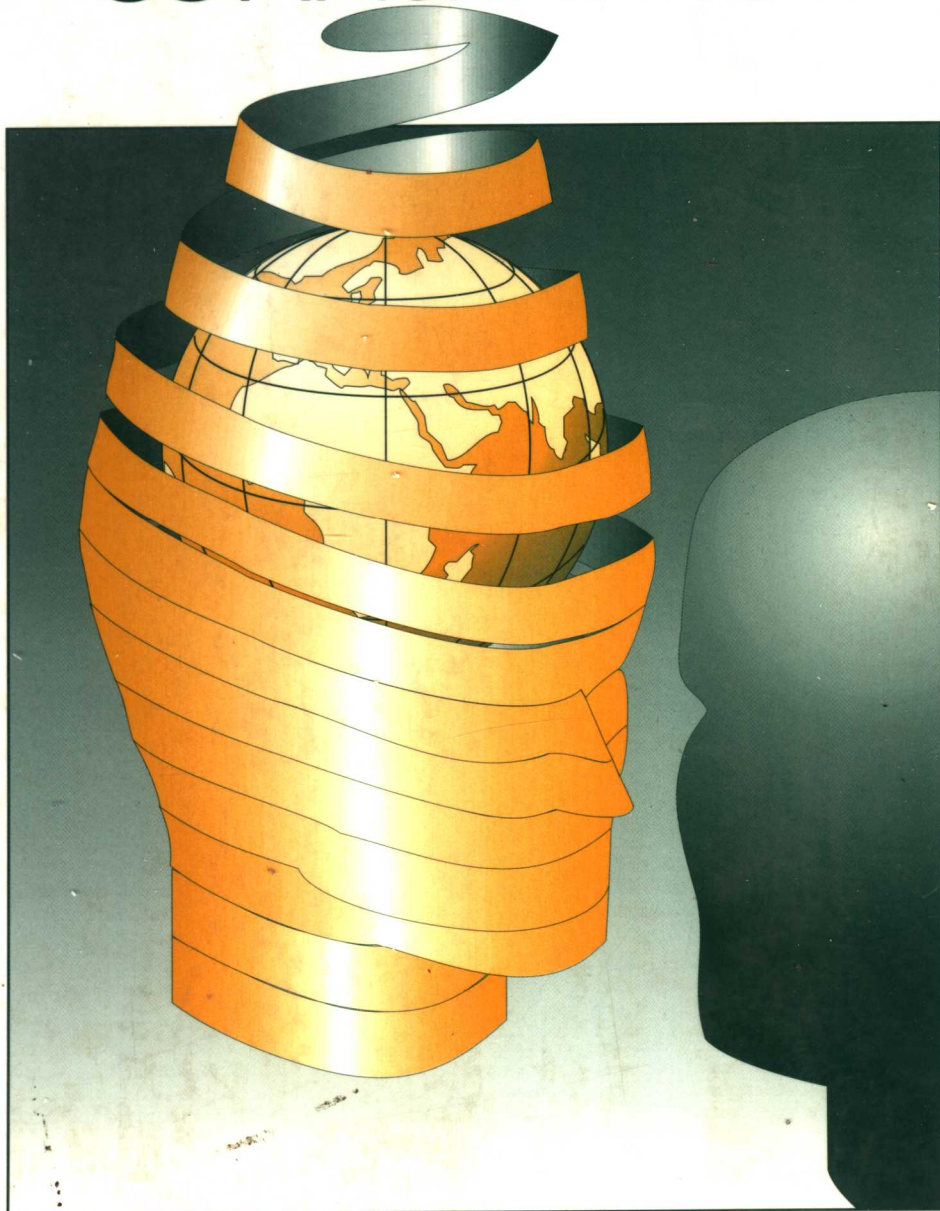


FRED E. JANDT

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION



AN INTRODUCTION

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Preface

This book is different from other intercultural communication texts in three important ways.

