



# Research Methods in Intercultural Communication

A Practical Guide

Edited by Zhu Hua

**WILEY** Blackwell

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This edition first published 2016  
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*Registered Office*

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

*Editorial Offices*

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Research methods in intercultural communication : a practical guide / edited by Zhu Hua. – First Edition.

pages cm. – (Guides to research methods in language and linguistics)

ISBN 978-1-118-83746-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-118-83743-6 (paper) 1. Intercultural communication—Research. 2. Intercultural communication—Methodology. I. Hua, Zhu, 1970—editor.

P94.6.R48 2016

303.48'20721—dc23

2015023712

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: © kaan tanman/Getty

Set in 10/12pt Sabon by Aptara Inc., New Delhi, India  
Printed and bound in Malaysia by Vivar Printing Sdn Bhd

## Notes on Contributors

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**Jane Andrews** is Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of the West of England, UK. She teaches on education and early childhood studies undergraduate programs, jointly leads the professional doctorate in Education (EdD), and supervises doctoral students in areas of language and education.

**Jo Angouri** is an Associate Professor at the University of Warwick, UK. Her research expertise is in sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. She has carried out research in a range of corporate and institutional contexts and her work concerns both online and face to face interaction. She has published work on language and identity as well as teamwork and leadership in medical settings. She has recently edited a special issue on Multilingualism in the Workplace (*Multilingua*, 2014) and co-edited one (with Ruth Wodak) on Euro/Crisis Discourses (*Discourse and Society*, 2014).

**Mariam Attia** is Research Associate at the School of Education, Durham University, UK, where she combines her commitment to researcher development with her exploration of the processes of researching multilingually. Her research interests cover the areas of reflective practice, teacher development, and non-judgmental discourse in professional interaction.

**Anne Betzel** is Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at Middlesex University and Kingston University, UK, where she teaches a number of undergraduate and postgraduate modules in English Language and English Language Teaching. Her research interests include language and politics, critical discourse analysis, and the role of language in constructing different types of social practices.

**Adam Brandt** is a Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at Newcastle University (UK), where he is a Degree Program Director for a range of MAs in Cross-Cultural Communication, and teaches courses on “Methods in Cross-Cultural Communication Research” and “Micro-Analysis of Intercultural Interaction.” His research employs CA and MCA, particularly in settings where interculturality and/or second language use is relevant. He has published research in journals such as *Language and Intercultural Communication* and *Discourse Processes*.

**Anna De Fina** is Professor of Italian Language and Linguistics in the Italian Department and Affiliated Faculty with the Linguistics Department at Georgetown University, USA. Her interests and publications focus on discourse and migration, identity, and narrative. Her books include *Identity in narrative: A study of immigrant discourse* (2003, John Benjamins), *Analyzing narratives* (2012, Cambridge University Press, co-authored with Alexandra Georgakopoulou), and the co-edited volumes *Dislocations, relocations, narratives of migration* (2005, St. Jerome Publishing, with M. Baynham), and *Discourse and identity* (2006, Cambridge University Press, with Deborah Schiffrin and Michael Bamberg).

**Darla K. Deardorff** is a research scholar at Duke University (Durham, USA) as well as Research Associate at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (South Africa) and at Meiji University (Japan). Known for developing the first research-based framework of intercultural competence, she is author of numerous publications including *The Sage handbook of intercultural competence* (Sage, 2009) and *Demystifying outcomes assessment for international educators* (Stylus, 2015). She is a frequently invited speaker around the world and founder of ICC Global.

**Fred Dervin** is Professor of Multicultural Education at the University of Helsinki (Finland). He also holds several associate professorships around the world. Dervin specializes in language and intercultural education, the sociology of multiculturalism, and linguistics for intercultural communication and education. He has widely published in international journals on identity, the “intercultural,” and mobility/migration. His website: <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/dervin/>.

**Richard Fay** is a Lecturer in Education (TESOL and Intercultural Communication) at The University of Manchester’s Institute of Education (UK). He co-ordinates the PhD in Education (with a particular focus on applied linguistics research), and leads both the MA in Intercultural Communication and the Manchester Global Award. He is currently a Co-Investigator on the AHRC-funded project “Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State.”

**Barbara Gibson** is a consultant, researcher and lecturer focused on intercultural communication and global business. With more than 25 years’ experience as a corporate communication professional, she has worked with companies worldwide, and is a past international Chair of the International Association of Business Communicators. She currently serves as President of the UK chapter of the Society for Intercultural Education, Training & Research (SIETAR). She lectures at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels for a number of institutions, including Birkbeck, University of London; Syracuse University; Hult International Business School and Oklahoma City University.

