



COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CULTURES

2nd Edition

Larry A.
Samovar

Richard
E. Porter

Communication Between Cultures

Second Edition

LARRY A. SAMOVAR
San Diego State University

RICHARD E. PORTER
California State University, Long Beach



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Preface



Culture, the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

We approached the occasion of a second edition with three very different responses: gratification, excitement, and caution. Our pride and egos were delighted that our first efforts were successful enough to warrant this new edition. We were also excited over the prospects of tinkering with what we had done in the original edition. We knew we had to be prudent when advancing additional perspectives and material so that we did not abandon the orientation that contributed to the popularity of the first edition. We believe that in this edition we have been able to balance the past, present, and future of intercultural communication. We have retained the core of the field, added current thinking and research, and staked out some new territory.

This book is still about the unique relationship between communication and culture. More specifically, it is about what happens when people from different cultures come together to share ideas and information. Because many who read it may not be communication or anthropology majors, we have tried to include the basic principles from both fields and attempt to demonstrate how culture and communication cannot be separated when we interact with other people.

This book is intended for those whose professional or private life is likely to include encounters with people from cultures or co-cultures different from their own. We therefore deal with both communication among international cultures and communication among co-cultures in the United States.

We have worked together in the field of intercultural communication for over twenty-five years and have seen many changes occur. Culture and communication, we have come to believe, involve personal matters, and we have therefore developed our own philosophy about intercultural communication. At times, we have stated our own positions, and we make no apologies for these. We also have made a conscientious effort to keep our own ethnocentrism in check, but for those instances in which it has accidentally emerged, we do apologize.

Rationale

Worldwide interest in intercultural communication grows out of two assumptions.

First, we live in an age when changes in technology, travel, economic and political systems, immigration patterns, and population density have created a world in which we increasingly interact with people from different cultures. And whether we like it or not, those interactions will continue to grow in both frequency and intensity. Huston Smith said much the same thing when he wrote, "When historians look back on our century, they may remember it most, not for space travel or the release of nuclear energy, but as the time when the peoples of the world first came to take one another seriously."¹

Second, people now know that these diverse backgrounds influence communication in subtle and profound ways: one's cultural perceptions and experiences help determine how one sends and receives messages.

Approach

Fundamental to our approach to intercultural communication is the belief that all forms of human communication involve action. Put in slightly different terms, communication is an activity that affects us and other people. Whether we are generating or receiving words or movements, we are creating and producing action. Therefore, any study of communication must include information about the choices we make in selecting our messages, plus a discussion of the consequences of those choices. Hence, this book takes a view of intercultural communication that is both pragmatic and philosophical. We have attempted throughout to translate ideas and concepts into practices that can improve your communication and help you attain your communication goals. We also continue to remind you in each chapter about the consequences of your choices.

Philosophy

A dual philosophy has guided us in the preparation of this book. First, it is to the advantage of all 5.5 billion of us who share the planet to improve our interpersonal and intercultural communication abilities. The world has grown so small that we all depend upon each other now. What happens in one place in the world affects other places. Second, most of the obstacles to understanding can be overcome with motivation, knowledge, and appreciation of cultural diversity. We hope to supply you with all three.

¹Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 7.

Organization

We have attempted to organize the book in manageable increments that build on each other. What you learn in one chapter you will carry into the next. The book is divided into four interrelated parts.

Part I introduces you to the study of communication and culture. After pointing out the importance of intercultural communication in Chapter 1, we use Chapters 2 and 3 to examine communication, culture, and intercultural communication.

Part II focuses on the ability of culture to shape and modify our view of reality. Chapter 4 examines how one's culture influences perception and communication. In Chapter 5, we examine the sources of those perceptions and behaviors by looking at cultural differences in world view, family experiences, and history.

Part III puts the theory of intercultural communication into practice. The first two chapters in this part explore differences between verbal and nonverbal messages. The final two chapters explain the ways in which cultures respond differently to business and educational settings.

The final part attempts to extend what we have learned throughout the preceding chapters by converting knowledge into action. In Chapter 10, we offer guidelines for improvement as well as a philosophy for a future that we believe will be filled with intercultural experiences.

Assistance

Both of us have been interested in culture since we were sophomores in college. Over time we have come to subscribe to the Buddhist and Hindu notions that we learn from each other and that there are many ways of knowing. Culture reaches below conscious levels of awareness, and we are sure, therefore, that some very extraordinary people have entered our lives and have taught us about the subject. In this sense, we believe that perhaps we have been both students and teachers to many who have crossed our paths. We know that we have learned a great deal about culture and communication from our contacts with special people in our lives.

A number of individuals were instrumental in the preparation of this new edition. We would like to thank some of them here. Professor Nemi Jain, in a previous work with us, helped to generate many of the ideas that have found their way into this new edition. Our research assistants, Vivian Laubacher Henchy and Edwin Mc Daniel, provided valuable material for many of the new chapters. We acknowledge and applaud the creative photographs provided by Lisa Stefani. Her ability to visually capture culture has made this new edition easier to look at. As always, we appreciate the advice and editorial direction of Wadsworth Publishing Company—specifically, the help provided by Joshua King and the

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Larry A. Samovar

Richard E. Porter

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PART ONE



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Communication and Culture

Intercultural Communication: Interaction in a Changing World



Human beings draw close to one another by their common nature, but habits and customs keep them apart.

CONFUCIAN SAYING

Every culture expresses its purposes and conducts its affairs through the medium of communication. Cultures exist primarily to create and preserve common systems of symbols by which their members can assign and exchange meanings. Unhappily, the distinctive rules that govern these symbol systems are far from obvious.

DEAN C. BARNLUND

When in 422 B.C. Euripides wrote “All is well; all yields its place and then goes,” he surely did not realize that he would someday be helping to introduce a book on intercultural communication. Yet he recognized that people, the world, and society are dynamic and always in a state of change. Recognition of this dynamic quality and the need for social change was repeated in the 1960s by Bob Dylan who proclaimed in his popular folk song “The times, they are a changin’.”

The study of intercultural communication is about change—changes in the world’s fabric of social relationships and how we must adapt to them. This book deals with the international and domestic changes that have brought us into direct and indirect contact with people who, because of their cultural diversity, often behave in ways that we do not understand. With or without our consent, the last four decades have thrust us into social contact with people who often appear alien, exotic, and perhaps even wondrous. These people may live thousands of miles away or right next door.

Importance of Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication, as you might suspect, is not new. Wandering nomads, religious missionaries, and conquering warriors have encountered people different from themselves since the beginning of time. These early meetings, like those of today, were frequently confusing and most often hostile. The recognition of alien differences, and the human propensity to respond malevolently to them, were expressed over two thousand