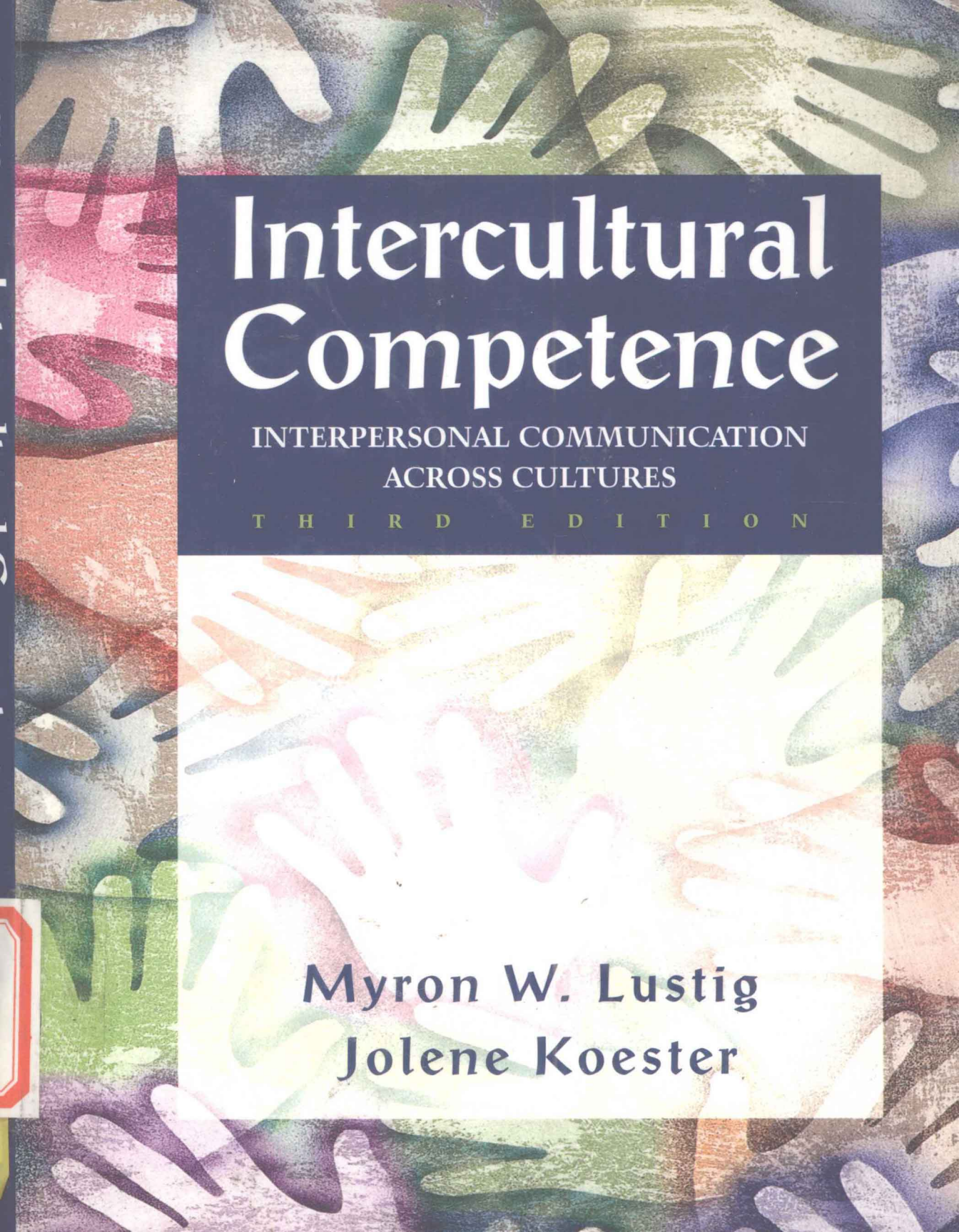
Intercultural Competence
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES
THIRD EDITION
Myron W. Lustig
Jolene Koester

Intercultural Competence

Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures

THIRD EDITION

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LONGMAN

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You know who you are.

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Preface

The twenty-first century is upon us, and competence in intercultural communication is an absolute necessity. In both your private and public lives, in all of your personal and professional endeavors, it is imperative that you learn to communicate with people whose cultural heritage makes them vastly different from you. This book is intended to help you accomplish that goal.

FEATURES OF THIS TEXT

The perspective we offer in this text differs from that of similar books in several important ways. We provide a healthy blend of the practical and the theoretical, of the concrete and the abstract, in order to make the ideas and issues salient and meaningful.

First, we recognize that intercultural communicators need specific suggestions and examples about what they should know, how they should interpret their feelings, and how they ought to behave in order to be competent in a given interaction. Beginning students, in particular, need material at the concrete end of the ladder of abstraction. Consequently, we have chosen an easy and conversational style and have linked the presentation of theories with numerous illustrative examples. The "Culture Connections" boxes, for instance, which are so useful to students, are designed to allow class discussions that emphasize the affective dimension of intercultural competence.