**Michael Handford** is Professor of the Institute for Innovation in International Engineering Education at the University of Tokyo, Japan, where he lectures graduates on professional discourse analysis and intercultural communication. He has published in the areas of ESP, professional and business discourse, intercultural communication, and conflictual communication, is the author of *The language of business meetings*

(Cambridge University Press), and is co-editor, along with James Paul Gee, of *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis*.

**Claudia Harsch** is an Associate Professor at The Centre for Applied Linguistics, the University of Warwick, UK. She researches and teaches in the fields of language assessment, educational evaluation and measurement, intercultural communication, the implementation of the Common European Framework, and teacher training. She explores aspects like the conceptualization of intercultural competencies and ways to foster and assess them, the role of assessment across cultures or the development and validation of tools for educational evaluation. Claudia is interested in teacher training and ongoing professional development, specifically in the field of assessment literacy.

**Adrian Holliday** is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK, where he directs doctoral research in the critical sociology of TESOL and intercultural communication. He has written about appropriate methodology, native-speakerism, qualitative research methods and intercultural communication. His recent book, *Understanding intercultural communication: Negotiating a grammar of culture*, Routledge 2013, explores the engagement with intercultural issues in everyday life.

**Prue Holmes** is Reader in the School of Education at Durham University, UK. She leads the MA program on Intercultural Communication and Education, and supervises doctoral students in this area. She is Co-Investigator on the AHRC-funded "Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State." (<http://researching-multilingually-at-borders.com/>) and the EU-funded project "Intercultural resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers" (IEREST) (<http://ierest-project.eu/>). Prue publishes in the areas of intercultural communication and education, and student mobility. She chairs the *International Association of Languages and Intercultural Communication* (IALIC).

**Jane Jackson** is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Intercultural Communication in the English Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her primary research interests are education abroad, language and intercultural communication, and identity. Recent books include *Introducing language and intercultural communication* (Routledge, 2014), *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication* (Editor) (Routledge, 2012), *Intercultural journeys: From study to residence abroad* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), and *Language, identity, and study abroad: sociocultural perspectives* (Equinox, 2008).

**Helen Kelly-Holmes** is a Senior Lecturer in Sociolinguistics and New Media at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Her research interests focus on the interrelationships between (new) media, markets and languages, and on economic aspects of multilingualism. Her publications include *Advertising as multilingual communication* (Palgrave, 2005), *Language and the market* (edited with Gerlinde Mautner, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), *Multilingualism and the periphery* (ed. with Sari Pietikäinen, Oxford University Press, 2013) and *Thematising multilingualism in the media* (edited with Tomasso Milani, John Benjamins, 2013).

**Ruth Kircher** is a lecturer in English Language at Liverpool Hope University in the UK. Her research interests are in the fields of sociolinguistics, the social psychology of language, and second-language learning. In particular, her research focuses on societal multilingualism and related issues such as social identities, language attitudes, and language policy and planning. Ruth is especially interested in contexts in which minority languages co-exist alongside English, including French in Canada and Welsh in the UK.

**Aoife Lenihan** is an independent researcher having completed her PhD on new media and sociolinguistics. Her main research interests include multilingualism, minority languages, globalization, media discourse and new media. Her work has appeared in *Digital discourse* (Oxford 2011) and *The language of social media* (Palgrave 2014).

**Agnieszka Lyons** is a Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at Queen Mary University of London, UK. Her research interests include multimodal and mediated discourse analysis, intercultural communication as well as text-based mobile and electronically mediated communication, particularly in the context of establishing reference frame and enacting physicality. She is interested in the notion of evoked multimodality and narrativity in text-based forms of electronically mediated discourse.

**Leila Monaghan** has a PhD in linguistic anthropology and currently teaches at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA. Her research and teaching crosses the fields of anthropology, communication, history, Deaf studies, disability studies, women's studies and American Indian studies. Co-edited books include *Many ways to be Deaf* and *A cultural approach to interpersonal communication*. Her current research is on Arapaho and Cheyenne women in the Great Plains Wars.

**Kristian Mortensen** is Associate Professor at the Department of Design and Communication, University of Southern Denmark. His work focuses on social interaction as an embodied and situated practice and the range of resources (in particular verbal and vocal, the human body and material artefacts) that participants draw on in their sense-making practices. His work has appeared in journals such as *Discourse Processes*, *Journal of Pragmatics* and *Journal of Applied Linguistics*.