First, some texts assume the position that the general objective of intercultural communication is to improve communication and resolve misunderstandings. I believe that this general objective is incomplete.

In his 1956 book *The Functions of Social Conflict*, Lewis A. Coser argued convincingly that sociologists who focused on group harmony had an incomplete understanding of groups, for understanding the pressures that bring individuals together in groups is insufficient without also understanding the pressures that pull groups apart. That same push-pull exists in intercultural contacts. A study of ways to resolve intercultural misunderstandings is incomplete without a study of factors that lead to divisions between cultures.

More and more people are beginning to think globally. As participation from many countries is required to deal with the world's problems, more problems are being addressed on a global level demonstrating our interdependence with one another. At the same time, worldwide balkanization or the breakups of countries into smaller ethnic states demonstrates the increasing importance that individuals place on ethnic group memberships as a way of defining identity. We find individuals increasingly turning to subgroups which resemble cultures to find and refine their identities. This book assumes that understandings of the pull to join us and the push to make us separate are critical for developing intercultural communication competence.

Second, this text examines the roles of immigration, modern transportation and communication systems, marketing, and media as both homogenizing forces and divisive forces. All U.S. citizens are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Yet our country of immi-

grants is experiencing renewed pressures from the current large number of immigrants. Today's immigrants can leave their homes on jets, phone home from the airport, and in a very real sense not leave their identity behind. These pressures affect you whether you live in Laredo, Texas, or in East Lansing, Michigan. Today, as well, you can see the development of a global popular culture as MTV and Coke® are international and the NBA and Madonna are known worldwide. International marketing and media contribute to the push-pull of intercultural contacts.

Third, some texts focus exclusively on communication between individuals from diverse national-cultural backgrounds; others focus exclusively on communication between individuals of diverse ethnic or racial backgrounds living together within one country. This text takes the approach that both must be studied together: Understanding the challenges of interethnic communication is facilitated by a better understanding of national-cultural backgrounds, and understanding the uniqueness of the United States and its international relations is facilitated by a better understanding of its multiculturalism.

To the Student

It might be that you live a few miles from the place of your birth and have not traveled extensively. Then again, you may have traveled extensively, perhaps to study abroad. You may be an international student studying in the United States. Regardless of your background, communication with people of diverse cultural backgrounds will be an important part of your future.

With your course, this text helps you become more competent in communication with others of diverse cultural backgrounds by helping you develop the following skills and understandings:

- Expanding your range of verbal and nonverbal communication skills. More effective communicators have the ability to select and perform communication behaviors appropriate to various contexts.
- Becoming better able to acclimate to new environments. We all experience stress in ambiguous environments. More effective communicators recognize and handle that stress.
- Recognizing the influence your own culture has had on the way in which you view yourself. More effective communicators understand how they became who they are and are less threatened by those of other backgrounds.
- Expanding your knowledge of social customs of other cultures. More effective communicators understand how other cultures think and behave.

As you begin your study, I urge you to avoid two common fallacies—that you already know the content of your course from your experiences and that some knowledge of cultures alone prepares you to communicate effectively with others of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Communication and social science books and courses are unique from others in that you have had some experiences with the subject matter before the course begins and have developed skills that you believe work for you. Educators call these skills and beliefs “naive knowledge”—not necessarily naive as simplistic but naive as untested

in a variety of settings. Rather than use your naive knowledge as the basis of judging the accuracy of this text and the course, I encourage you to open your naive knowledge to evaluation. How did you develop your belief? In what situations might that belief not be appropriate? How can you develop the ability to evaluate situations and choose one of many possible ways of communicating?

I believe it is equally a fallacy to believe that if you understand an individual's culture, you can be a successful communicator by adapting your communication on the basis of your knowledge of the culture. Is every U.S. citizen so similar that an international student, for example, is prepared to communicate effectively with each of us based on general knowledge of the United States alone? Of course not. Are there no significant differences between you and other U.S. citizens? Of course there are.

