# inter-cultural communication

## an Advanced Resource Book

Adrian Holliday, Martin Hyde
and John Kullman

ROUTLEDGE APPLIED LINGUISTICS
ERIES EDITORS: CHRISTOPHER N. CANDLIN AND RONALD CARTER

# Intercultural Communication

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Adrian Holliday, Martin Hyde
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# Series Editors' Preface

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Each book has three main sections, each made up of approximately ten units.

A: An **Introduction** section, in which the key terms and concepts that map the field of the subject are introduced, including introductory activities and reflective tasks designed to establish key understandings, terminology, techniques of analysis and the skills appropriate to the theme and the discipline.

B: An **Extension** section, in which selected core readings are introduced (usually edited from the original) from key books and articles, together with annotations and commentary where appropriate. Each reading is introduced, annotated and commented on in the context of the whole book, and research/follow-up questions and tasks are added to enable fuller understanding of both theory and practice. In some cases, readings are short and synoptic and incorporated within a more general exposition.

C: An **Exploration** section, in which further samples and illustrative materials are provided with an emphasis, where appropriate, on more open-ended, student-centred activities and tasks designed to support readers and users in undertaking their own locally relevant research projects. Tasks are designed for work in groups or for individuals working on their own. They can be readily included in award courses in Applied Linguistics or as topics for personal study and research.

The books also contain a glossarial index, which provides a guide to the main terms used in the book, and a detailed, thematically organised further reading section which lays the ground for further work in the discipline. There are also extensive suggestions for further reading.

The target audience for the series is upper undergraduates and postgraduates on language, applied linguistics and communication studies programmes as well as teachers and researchers in professional development and distance learning programmes. High-quality applied research resources are also much needed for teachers of EFL/ESL and

foreign language students at higher education colleges and universities worldwide. The books in the Routledge Applied Linguistics Series are aimed at the individual reader, the student in a group, and at teachers building courses and seminar programmes.

We hope that the books in this series meet these needs and continue to provide support over many years.

## The Editors

Professor Christopher N. Candlin and Professor Ronald Carter are the series editors. Both have extensive experience of publishing titles in the fields relevant to this series. Between them they have written and edited more than 100 books and 200 academic papers in the broad field of applied linguistics. Chris Candlin was president of AILA (International Association for Applied Linguistics) from 1997–2002 and Ron Carter is Chair of BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics) from 2003–2006.

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# How to use this book

The book is divided into three sections:

- Section A Introduction: Defining concepts, which aims to present concepts that will be the basis for study throughout the book
- Section B Extension, which will develop and continue to explore these concepts in dialogue with a series of readings
- Section C Exploration, which will realize the discussions of the first two parts within a series of research tasks, and which will establish a methodology for addressing intercultural communication.

Each section will also be divided into three themes.

- Theme 1 Identity deals with the way in which we all bring with us our own discourses and feelings of culture and negotiate these in communication.
- Theme 2 Otherization deals with a major hindrance to communication in the way in which we over-generalize, stereotype and reduce the people we communicate with to something different or less than they are.
- Theme 3 Representation looks at the way in which culture is communicated in society, through the media, professional discourses and everyday language. It focuses on how we need critically to recognize and address the ways in which these representations influence our own perceptions if we are to communicate effectively

It is a tenet of the book that the disciplines presented in Section A and applied to research tasks in Section C are usable in all intercultural communication contexts, and as it is argued that all communication is intercultural, that this book is ultimately about developing skilled communication strategies and principles in a globalizing world.

Examples that are drawn on and which are from the writers' own cultural milieux and experiences are thus simply catalysts for illustrating larger principles that readers are expected to apply and use in their own cultural milieux and contexts. Because the book is not based upon the principle that cultural differences exist as real and tangible entities, but are intersubjective and negotiated processes (admittedly affected by power structures) the book cannot attempt to be a manual of cultural differences and therefore does not aim to collect exotic examples of cultural behaviours. To do this would indeed be to enter into the process of otherization decried as a major problem in intercultural communication in the world today. The examples used are simply those that the authors

have felt sufficiently familiar with and confident enough to be able to describe and use to promote the readers' thoughts and sensibilities about their own communicative behaviour in the interactions, wherever these may be.

The use of examples in the book from, for example, the Middle East in Section A and from Britain and the Spanish-speaking world in Section C, is thus a consequence of the locatedness of the authors. It is expected that readers will be able to generalize out from these examples; and in Section C there is an invitation for readers to bring their own cultural milieux into research activities.

