such as anxiety and embarrassment can motivate a person to exit rather than persevere within a difficult situation. Similarly, when individuals feel distress or anger about having to switch behavior, these negative emotions can "leak" into their performance of the behavior, further undermining effectiveness. People in such a state are often quite inwardly focused on their own emotions and on resolving their emotional state rather than on trying to accommodate the needs of a client or address the demands of a difficult situation.

In the end, code switching requires flexibility and creativity. But the paradox for many people trying to engage in intercultural code switching is that they have to do it under high levels of emotional intensity and pressure, making flexibility quite difficult to achieve. To address this problem, new research is being conducted about how people can escape this difficult bind. It seems that one of the most effective ways of coping with the challenges of intercultural code switching is to personalize an individual's behavior in a new culture so that while it still conforms to expectations for appropriate behavior in that setting it also feels authentic and genuine to the person. This idea of "having your cake" (keeping your personal integrity) and "eating it too" (being simultaneously effective and appropriate) is the motivation behind new research on authenticity, coping strategies, and successful intercultural code switching.

Andrew Molinsky

See also Co-Creation of Meaning; Culture Learning; Empathy; High-Context and Low-Context Communication; Intercultural Nonverbal Communication

Further Readings


culture, while retaining the adjectival and adverbial forms (as in cultural patterns or culturally influenced). The intercultural communication field has helped to broaden and diffuse the idea of culture as a concept that overlaps with the culturally imposed categories of race, ethnicity, and social class; age and generation; gender and sexual orientation; and differently abled people. Interculturalists also speak of institutional cultures (e.g., specific organizational cultures) when considering interpersonal and intergroup communication. Any one person may identify with many such categories, suggesting intersecting cultural identities.

As the name suggests, the focus of intercultural communication is on the “inter.”

Intercultural communication refers to what transpires when people engage in communication with others whose experiences, assumptions, sense making, and behaviors are different. The emphasis in this field is not on objective culture, including material culture, much of which is popularly identified as the whole of culture, such as art, literature, food, architecture, and recorded histories. Important as these are, they are not central to intercultural communication. Nor should one assume that human communication is a neutral, transparent activity to which one can add culture. Intercultural communication concerns the process through which shared meanings are co-created through engagement. These shared meanings are also directly affected by subjective culture—cultural assumptions, expectations, and behaviors so deeply learned that they are easily imagined to be human nature. Individuals may even assume that culturally influenced ways of thinking, which have been learned from and shared with their communities of origin, are a matter of common sense. Intercultural communication is about a process, not products; its complexity and dynamics are manifest for reasons that are largely internalized and often not within one’s conscious awareness.

There are patterns of behavior that distinguish one group of people from another: language, most obviously, and dialect, which is more subtle. There are also culturally influenced patterns of nonverbal behavior of all kinds—not just obvious differences in gestures but also norms regarding the display of emotions in culturally defined contexts, how people learn to regard time, or how they organize and occupy space, for instance. Furthermore, patterns such as how people have learned to reason, to argue or not argue, and even to learn are strongly influenced by their cultural backgrounds. People may describe cultural patterns when generalizing about what they learn from and share with others, and such generalizations are helpful in the understanding of intercultural communication.

The intercultural communication field grew out of a recognition that some of the same points of tension and conflict in communication were observed irrespective of the specific people and backgrounds involved. This is the realm of the culture general (perhaps more appropriately called the interculturally general perspective of interculturalists), in contrast to the detailed, culture-specific information that has characterized other social science studies, where research focuses on a single culture. Culture-general frames anticipate possible patterns of interaction without necessarily requiring detailed knowledge of the backgrounds of those with whom one works. Conversely, an area specialist may know much about the historical and cultural histories of a people but still not be effective interculturally.

