will not just unlock doors closed for generations; it will open those doors and, thus, resolve misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mistrust through honest, open, positive, healthy communication. People not only fear, but they also distrust the unknown. Trust is gained through knowledge and understanding [3, p. 61-62].

To investigate whether it is possible to avoid any of the problems of intercultural communication, it is suitable to start with the communication situation itself and analyze why misunderstanding and conflict arise.

If you do this, you find that it should be possible to put in preventative measures related to a number of the factors which according to the analysis given

above lie behind the problems that can arise. As most of these actions are found to require education, they will be goals for education in intercultural communication.

Some people do not know about other cultures, and some do not want to know. There is no doubt that both ignorance (lack of knowledge) and naiveté (lack of sophistication) can be important barriers to intercultural communication.

According to S. Hybels ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are the main barriers to intercultural communication. These are barriers because each is constructed around a judgment made before any communication takes place that then biases the communication that follows. All communication has a past, present, and future; barriers are part of the past that influence the communication that takes place now and affect all that follows in the future [3, p. 67]. To deal with barriers, nondominant group members use one or more of three main strategies to get what they want from dominant-group members: assimilation, accommodation, or separation. Five ways to improve intercultural communication are: (1) pay attention to your own words and actions; (2) control your assumptions; (3) engage in transpection – the process of empathizing across cultures; (4) gain knowledge; and (5) gain experience.

There are some guidelines drawn from communication research and practice that can foster better communication among various cultures.

– Understand your own culture and communication variables such as social role, symbolism, thought patterns, worldview, silence and particularly the various nonverbal aspects of communication (chronemics, kinesics, proxemics and so on).

– Learn the communication rules for the other culture by reflecting on its approach to nonverbal and other aspects of communication. Be sensitive to verbal and nonverbal language codes, and use language appropriate for the culture or co-culture with which you are trying to communicate.

– Approach intercultural communication with a positive attitude and with the goal of understanding the other side rather than preaching about or defending your own.

– Avoid ethnocentrism that interprets everything on the basis of your own social and cultural values. Instead, try to understand how a concept, product or practice fits into the other culture.

– Be flexible, and be on the lookout for cues that suggest you should change your own communication style or your interpretation of the communication style of the other person.

Cross-cultural interaction and experience enable us to see what other cultures can teach us about the world. Our own cultural experience is not enough to conclude that the way we do things, the way we

think, the values we adhere to, and the way we communicate are the best and the standards that everyone else should adopt. Therefore, while the study of intercultural communication should begin as a journey into an unfamiliar culture and end as a journey into our own culture, we should understand that the study of cultures is actually the study of people, people in specific cultural contexts. Further, to lose sight of the humanity at the core of the topic is to lose sight of something fundamentally important in understanding communication between people from different cultures. It is easy to study culture and intercultural communication from a theoretical, or abstract and technical, perspective and to ignore the fact that we are dealing with human beings with personalities, feelings, histories, struggles, hopes, and dreams. Our study of human cultures not only must expose us to knowledge that helps us understand people who are different from us but must also challenge us to find ways to accept and love them.

**Conclusions and prospects for further researches of direction.** The first reason for studying intercultural communication is to develop sensitivity to various cultural heritages and backgrounds to better understand your own identity. The broader your outlook, the more tolerant and accommodating you become. The chances of having close, personal, and interactions with those different from you are increasing daily. Such relationships help you learn about the world, break stereotypes, and acquire new skills.

The process of learning and adapting in a new culture is very tiring and unsettling. It generates uncertainty, stress and resistance, and thus requires a great deal of energy and strength.

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