The general goals you should have for this text and your course is to develop an understanding of cultures to understand the opportunities and challenges that each culture presents to people and to develop the skills of learning from each individual how they dealt with those opportunities and challenges. The United States does stress individualism in families, schools, and workplaces. Are each of us alike in our feelings about and expressions of individualism? No. We have all dealt with that important cultural challenge, and how we dealt with it helps others to know us as individuals.

Of all the courses I have taught over the years, this is my favorite. I enjoy teaching it because my students have expressed enjoyment and pleasure from learning new things about other people and about themselves. I encourage you to undertake that same adventure with enthusiasm! Good luck!

Notes to the Instructor

This text is written for introductory courses in culture and communication at the sophomore or junior level. It assumes little or no previous course work in communication or culture studies.

Of two influential theories of intercultural communication, uncertainty reduction theory and coordinated management of meaning theory, this text is more closely aligned with the second. The approach of this text, then, is to develop the skills of intercultural communication competence through developing an understanding of how individuals perceive and react to cultural rules. This text integrates several important theoretical contributions for skills development, notably Richard Brislin's definitions of culture, LaRay Barna's intercultural communication stumbling blocks, Geert Hofstede's culture dimensions, Edward Stewart's description of cultural patterns, John Berry's work on acculturation, and Edith Folb's essay on dominance in intercultural communication.

The intercultural communication skills specifically addressed in this text are the following:

- *Communication skills.* To expand students' ranges of communication skills, cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication are described. Common intercultural communication stumbling blocks, such as stereotypes and prejudice, are described. Accompanying the text is a student's workbook containing application exercises that assist you in providing students the opportunity to apply concepts presented in that chapter.
- *Handling new environments.* This objective is supported first by a chapter on perception and decision making to describe how others can see themselves and the world differently. Another important chapter discusses what happens when cultures come in contact with one another, how they borrow from one another, and how they market to one another.

- *The way in which students view themselves.* Assuming that most readers of this text are residents of the United States, the text describes dominant U.S. cultural patterns so that students can reflect on how these have affected how they view themselves. And because everyone living in the United States is either an immigrant or descended from one, immigration and its effects are described. Of all immigrant groups, Hispanics and African-Americans are emphasized because of the representations of these groups in media and marketing that are accessible to all students. Subgroups are then described as presenting the same communication challenges as cultures.
- *Knowledge of other cultures.* Some authors seem to assume that one can learn intercultural communication without any specific knowledge of other cultures. Yet a fundamental principle of communication is understanding your audience. This text presents specific information on Arabian, Chinese, and Japanese cultures as well as major cultures within the United States. This text also addresses the evolving role of women and men in the United States and in other cultures.

In areas of diversity education, it is reasonable to question the qualifications, experiences and backgrounds, and agendas of authors and instructors. I have taught and been a student of intercultural communication for some 25 years, developing my experience through travel and international training and research projects. By appearance I am a White male, but that popular stereotype in no way describes my background. To know me would require knowing how I as an individual dealt with the opportunities and challenges presented me by my cultural identifications. My agenda for my involvement in this study began with seeing prejudice from the unclouded eyes of a child. It simply made no sense to me. Experiencing prejudice later in life also made no sense to me. My agenda is to facilitate students' development of self-concepts that value their histories and appreciate the diversities of others'.

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I also wish to express appreciation to two special graduate students who have worked with me: Yosei Sugawara and Ibrahim Bin-Täher.

In many ways the saying "know thyself" is not well said.
It were more practical to say "know other people!"

—Menander, Greek poet (343-292 B.C.)

There is a true yearning to respond to
The singing River and the wise Rock.
So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew,
The African, the Native American, the Sioux,
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek,
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheik,
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,
The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.
They hear. They all hear
The speaking of the Tree.

—portion of Inaugural Poem by Maya Angelou
for William Jefferson Clinton, President,
January 20, 1993.
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