Although intercultural communication is often expressed at the interpersonal level, there are also systemic histories and practices that characterize many intercultural encounters. The experience of privilege or discrimination is also a part of a cultural background that affects one’s sense of agency and self-efficacy. In the field of intercultural communication studies, some have emphasized the interpersonal, while others have emphasized the intergroup dynamics that often center on power that favors one group over another. Each emphasis is important.

The field of intercultural communication has acquired a considerable research history, and in the process of research, learning, and application, the goal extends beyond the learning of new information. Rather, the emphasis from the beginning has been on an attitude of self-reflection, cultural modesty or humility (being open to learning from and with others rather than telling others what to do), and appreciating the importance of empathy, or what some in psychology call the theory of mind, shifting one’s own perspective in an effort to see things as another person might. There is an assumption that each person’s idea of reality is socially constructed through the influence of the
categories and grammar that languages provide us, as well as through the person’s personal and social histories.

Intercultural communication competence is a term that has gained attention in the early part of the 21st century throughout much of the world. How to characterize such competence is a challenging task. The Association of American Colleges and Universities developed a framework of intercultural knowledge and competence as a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts. Significant in this statement is the recognition that knowledge is not the same as, and may not lead to, competence; it calls attention to the need for motivations and actions (skills) that are appropriate (acceptable to those involved) and effective.

Conversely, there has been an effort to identify and develop more effective responses to expressions of prejudice, stereotyping, individual and systemic discrimination, and other negative behavior that requires far more than merely labeling such behavior as wrong.

**Origins and Development of the Field of Intercultural Communication**

Identifying the beginnings of anything as broad and complex as a field of study is inevitably somewhat arbitrary, as there are always earlier events, individuals, and ideas that contributed their influences. With that recognition, the origin of intercultural communication is often identified with the publication in 1959 of *The Silent Language* by the U.S. anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Hall’s work grew out of his personal and professional life in the culturally complex southwestern region of the United States and, after the end of World War II, his undertaking an assignment at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute to find better ways to prepare those working in the diplomatic service to be more culturally effective. Hall learned that some of the same challenges and complaints that he heard over and over again when he visited embassies abroad were not so different from many of the issues he had experienced in intergroup relations in the United States. Hall was the first to use the term *intercultural communication*, and though he never intended to launch a new field of research and practice, his writings had that effect. He also introduced concepts and coined terms for them, which added to a vocabulary that emerged in the following two decades. Hall sought to reach a broad public, not just other academics in his field, and he hoped to raise awareness and influence behavior. It is not surprising that the academic home for intercultural communication was not in anthropology but in what are now called departments of communication, which has a long history as a pragmatic, process-centered, applied field. Similarly, many programs in business and management have introduced courses in intercultural communication.

During the 1960s and 1970s, considerable attention was given to international contexts—international development personnel, U.S. Peace Corps volunteers, international students and their advisers, study-abroad programs, and the increasing internationalization of the business sector.

During the same period, the Civil Rights Movement helped transform the nation and its institutions, inspiring other social movements for inclusion and equality. The changing demographics in the workplace, schools, and elsewhere, reinforced by changes in the law, affected the national consciousness. Domestic demands for inclusion, fair treatment, justice, and social change, which are goals basic to the meaning of intercultural communication, were rarely at the forefront of the goals of international intercultural communication in its early years. However, the changing demographics resulting from immigration, refugee resettlement, international education, corporate transfers, globalization of business, and outsourcing of personnel make the notion of a clear-cut distinction between domestic and global obsolete. Moreover, the underlying perspectives, models, and concepts of the intercultural communication field serve the goals of both those who are most concerned with domestic diversity and those whose focus is on intercultural communication across national boundaries.

Another effect of all this activity was that communication courses, which had once been mostly found only in the United States, began to appear throughout the world, with intercultural communication often being the initial offering. So widespread are college courses in intercultural communication that in many schools they are required for particular majors where interaction
among people from different cultural backgrounds can be anticipated. These include education, public health, social work, dentistry, medicine, nursing, counseling, international education, management, and many others.