**John P. O'Regan** is Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at UCL Institute of Education, University College London, UK, where he is a doctoral supervisor and leads the MA in Applied Linguistics. He specializes in World Englishes, intercultural communication, and critical discourse analysis, and is the author of articles covering a wide range of topics in applied linguistics and cultural studies.

**Helen Spencer-Oatey** is a Professor and Director of The Centre for Applied Linguistics, the University of Warwick, UK. Her main research interests are in intercultural interaction, face, and interpersonal relations. Her current research projects include the competencies of global leaders and employees, and intercultural integration in educational contexts. Her publications include the following books: *Culturally speaking* (2000/2008, Continuum), the *Handbook of intercultural communication*

(2007/2009, de Gruyter, with Kotthoff), and *Intercultural interaction* (2009, Palgrave Macmillan, with Franklin).

**Emma Sweeney** is a teacher of English language and Study Skills for Specific Academic Purposes at INTO University of Exeter. Her main research interest is intercultural business communication. She has published articles in the *Journal of Business Communication* and *Intercultural Communication*.

**Jane Woodin** is Director of MA Studies for the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Sheffield, UK. She has run a Masters program in Intercultural Communication since 2003, and recently set up an MA Program in Intercultural Communication and International Development. Her research interests include intercultural communication in applied linguistics, discourse and conversation analysis, language teacher education and dialogic approaches to learning. Her work has appeared in journals such as *ReCALL*, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, and the *European Journal of Higher Education*.

**Tony Johnstone Young** is Senior Lecturer in Language and Communication at Newcastle University, in the north of England. His research and supervision focuses on intergroup communication, particularly between people living with dementia and medical professionals; between “international” students and hosts in higher education contexts; and between teachers and learners in English language classrooms, and he has published extensively in these areas. In 2010 he was awarded the James J Bradac Prize for his contributions to dementia communications research.

**Zhu Hua** is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Communication at Birkbeck, University of London, UK. Her main research interests are intercultural pragmatics, language and intercultural communication, and child language development. Her most recent book-length publications on Intercultural Communication include *The language and intercultural communication reader* (2011, Routledge) and *Exploring intercultural communication: language in action* (2014, Routledge). She is a joint editor for the book series *Routledge Studies in Language and Intercultural Communication*.



# Acknowledgements

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This publication is the product of collaborative efforts of many people. When Li Wei set up the series *Guides to Research Methods in Language and Linguistics*, modelled on his successful and award-winning *The Blackwell Guide to Research Methods in Bilingualism and Multilingualism* (co-edited with Melissa Moyer), I was approached by Danielle Descoteaux at Wiley-Blackwell to compile a volume on intercultural communication. I liked the idea, but could not immediately embark on the project, since I was working my way through a research monograph. Thank you, Danielle and Li Wei, for your patience and the gentle nudges at the right times. I am glad that I took on the challenge.

The contributors have been wonderful to work with. Their professionalism and collegiality have made the whole process enjoyable. Thanks also go to Julia Kirk at Wiley-Blackwell whose editorial support has been most effective. I am also grateful to Jennifer Watson, who proofread a selection of this collection. The editing of the book benefitted from a three-month sabbatical leave granted by Birkbeck College, University of London in 2013. Last but not least, I would like to thank Li Wei whose support as my “significant other,” colleague, and Series Editor is indispensable as ever.

# Preface

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As part of the series *Guides to Research Methods in Language and Linguistics*, this volume aims to provide an introduction to the key methodological issues and concerns in the study of Intercultural Communication for students on advanced undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Intercultural Communication, language and linguistics, applied linguistics, TESOL, education, translation, communication studies, and other related subjects. It can also be used by research students in these subject areas.

As a field of enquiry growing out of a number of disciplines and subdisciplines, Intercultural Communication does not “own” many discipline-specific methods and methodologies, although it has witnessed and contributed to the development of some distinctive research paradigms over the years. Many of the methods used in Intercultural Communication studies are adopted from other disciplines. With many methodology guides available, including previously published edited volumes in this series and many volumes on single methods (e.g. longitudinal study, interviews, questionnaires, conversation analysis, etc.), this volume does not intend to give verbatim guidance on general principles and procedures of methodologies that have been used and written extensively elsewhere. Rather, it aims to contextualize research methods and methodologies in Intercultural Communication studies by examining how research paradigms influence the way Intercultural Communication scholars study culture, identity, and discourse (Part I), what issues are specific to or salient in Intercultural Communication research (Part II); and what type of research questions a methodology is suitable for in the context of Intercultural Communication studies and the new frontiers in Intercultural Communication research (Part III).

