Intercultural Communication Studies

A Special Issue on

Intercultural Communication in Context

Introduction

Shirley Willihnganz
University of Louisville
and
Margaret Usha D'Silva
University of Louisville

Intercultural communication occurs in a variety of contexts, and because context itself is not a static concept, it shapes interaction into a kaleidoscope of ever-changing patterns. These patterns are endlessly interesting and complex, and in this special issue of *Intercultural Communication Studies,* our authors explore how context influences intercultural communication. The articles in this issue explore a range of topics, from how one manages identity in a place that is not home, to how one uses cultural knowledge to persuade another to follow a preferred course of action.

Included in this issue are fifteen articles. Although their topics are far ranging, they can be loosely organized into four related areas: mediated contexts and cultural identity, competency in interpersonal and business contexts, changing perspectives and policies in education, and intercultural sensitivity and intercultural conflict.

In the first section, Summers, Weber, Monberg and D'Silva focus on how individuals and the media interact in the construction of identity and our understanding of truth. Penny Summers' article, "Cultural Truth and the First Amendment: Your Truth Better than Mine," explores the notion of "truth" and examines what happens to freedom of speech when the individual right of expression collides with a communitarian view in which public speech should be restricted. If truth is largely interpreted whose truth is most valued when conflicts between definitions arise?

In his article, "Shanghai Youth's Strategic Mobilization of Individualistic Values: Constructing Cultural Identity in the Age of Spiritual Civilization," Ian Weber examines Shanghai youth reaction to the Chinese Government's packaging of ideal culture as evidenced in the television broadcasts and spiritual civilization program. He focuses on how individualistic and collectivistic values are intertwined in the Chinese youth interpretation of television programming.

John Monberg compares media regulation in France and the U.S. to deepen our understanding of and re-invision the social possibilities of communication. Margaret D'Silva continues with the theme of global media and specifically looks at the interplay between identity in the local community and the global world of systems in a small Indian town.

The second section moves us from the mediated context to the interpersonal one. Fong and Philipsen, Uematsu, and Hashimoto look at intercultural competency in interpersonal and business contexts. Mary Fong and Gerry Philipsen examine the persuasive tactics used by Chinese immigrant parents with their adult children regarding marriage and caring for the elderly. They find a strong preference for the use of indirect strategies: study participants only used direct strategies if those were not effective. The authors conclude that 'Dim Sum,' translated very loosely as a kind of caring, is important in Chinese relationships, and the preference for indirect strategies reflects the participants desire to influence the other through face-saving strategies likely to maintain harmony.

Shigeo Uematsu uses Maynard's taxonomy, with some revisions, to analyze the use of back channels between native and non-native speakers in English and Japanese. In particular, he looks for evidence of 'convergence' in interaction between high and low back channelers.

Second language learners need to possess language knowledge and pragmatic knowledge to solve communication problems in a target culture. Reiko Hashimoto explores this issue in the article "Problem Solving in Cross-Cultural Communication Situations."

In the third section Chang-fu Chang, Sean O'Halloran, Alan Cogen, Robert Schatz, Nancy Sullivan, Beverly Flanigan, and Autumn Black, and Branson Woodard introduce a fresh perspective on learning and education. In his essay, "Civilization or Barbarism? Deconstructing Logocentrism in the works of several communication scholars," Chang-fu Chang deconstructs logocentrism in the works of prominent communication scholars such as Innis, McLuhan, Havelock Ong, and Hall.

Sean O'Halloran's article examines the Hong Kong government's mandatory language policy, and questions how a system of monolingual elite schools will be able to serve Hong Kong's multi-lingual needs. He suggests the need for research into the development of a bilingual teaching code that is responsive to students' needs.

The question of how students should be educated is addressed again by Alan Cogen. He questions how university students can be sensitized to issues of interculturalism. He presents a program for teaching multicultural literacy and intercultural conflict resolution using a cooperative learning group process. He argues that programs such as the one he and his students implemented are essential to global business endeavors.

In their article "Attitudes toward English Language Legislation: Predictors and Rationales," Schatz, Sullivan, Flannigan and Black explore people's attitudes toward English Language Legislation. They use statistical methods to investigate the relationship between strength of ethnic identification and support or opposition to ELL.

Branson Woodard begins his article "Postmodern Disintegration and Communicative Presence: Toward another Perspective on Words and Things" by posing a broad question: Do language and cross-cultural communication have any transcendent origin, definable aesthetic, or higher meaning? He examines randomly selected Nigerian fictional prose and uses incarnational theory to provide you with a thoughtful analysis.

In the fourth section, Kapoor, Konsky, Blue and Drager, Konsky, Kapoor, Blue and Kapoor, and Chapel, examine issues of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural conflict.

Suraj Kapoor, Janet Blue, Catherine Konsky, and Michael Drager examine the question of "universal values," and statistically study the utility of using Schwartz and Bilsky's measure of universal values to assess intercultural sensitivity in an individualistic-collectivist setting. Their analyses suggest that respondents found it difficult to respond to questionnaire items as though they were residents of a second culture. They conclude that while using values as a measure of intercultural sensitivity has potential, the individualism/collectivism typology should be refined.

In the essay "Religion and Communication: A study of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity," Catherine Konsky, Usha Kapoor, Janet Blue, and Suraj Kapoor, examine the principles of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity for individualist/collectivist value orientations. They find that the three major world religions advocate collectivist values over individualist values.

William Chapel uses a case study approach to apply Aristotelian persuasive strategy to the trails of the Apostle Paul. Chapel argues that the language, logic and intercultural communication competence exhibited in those trails present a model for resolving modern day disputes. Specifically, Chapel suggests that persuasive messages constructed from individual trustworthiness and solid proof provide a logic that is as effective today as it was in ancient times.

The authors of these articles grapple with difficult and important issues and their efforts increase our understanding of how intercultural communication affects and is affected by context. We invite you to partake of the scholarly efforts of your colleagues.