However, how one can best learn intercultural communication competence, which requires more than acquiring information, has been a challenge from the outset in the field. In a now classic article written by Roger Harrison and Richard Hopkins in the early years of the U.S. Peace Corps, the authors argued that university classes, at least as conventionally presented, were unlikely to foster the sensitivity, values, and behavior needed by prospective sojourners. Rather, attention to nonverbal behavior, emotional expression, tolerance for ambiguity, and knowing there are few correct answers would be crucial. Today, courses in intercultural communication are often highly participative, using simulations, role-plays, and other methods that may be more associated with training than with readings and lectures. Newer possibilities and challenges have appeared since the 1990s with the ubiquity of the Internet and kinds of intercultural communication that were unimaginable when the field was taking shape. Social media, virtual conferences, online educational programs, and invitations for friendship and romantic relationships have become commonplace as a part of intercultural communication. But the ease with which these occur does not obviate the intercultural challenges. The anticipated increase in the use of online learning of foreign languages and of aspects of intercultural communication will no doubt continue to affect the study and practice of intercultural communication.

John Condon

See also Cross-Cultural Communication; Cultural Patterns; Culture, Definition of; Disciplinary Approaches to Culture: Intercultural Communication; Diversity and Inclusion, Definitions of; Hall, E. T.; Intercultural Communication and Language

Further Readings


INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

Undeniably, language is an important element in intercultural communication, whether one is using one's first language or another language. In many parts of the world, more and more people from different cultural backgrounds are coming together and communicating in a common language or dialect. Increasingly, these intercultural interactions involve the use of a second or a third language, such as English or another international language. If one or more of the speakers do not have the requisite language or cultural competency, there is a power imbalance, and miscommunication may also ensue. To complicate matters, it is possible to mistake language barriers for cultural problems if one does not have an adequate understanding of linguistic elements and the communication process.

As language is closely tied to one's identity, worldview, and positioning, it also influences how
people from different cultural backgrounds interact and perceive one another. Language and cultural misunderstandings and identity misalignments can have a negative impact on intercultural relations and, subsequently, reduce the willingness for further interaction. To enhance one's intercultural competence and experience more satisfying intercultural interactions, it is vital to have an understanding of the linguistic dimension of intercultural communication.

This entry describes the core elements of language and the communication process; the relationship between language, worldview, and communication styles; the role of language and power in intercultural interactions; the complex relationship between language, culture, and identity; and the vital role of language and intercultural relations in today's globalized world. Although the term language may refer to spoken and written language as well as body language (e.g., nonverbal actions), this entry largely focuses on verbal codes.

**Language Components**

Human language is basically an arbitrary symbolic system that enables us to engage in verbal communication. It includes the following five components: (1) phonology, (2) morphology, (3) semantics, (4) syntactics, and (5) pragmatics.

**Phonology** or phonological rules refer to the system of sound segments that we use to build up words. Each language has a different set of these segments or phonemes (the smallest sound units of a word). During the primary socialization process, children learn to recognize and then produce the speech segments that are characteristic of their native language.

**Morphology** or morphological rules describe how combinations of different sounds make up a meaningful word or different meaningful units of a particular word. A morpheme is the smallest semantic unit in a language. Words may consist of one or more morphemes.

**Semantics** or semantic rules refer to the system of meanings that are expressed by words and phrases. To serve as a means of communication between people, words must have a shared or a conventional meaning.

**Syntactics** or syntactic rules describe the system of rules by which words and phrases are sequenced to make meaningful statements in a particular language. Children need to learn how to use the ordering of words to mark grammatical functions such as the subject or the direct object.

