

AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

John C. Condon and Fathi Yousef



JOHN C. CONDON

International Christian University, Tokyo

FATHI S. YOUSEF

California State University, Long Beach

An introduction to intercultural communication

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*An introduction
to intercultural
communication*

THE MACMILLAN SERIES IN *Speech Communication*

RUSSEL R. WINDES, *Editor*
Queens College of the City University of New York

Editor's Foreword

Professors Condon and Yousef have written a very special book, which we believe to be the first comprehensive introduction to the vital subject of interpersonal communication across cultures. There have been a number of books which have touched on selected aspects of intercultural communication: the mass media and international communication; nonverbal behavior; communication in or with specific cultures; cultures and subcultures. Recently we have begun to see frequent articles on intercultural communication, some of which have been collected into books of readings. But thus far no book has attempted to provide the student of culture and the student of communication with a thorough background of the many issues which underpin the study of intercultural communication. As instructors well know, one simply cannot take relevant but scattered articles from different disciplines, written from different perspectives for different purposes, and put them together to make a unified course of study. There must be a basis for selection, a sense of emphasis and balance, and, above all, some unifying themes and assumptions which not only **bring** necessary issues together, but **hold** them together. **An Introduction to Intercultural Communication**

is the first book in its field to make this attempt. So successful is the result that, we believe, this book is likely to define the field of intercultural communication for years to come.

The significance of this study can hardly be overestimated. Any work in contemporary history and politics; any survey of educational exchange programs, technical assistance, tourism and multinational conferences; any study of world economics and multinational corporate growth and activity are evidence that communicating with persons of other cultures has become a daily necessity. If we do not yet live in Marshall McLuhan's "global village," we at least inhabit its suburbs, within easy commuting distance. Moreover, in the United States today we need not travel at all in order to encounter significant differences in attitudes, values, language, nonverbal behaviors, and ways of thinking. The communication problems we often label as "race relations," "interethnic relations," or even "the generation gap," are really not so very different from those we experience in communicating across more clearly defined cultural and national lines.

This much-talked-of "shrinking world" has produced some standardizations of behavior. At the same time, however, it has made us more aware of differences in ways of speaking, reasoning, gesturing, and acting—differences which no longer are viewed at a distance. Technological and political realities have conspired, not just to permit, but to require a secretary of state to race from one part of the globe to another, a process which has underscored the necessity of **personal** communication among men of varied and varying cultures. Of lesser consequence, no doubt, but of far greater frequency, each of us may decide whether we wish to stay at home this year (in our own country) or to see the gardens in Edinburgh, to watch the sunsets in Vienna, or to go trucking the back roads of Yucatan. The study of intercultural communication is a subject of concern not only to communicologists and anthropologists, but to diplomats, missionaries, businessmen, Peace Corps volunteers and exchange students; it is, in fact, a reality which embraces us all.

It is not surprising that more colleges and universities are offering additional courses in this field, or even that Bobbs-Merrill is adding this volume to our Series in Speech Communi-

cation. What is surprising is that our discipline, dating back two thousand years, has failed to produce such a book until now. One possible reason may be simply that, until recently, the conduct of international relations was essentially a matter of secrecy and subterfuge, and that the humanistic concerns of communication were most often reserved for the citizenry at home. In ancient Greece a barbarian was any foreigner; in the world of today we seem at least a bit more sophisticated. A second reason for the late appearance of such a book probably lies in the great disparity between the vastness of the potential subject matter and the obvious limitations felt by any scholar. As the authors of this book make clear, however, this problem can be somewhat diminished if the focus of study is not "all about other cultures," but rather "something about our own cultural behavior as sensed through interaction with some other cultures." Thus, the book invites self-awareness and introspection as much as it informs about the behavior of others. For this reason alone, the book ought to be highly relevant to many courses not primarily concerned with international or cross-cultural communication. **An Introduction to Intercultural Communication** is one book from speech communication which is likely to find its way into courses in other allied disciplines—sociology and anthropology, political science and international relations, urban studies, linguistics, and in certain interdisciplinary studies. At the same time, within the speech-communication discipline, the book should be highly relevant to many aspects of interpersonal communication, nonverbal communication, semantics, rhetorical criticism, political communication, and courses which relate to conflict and decision-making (argumentation, persuasion, for example).