Second, we are aware of the importance of current and accurate descriptions of intercultural communication theories and their supporting research, which provide powerful ways of viewing and understanding intercultural communication phenomena. This edition includes new or updated information on communication accommodation theory, anxiety/uncertainty management theory, expectancy violations theory, conversational constraints, and interpersonal dialectics. We have also incorporated ideas from literally hundreds of sources across a wide spectrum of inquiry. These sources form a solid bibliography for those interested in pursuing specific topics in greater detail. However, we have chosen to maintain the text's readability by placing the citations at the end of the book where they are unobtrusive but available to interested readers.

Third, we recognize the significance and importance of cultural patterns, which provide the underlying set of assumptions for cultural and intercultural

communication. The focus on cultural patterns as the lens through which all interactions are interpreted is thoroughly explored in Chapters 4 and 5, and the themes of these two chapters permeate the concepts developed in all subsequent chapters. New to this edition is a more seamless and less disjointed elaboration of the central concepts underlying all cultural patterns, which makes these foundational ideas easier to understand. Also included is an extended discussion of Confucian cultural patterns, which provides a non-Western counterpoint to the other taxonomies that are included.

Fourth, we include topics not normally emphasized in intercultural communication textbooks. New to this edition is a chapter that emphasizes the importance of cultural identity and the role of cultural biases—ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and racism—in intercultural interactions. We also update and revise the section on communication contexts—health care, education, and business—where people from many cultures often converge and interact. Although it is standard fare for most texts to consider verbal and nonverbal code systems, we provide a careful elaboration of the nature of differing logical systems, or preferred reasoning patterns, and the consequences for intercultural communication when the expectations for the language in use are not widely shared. Similarly, drawing heavily on the available information about interpersonal communication, we explore the dynamic processes of establishing and developing a relationship between culturally different individuals, including an elaboration of issues related to "face" in interpersonal relationships.

Fifth, we provide a discussion of important ethical and social issues for intercultural communicators. Ethical issues are often inadequately considered as one learns about intercultural communication; yet, in our view, they are crucial because intercultural competence requires a delicate balancing act on the tightrope between moral certainty and cultural relativism. Consistent with this ethical orientation, we as authors are aware of and wish to acknowledge the cultural perspective that we bring to its writing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF CULTURAL ANCESTRY

At various points in our writing, we were amazed at how subtly but thoroughly our own cultural experiences had permeated the text. Lest anyone believe that our presentation of relevant theories, examples, and practical suggestions is without the distortion of culture, we would like to describe our own cultural heritage. That heritage shapes our understanding of intercultural communication, and it affects what we know, how we feel, and what we do when we communicate with others.

Our cultural ancestry is European, and our own cultural experiences are those that we refer to in this book as European American. Both of our family backgrounds and the communities in which we were raised has influenced and reinforced our cultural perspectives. The European American cultural experience is the one we know best, simply because it is who we are. Many of

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our ideas and examples about intercultural communication, therefore, draw on our own cultural experiences.

We have tried, however, to increase the number and range of other cultural voices through the ideas and examples that we provide. These voices and the lessons and illustrations they offer represent our colleagues, our friends, and, most important, our students.

IMPORTANCE OF VOICES FROM OTHER CULTURES

Although we have attempted to include a wide range of domestic and international cultural groups, inevitably we have shortchanged some simply because we do not have sufficient knowledge, either through direct experience or secondary accounts, of all cultures. Our errors and omissions are not meant to exclude or discount. Rather, they represent the limits of our own intercultural communication experiences. We hope that you, as a reader with a cultural voice of your own, will participate with us in a dialogue that allows us to improve this text over a period of time. Readers of previous editions were generous with their comments and suggestions for improvement, and we are very grateful to them for these comments. We ask that you continue this dialogue by providing us with your feedback and responses. Send us examples that illustrate the principles discussed in the text. Be willing to provide a cultural perspective that differs from our own and from those of our colleagues, friends, and students. Our commitment now and in future editions of this book is to describe a variety of cultural voices with accuracy and sensitivity. We ask for your help in accomplishing that objective.

ISSUES IN THE USE OF CULTURAL EXAMPLES

Some of the examples in the following pages may include references to a culture to which you belong or with which you have had substantial experiences, and our example may not match your personal knowledge. As you will discover in the opening chapters of the book, both your own experiences and the example we recount could be accurate. One of the tensions we felt in writing this book was in making statements that are broad enough to provide reasonably accurate generalizations but specific and tentative enough to avoid false claims of universal applicability to all individuals in a given culture.