**Pragmatics** or pragmatic rules describe the system of patterns that determine how we use language in specific social settings for particular purposes. All of us belong to linguistic and social groups, or speech communities. Each speech community uses language based on pragmatic rules or norms. During the socialization process, group members develop understandings of the appropriate ways to use language in certain social situations. For example, as children we learn what expressions, degree of directness, and communication styles are considered polite in particular contexts. We discover the socially accepted ways to greet people, take turns in conversation, and demonstrate respect to individuals with a higher status. Over time, we learn how to adjust the content and style of our communication in order to match our listener's interests, knowledge, position, and language ability.

Together, these components and properties make human language a unique type of communication system, differentiating it from the forms of signaling used by apes, bees, dolphins, and other creatures.

**The Communication Process**

When communicating verbally, people (the senders) transmit their thoughts and emotions to others (the receivers) in the form of words and sentences, which may be accompanied by nonverbal actions, including paralanguage, speech behavior that accentuates the words that are spoken (e.g., pitch, volume, intonation, tone of voice). Without language, nonverbal behaviors (e.g., gestures, spatial distance) may also transmit information, whether intentionally or not, to others. The process of putting an idea or message into a set of symbols (e.g., words, gestures) is...
referred to as encoding. The common channels or paths of communication are speech, writing, and nonverbal signals.

In the communication process, the receiver interprets the verbal message (e.g., language, communication style) and nonverbal signals (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions) that have been transmitted by the sender. The act of deciphering this information is referred to as decoding. The receiver may then respond verbally or nonverbally or not react. Feedback refers to the verbal or nonverbal signals that receivers send to a speaker to acknowledge what the speaker has said (e.g., nodding their head, uttering words of agreement or disagreement). The speaker processes this information to gauge whether the message has been interpreted as intended. Interaction, then, is the process of encoding and decoding messages. All communication takes place within a particular environment (linguistic, physical, sociocultural, socio-relational, temporal, etc.), which influences how the interaction unfolds.

Within a speech community, members learn to associate certain verbal and nonverbal symbols (e.g., words, idiomatic expressions, gestures) with particular ideas or concepts. In intercultural interactions, the sending and decoding of messages can pose challenges when communicators do not share the same understanding of the symbols or communication styles that are being used. Receivers who have a different linguistic and cultural background from that of the sender may easily misinterpret or not recognize the messages that are being transmitted, especially if they are not fully proficient in the language being used and have little knowledge of the verbal and nonverbal codes and other linguistic and cultural norms that are prevalent in a particular speech community.

Language, Worldview, and Communication Styles

Language use varies among cultural groups. This means that even speakers of the same first language who are socialized in different parts of the world may express themselves differently and have different worldviews or philosophical outlooks. For example, native speakers of English in Australia and Britain vary in their use of aspects such as idiomatic expressions, communication styles, and humor, among others. In particular, speakers of the same language may employ different degrees of directness in their speech, and this also varies depending on the context and status of the communicators. All of these dimensions may challenge their intercultural communication, raising awareness of the importance of the linguistic dimension in all intercultural interactions.

Pragmatic usage, in particular, differs among speech communities. Consequently, when people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact, they may easily misinterpret a speaker’s intended meaning. Listeners may take offense when none is intended or perceive romantic interest when there isn’t any. Newcomers who use a more direct style of communication than is the norm in a particular cultural context may be labeled as rude and aggressive; conversely, those who employ a more indirect style in situations where direct discourse is valued may be perceived as weak and indecisive. These negative, and often inaccurate, perceptions may significantly hamper intercultural relations.

Language, Power, and Intercultural Communication

Power can play a critical role in intercultural interactions. When people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact, they do not share an equal power status. In most encounters, the person with more power (e.g., a monolingual native speaker) determines how the communication process unfolds (e.g., which language or dialect is used, the speed of the discourse, who speaks when and for how long, what communication style is accorded more respect). Those in power, consciously or unconsciously, use language to reinforce and promote their own language variety, style of speech, and ways of thinking.