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# SECTION A
# Introduction: Defining concepts

Each unit in Section A will comprise the presentation of an *experience* or situation in the form of an example, and a *deconstruction* of this example through which basic concepts will be introduced. By deconstruction we mean 'taking apart' to enable greater insight and analysis. This is an essential skill which will prepare readers to be able to look at their own interaction with others analytically and with fresh eyes in order to solve the puzzle of what is going on. It is particularly important, where we feel that much intercultural communication is marred by prejudice, to be able to take apart and undo this prejudice. The concepts introduced in Section A can then be responded to in the rest of the book. The emphasis is not only on people with different nationalities, but also with other senses of belonging, whether community, class, occupational, gender and so on. There will then be a final section in each unit which focuses on what is needed for successful communication. This will take the form of *disciplines* about what to be aware of in the process of intercultural communication, which will then be collected together at the end of each theme.

These disciplines will not be based on what a person from culture X is like and therefore how we should communicate with them. There is enough published along these lines, which we consider to be largely essentialist and reductive. By essentialist we mean presuming that there is a universal essence, homogeneity and unity in a particular culture. By reductive we mean reducing cultural behaviour down to a simple causal factor. The disciplines will thus be basic principles about understandings which need to be achieved in order to interact with different individuals in different contexts. This order of example, deconstruction, disciplines, binds the book together and our belief is that intercultural communication should grow from an understanding of people, culture and society generally. The deconstruction of the examples will attempt an understanding, and observations about communication will grow from them. Each unit will also finish with a task which will help you to link the examples and concepts it provides with your own experience.

The examples in each unit are reconstructed from actual experience. They have been edited, sometimes mixed together, the characters, genders, nationalities changed, with fictitious names and situations, so that no one can be recognized, and also to bring out the issues we have found important. The approach in this part of the book is therefore novelistic. The deconstruction of what happens in each example is subjective. We do not however feel that the subjectivity is problematic. As in more formal qualitative research, each instance speaks for itself, its value being in the resonance or dissonance each example creates – in the degree to which the reader can say 'This makes sense to me; I can recognize this type of thing from my own experience', or 'This makes no sense; I need to think about this more'.

The examples are all about particular people in particular situations. They have been taken from a range of nationalities and social groupings. However, really, it does not matter which nationality or group they come from, as the aim is not to describe what someone from a particular culture is like and then suggest how to communicate with them. Each example shows one or two people struggling with their differences, perceived or real, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing, sometimes understanding, sometimes falling into an essentialist trap. If the balance is more on the side of people failing, followed with discussion on how they went wrong, this is because in the majority of

cases we do indeed get things seriously wrong, and this is something which needs to be dealt with. It needs to be realized that the reason for failure is essentialism.

Section A introduces a non-essentialist view of culture which is then followed up in the rest of the book. It focuses on the complexity of culture as a fluid, creative social force which binds different groupings and aspects of behaviour in different ways, both constructing and constructed by people in a piecemeal fashion to produce myriad combinations and configurations.

The difference between 'non-essentialism' and 'essentialism', which are terms used by social scientists in their discussion about the nature of culture (e.g. Keesing 1994), is described in Table 1. We realize that this, like all other dichotomies, is harsh and ignorant of the fact that in reality views range between the two extremes. Nevertheless, essentialism in the way we see people and culture is the same essentialism which drives sexism and racism. The equivalent condition, culturism, similarly reduces and otherizes the individual and underlies many of the problems in the world today. By otherization we mean imagining someone as alien and different to 'us' in such a way that 'they' are excluded from 'our' 'normal', 'superior' and 'civilized' group. Indeed, it is by imagining a foreign Other in this way that 'our' group can become more confident and exclusive. Essentialism therefore needs to be defined strongly, recognized and fought against wherever it is found. This particular definition of essentialism might be different to that of others. As with racism and sexism, the concept needs to be discussed and continuously revisited.

It is perhaps noticeable that the entries on the right-hand side of the table (for non-essentialism) represent more complex and perhaps obscure ideas than those on the left-hand side. In this sense, essentialism is the 'easy' answer for culture, which has become popular, usable and marketable in, for example, management studies and foreign language education where people are looking for simple formulae for communicating with clients, students and colleagues from 'other places and backgrounds'. For this reason, the tone of this book is to go against these 'easy' answers, to struggle with dominant discourses and to problematize what is normally thought.

The final row in the table addresses the final question posed by this book, developing strategies for intercultural communication. Again, whereas the essentialist side provides an answer, the non-essentialist side poses more of a problem which is complex and requires an understanding of things which are not at all clear and different to what we imagine. Thus, the angle on communication within the theme of *identity* will be how identity is constructed and how individuals define their own identities. Within the theme of *otherization*, the focus will be how to avoid the trap of over-generalization and reduction when describing and interacting with others. Within the theme of *representation* the emphasis will be on deconstructing the imposed images of people from the media and popular discourse.

The purpose of this book is to engage in a dialogue with the reader. We do not believe there is only one route to achieving successful intercultural communication. You will therefore encounter different perspectives, possibly contradictory, within the book.



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