We have struggled as well as with issues of fairness, sensitivity, representativeness, and inclusiveness. Indeed, we have had innumerable discussions with our colleagues across the country—colleagues who, like ourselves, are committed to making the United States and U.S. colleges and universities into truly multicultural institutions—and we have sought their advice about appropriate ways to reflect the value of cultural diversity in our writing. We have responded to their suggestions, and we appreciate the added measure of quality that these cultural voices supply.

TEXT ORGANIZATION

Our goal in this book is to provide ideas and information that can help you to achieve competence in intercultural communication. Part One, "Communication and Intercultural Competence," orients you to the central ideas that underline this book. Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the international and domestic imperatives for attaining intercultural competence. We also focus on the United States as an intercultural community, as we address the delicate but important issue of how to characterize its cultural mix and the members of its cultural groups. In Chapter 2, we define and discuss the nature of communication generally and interpersonal communication specifically. We also introduce the notion of culture and explain why cultures differ. As our concern in this book is with interpersonal communication among people from different cultures, an understanding of these key concepts is critical. In Chapter 3, our focus turns to intercultural communication, and we distinguish that form of communication from others. We also lay the groundwork for our continuing discussion of intercultural competence, explaining what it is, what its components are, and how people can achieve it when they communicate with others.

Part Two, "Cultural Differences in Communication," is devoted to an analysis of how cultures differ. Chapter 4 examines the ways in which cultures differ and emphasizes the importance of cultural patterns in differentiating among communication styles. This chapter also examines the structural features that are similar across all cultures. Chapter 5 offers several taxonomies that can be used to understand systematic differences in the ways in which people in various cultures think and communicate. Chapter 6 underscores the importance of cultural identity and the consequences of biases within intercultural communication.

In Part Three, "Coding Intercultural Communication," we turn our attention to verbal and nonverbal messages, which are central to the communication process. Chapter 7 examines the coding of verbal languages and the influences of linguistic and cultural differences on attempts to communicate interculturally. As the accurate coding and decoding of nonverbal symbols is also vital in intercultural communication, Chapter 8 discusses the effects of cultural differences on nonverbal codes. Chapter 9 investigates the consequences or effects of these cultural differences in coding systems in face-to-face intercultural interactions. Of particular interest are those experiences involving participants who were taught to use different languages and organizational schemes.

Part Four, "Communication in Intercultural Relationships," emphasizes the associations that form among people as a result of their shared communication experiences. Chapter 10 looks at the all-important issues related to the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships among people from different cultures. Chapter 11 highlights the processes by which communication events are grouped into episodes and interpreted within such con-

texts as health care, education, and business. Finally, Chapter 12 focuses on the opportunities and possibilities that are available as people attempt to improve their intercultural competence, and it highlights the ethical choices individuals must face when engaged in interpersonal communication across cultures.

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS

Accompanying the text is an Instructor's Manual and a Test Bank, which are available to instructors who adopt the text for their courses. Please contact your Longman representative for these materials. The Instructor's Manual and Test Bank provide pedagogical suggestions and instructional activities to enhance students' learning.

Teaching a course in intercultural communication is one of the most exciting assignments available. It is difficult to convey in writing the level of involvement, commitment, and interest displayed by typical students in such courses. These students are the reason that teaching intercultural communication is, quite simply, so exhilarating and rewarding.

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Finally, we would like to acknowledge each other's encouragement and support throughout the writing of this book. It has truly been a collaborative effort. We also want to acknowledge a shared responsibility for any remaining errors, omissions, oversights, mistakes, and misstatements that may exist despite our best efforts and intentions to correct them.

Myron W. Lustig
Jolene Koester

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PART ONE

Communication and Intercultural Competence

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Intercultural Competence

CHAPTER 2

Communication, Culture, and Cultural Differences

CHAPTER 3

Intercultural Communication Competence

CHAPTER

1 Introduction to Intercultural Competence

- THE IMPERATIVE FOR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE
  - The International Imperative for Intercultural Competence
  - The Domestic Imperative for Intercultural Competence
- THE UNITED STATES AS AN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY
  - Metaphors of U.S. Cultural Diversity
  - What Do You Call Someone from the United States of America?
  - Cultural Groups in the United States
- THE CHALLENGE OF LIVING IN AN INTERCULTURAL WORLD
- SUMMARY

We live in remarkable times. All around us, there is a heightened emphasis on culture and a corresponding interplay of forces that both encourage and discourage accommodation and understanding among different people.

Consider the enormous changes that have occurred recently in the coalitions and alliances forged among members of vastly different cultural groups: the formation of the European Economic Community, the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the expansion of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to include more countries in the region, and the optimistic signs in South Africa. These changes are only a few of the many we could name, and they redirect our attention to the problems and possibilities inherent in all attempts at communication among people from different cultures.

A counterweight to these trends toward unification and accommodation, however, has been equally powerful emphases on cultural uniqueness. The importance of maintaining one's cultural identity—and therefore the need to preserve, protect, and defend one's culturally shared values—often creates a rising tide of emotion that promotes fear and distrust while encouraging

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