Professors Condon and Yousef are highly qualified by education and experience to write an introductory book in intercultural communication. Professor Condon, who prepared a major share of the book, has spent ten years studying and teaching abroad—in Mexico, Brazil, Tanzania, and Japan. He taught for five years at Northwestern University. His first book, **Semantics and Communication** (Macmillan, 1966), continues to be an important book in the discipline and he has published more than thirty articles in several nations. Professor Yousef also brings impres-

sive credentials. Born and raised in Egypt, he spent many years working with Americans in the Middle East (chiefly with Aramco in Saudi Arabia) and in Europe. His studies at the University of Minnesota centered around intercultural communication, and he has published several important articles in the field. Between the two of them, the authors speak and understand eight languages and have spent over twenty years outside their own cultures.

By choice of topics, organization, and balance of theory and example, this introduction to intercultural communication is an innovative, practical, and fascinating book. Because its emphasis is on communication, and not on all facets of culture, the introduction, Chapter One, surveys selected principles of interpersonal communication. It not only provides common ground for a potentially diverse readership, but it makes even familiar concepts seem fresh as they are viewed in their application across cultures. Chapter Two, in which the authors present a series of cases drawn from actual intercultural encounters, sets the tone for the remaining chapters of the book. Its overall purpose is to make the reader aware of some of his own culture-bound assumptions and some of his own difficulties in knowing what other people might be thinking, as well as what he might or might not do in simple but unfamiliar situations.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five form the core of the book: an introduction to the concepts of values and value orientations, followed by a study on value orientation and cultural beliefs. Often the relationship to communication is left implicit, but never far from the surface. The reader should emerge from these chapters with a far clearer sensitivity to the cultural roots of his own behavior, as well as a sensitivity to the richness and variety of alternative values and assumptions of persons in other societies. These chapters are impressive not only for the wealth of insights drawn together, but because they leave the reader with a means of interpreting other cultures not specifically referred to in the chapters. Thus, most valuable here is the perspective and framework for further analysis.

Because of the structuring of the book, the reader finds himself well into the theory before he begins to consider in some detail those specific topics that often, individually, masquerade

for the whole of "intercultural communication." Chapter Six, on nonverbal behavior and communication across cultures, is selective enough to complement other more exhaustive studies of nonverbal communication. Following this, Chapter Seven describes home styles and communication patterns, reminding us that culture, if not always charity, begins at home.

Chapter Eight, on language in culture, is no less original in its content and design. The much discussed "Whorfian hypothesis" is included, but it is included in the perspective of more recent linguistic theories. Here, as elsewhere throughout the book, the writing is neither technical nor popularized. Information and examples provide insights and at the same time raise significant questions. Another original contribution, a consideration of the importance of translation and interpretation, follows in Chapter Nine. Up to now, almost no information has been available on the many roles and influence of those anonymous people providing the link between speakers of different languages.

The next to final chapter, Ten, discusses the issues which once comprised almost the entirety of the speech discipline: rhetoric. Viewing rhetoric, language, and cultural values as essentially interdependent, we believe that this chapter alone is sufficient to revise many traditional and culture-bound treatments of reasoning and persuasion.

The final chapter, Eleven, written in question-answer format, gives a partial review of some of the most important considerations raised by the previous chapters. It also underscores two important themes in the book: first, the knowledge that both the study and facility in interpersonal communication across cultures begin with the awareness of our own culturally influenced patterns of communication; second, the importance of realizing that each intercultural encounter is unique and complex. Thus, the advice of "do this," or "don't do this," must be regarded with suspicion. Therefore, the perspective from any one area—theory of speech communication, rhetorical theory, language, nonverbal behavior—is of necessity incomplete.

An Introduction to Intercultural Communication is a richly human, often fascinating experience which embraces insights and conclusions from many disciplines and from many cultural experiences. For all that, there is a modesty about the book which

helps to make it an excellent introduction for readers who wish to enhance their knowledge about and proficiency in that which is the most human of all human experiences: communication.