The volume does not start with methods. Rather, it opens with two parts that often receive little attention in research training, but have significant bearings on the validity of research questions and the interpretation of results. Part I focuses on linking themes, paradigms and methods. It starts with an overview of research paradigms, followed by chapters dedicated to three key topics in the study of Intercultural Communication: culture, identity, and discourse. Part II discusses the key issues and challenges in research strategies, planning, and implementation, including identifying research questions, researching multilingually, interculturally, and ethically, myths and challenges in measuring intercultural competence, the researcher’s role, and a step-by-step guide to developing a research proposal. Part III comprises

accounts of twelve research methods or techniques. Each chapter addresses the questions of what the method is about, why this method and why not (strengths and limitations), how to do it, what research themes this method is associated with, how it works with other methods, and what are the new and emerging data-collection and analysis methods and tools.

To illustrate what it is like to apply a method, most chapters feature at least one Case in Point or Case Study, where examples of published studies or projects, sometimes undertaken by the contributors themselves, are summarized and reflected on. Each chapter includes special features – a Summary, Key terms, and Further Reading and Resources – to help the reader to explore each topic further beyond the contents of the chapter.

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# Part I   Linking Themes, Paradigms, and Methods

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communication patterns across cultures and studies of discursive construction and negotiation of cultural differences.

The field of Intercultural Communication (abbreviated as IC) has a distinctive, multidisciplinary background. Its main concerns have been researched extensively, and largely separately, across a number of established disciplinary and theoretical perspectives including the following:

- The disciplines that examine linguistic and interactional aspects of communication between different groups, such as interactional sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cross-cultural / intercultural pragmatics, discourse studies, translation studies, ELF (English as Lingua Franca) and bi- / multilingualism studies.
- The disciplines that are concerned with the development and learning of skills to communicate intercultural, such as intercultural education, language learning and teaching.
- The disciplines that study cultural practices or seek to identify cultural variations in communication patterns, such as cultural and linguistic anthropology, ethnicity studies, gender studies.
- The disciplines that regard Intercultural Communication as a special case of communication, such as communication studies and interpersonal communication.
- The disciplines that study human behavior and mental process including both their variability and common trends under diverse cultural conditions, such as cross-cultural psychology.
- The disciplines which critically examine the relationships between culture, communication and power (e.g. global politics of cultural prejudice), such as critical discourse studies and critical cultural studies.
- The (sub)disciplines and models that look at contributions that society makes to individual development through interactions between people and the culture in which they live in, such as sociocultural theory of learning in second language acquisition.

As a consequence of its multidisciplinary nature and the inherent complexity of the phenomenon under study (e.g. debates on what culture is, Holliday, 2011, 2013, Chapter 2, this volume), IC studies encompass many different paradigms. While different paradigms complement each other and potentially bring a rich understanding of the phenomenon under study, they can also be a source of confusion for newcomers to the field. In this chapter, I shall first outline what a paradigm is and then introduce five key paradigms in the field of Intercultural Communication in terms of their main assumptions and research themes and disciplinary connections. Some general questions regarding paradigms are discussed in the last section.

## What is a Paradigm?

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A paradigm is the overarching constructive framework and meta-thinking behind a piece of research. It is “a way of examining social phenomenon from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted”



# 1 Identifying Research Paradigms

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*Zhu Hua*

## Summary

This chapter starts with an overview of the multidisciplinary nature of Intercultural Communication as a field of enquiry. It then discusses what a paradigm is and why it is essential to understand paradigms before embarking on research designs. It introduces five key paradigms in Intercultural Communication studies: positivist, interpretative, critical, constructivist, and realist paradigms, in terms of their main assumptions, research themes, and disciplinary connections. Some general questions regarding paradigms are discussed in the last section.

## Introduction

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Intercultural Communication as a field of enquiry is concerned with how people from different “cultural” backgrounds interact with each other and negotiate “cultural” or linguistic differences perceived or made relevant through interactions, as well as the impact such interactions have on group relations and on individuals’ identities, attitudes and behaviors. Although, historically, terms such as “cross-cultural communication,” “inter-ethnic communication,” “inter-racial communication,” and, more recently, “international communication” have been used, more and more people now use Intercultural Communication as an umbrella term to include studies of interactions between people of different cultures, comparative studies of

*Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide*, First Edition. Edited by Zhu Hua.  
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