One’s accent, communication style, and linguistic knowledge (e.g., level of proficiency/listening comprehension, awareness of language conventions prevalent in a particular context) affect one’s degree of power or positioning in intercultural interactions. As English has become the dominant language of globalization and is a lingua franca in many parts of the world, individuals who are very proficient in this language may be accorded more status and privileges in intercultural interactions.
Similar to other types of social and cultural identities, language identities may shift during one's lifetime. For example, you might learn Arabic as a child in Egypt and then immigrate to the United States in your twenties, where you then live and function in your second language in your social and professional life. As you form strong bonds with English speakers, you develop a sense of belonging to that linguistic community. You may marry a native English-speaking American and have children who speak only English. In some circles, however, the identity you wish to convey (e.g., your English-language self) may not be accepted by locals. Owing to your accent and other factors, you may still be positioned as a second-language speaker, no matter how fluent you are. Language, identity, and power can be very sensitive issues in intercultural communication.

Learning an additional language need not result in *subtractive bilingualism*, that is, the loss of one's first language and cultural identity as one masters the second language. With *additive bilingualism*, one's first language and culture continue to be nurtured even as one becomes more proficient in the second language and culture. In the latter case, individuals are enriched by learning two or more languages and cultures. Over time, with an open mind-set, bilinguals (or multilinguals) may develop a more broadened, hybrid sense of self, incorporating elements of multiple cultures and languages.

**The Significance of Language in Intercultural Communication Interactions**

In today's globalized world, with significant advances in technology and transportation, people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are coming into contact with one another with increasing frequency. While some encounters are face-to-face, many others involve online communication (e.g., e-mail, Facebook, Skype, Twitter) or the use of the phone or fax. Our ever-changing, interconnected world demands effective intercultural communication skills, global competency, and linguistic ability in more than one language, especially an international one. As immigration is also leading to linguistic and cultural diversity in many nations, it is imperative that we understand the relationship between language, identity, and culture. Our affiliations with particular groups can provide us with a sense of belonging, but our identities and attitudes can also serve as barriers to intercultural communication (e.g., lead to stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion). Increasingly, bilingual or multilingual interactions further underscore the need to better understand the impact of language and identity in intercultural relations.

The role of language in intercultural communication is naturally very important for applied linguists and second-language teachers, as well as second-language learners. Educators who are responsible for preparing individuals to communicate in another language, whether at home or abroad, must pay attention to both linguistic and sociocultural elements. People in other professions (e.g., communication, healthcare, business, tourism) also need to be mindful of the multiple ways in which language use, attitudes, identity, and positioning may influence intercultural relations.

When individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact, one or more of the speakers is apt to be using a second language, and if the person is not fluent in the language, miscommunication may easily occur. In intercultural interactions, speakers who are using their first language need to be aware of their privileged position and recognize that their communication partners are apt to be expending considerable effort and energy in order to express their ideas in their second language. Individuals with a limited proficiency in the language may mentally translate a message in their head, formulate a response in their native language, and then struggle to convey their thoughts in their second language. They may also be plagued with insecurities about their grammar/word choice and fear that they will be misunderstood. To be mindful intercultural communicators, individuals need to routinely employ measures to check that their second-language communication partners understand their intended messages, without causing embarrassment. In second-language interactions in particular, it is imperative for first-language speakers to demonstrate respect for conversation partners who may not be fully proficient in the language.

With more understanding of the linguistic dimension in intercultural interactions, it is possible to avoid confusing language problems with
cultural misunderstandings, and vice versa. To better understand the multifarious connection between language, culture, power, and identity, it is imperative for scholars in different disciplines to come together in order to study intercultural interactions in context. This can deepen our knowledge about the central and complex role that language plays in the intercultural communication process.

Jane Jackson

See also Applied Linguistics; Communication Accommodation Theory; Disciplinary Approaches to Culture: Applied Linguistics; English as a Lingua Franca; Language and Identity; Language, Culture, and Intercultural Communication; Language Use and Culture; Linguaculture; Pragmatics; Sociolinguistics; Speech Acts

Further Readings