Russel R. Windes

Preface

This book is an **introduction** to intercultural communication. And while the handling of such a complex subject requires a measure of immodesty, even to attempt an introduction, it seems surprising that this attempt is one of the first, so far as we know, to provide such a study. The area of intercultural communication remains largely uncharted. The speech communication field has explored very little, claimed little, and contributed little thus far. But the potential is great. While we stake no claims, either, we hope this book will stimulate greater interest in the subject.

Looking back, we can see that more than a little progress has been made. When I was at Northwestern twelve years ago, completing doctoral research on intercultural communication and values, there were no courses, no books, and few articles in the field. Attitudes were reflected in the graduate school directives. Although my research was conducted in Mexico, the graduate school refused to allow Spanish as the foreign-language requirement. I was told to take the French examination instead, because, they said, too little serious scholarly research was published in Spanish! Since then, however, the Department of Communication Studies has supported a number of excellent dissertations

in this field, including two excellent ones prepared in East Africa. Now Swahili is regarded as highly as French. Now there are courses in intercultural communication and cultural patterns of communication; there is an excellent newsletter, **Communique**, with a circulation in the thousands; there are international conferences—even three or four per year. At least two state legislatures have passed a law requiring a course in intercultural communication as part of teacher certification requirements.

Five years ago, at the University of Minnesota, Professor William Howell—a pioneer in intercultural communication—introduced me to Fathi Yousef. One summer we worked together in a seminar and, finding that our interests coincided and our backgrounds were complementary formed the idea for writing a book together. He had worked with Americans in the Middle East and later came to the United States as a foreign student (and has since become a citizen). My perspective, on the other hand, was directed **out** of the U.S., and my experiences were in other parts of the world. Hence, this book evolved more out of personal experiences and questions than a survey of literature in the library. While there are certain obvious limitations inherent in this kind of approach, and we cannot begin to cover **all** aspects of intercultural communication, we believe there are advantages, too. For one thing, through working together we hoped to minimize biases that result from personal or cultural peculiarities. The examples we used come mainly from the United States, Brazil, Mexico, the Middle East, Japan, and East Africa, with linguistic examples from the corresponding languages.

A study of this kind depends heavily on the insights of many colleagues and friends who have unknowingly assisted over the years. We acknowledge gratefully the contributions of my colleagues at International Christian University in Tokyo, including Professor Mitsuko Saito (Japan's "First Lady" of communication studies), Noah Brannen, Holloway Brown, Anatol Gorshkoff, and—most of all—our magnificent students who live intercultural lives at ICU. Also we are indebted to friends and associates in Japan: Masao Kunihiro, Sen Nishiyama, and to the gentle Kobayashi family, with whom my barbaric family has lived for five years. We are grateful, also, to Caroline Yousef, for observations on homes in Germany, where she grew up, and to my

wife, Camy, who worked for three years in northeast Brazil. Also in Brazil we wish to acknowledge the wise counsel of Frei Joao Vogel, former Director of the Centro de Formacao Intercultural in Petropolis. In Tanzania, others are to be thanked: the dedicated students at Kivukoni College in Dar es Salaam, Griff Cunningham, former Director, George Shilaka, Lionel Cliffe, and Ezekiel Ngonyani. At Northwestern University the Council on Intersocietal Studies was of great assistance, and the Ford Foundation made possible the year of teaching and research in East Africa. In Mexico we were helped by Ivan Illich and his associates at CIDOC in Cuernavaca, and by the good people at the **casa** Solis—including the sixteen children. In the United States many colleagues and friends have helped, only a few of whom I can mention here: Ethel Albert, Mary Badami, Dean Barnlund, Karen Carlson, William Howell, Bill Neher, Lee Roloff, and Edward Stewart. We have been aided also by Helmut Morsbach, now at Glasgow, and Heinz Gohring at Heidelberg. Several typists in different locations worked on the manuscript, including Yoko Yamada Kubota, Anita Mermel, and Ann Pyshos. Finally, we wish to express special appreciation to Russ Windes and Ralph Smith, who made many helpful editorial suggestions, most of which have been incorporated into the manuscript.

The book is dedicated to: Kaemi, Mama Bahati, kanai, Carmelita, and Camy—for reasons best known to her.

John Condon

Cuernavaca, Mexico
January, 1974

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