

Larry A. Samovar  
Richard E. Porter

# Intercultural Communication: A Reader

FOURTH EDITION



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# Intercultural Communication: A Reader

Fourth Edition

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California State University,  
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## Preface

The occasion of the fourth edition of our reader on intercultural communication is both pleasant and exciting because it indicates an ongoing acceptance of our ideas and views about intercultural communication among a wide variety of scholars and teachers in a field that has great personal meaning to us. We are also pleased that the intercultural communication field is continuing to grow and that we have helped shape and define that field. This fourth edition represents our continuing attempt to refine our thoughts and feelings about the field and to share them with you.

As in the past, we intend this anthology to be for the general reader. Consequently, we have selected materials that are broadly based and comprehensive, which are suitable for both undergraduate and graduate students. Although the level of difficulty varies from article to article, we believe that, with only one or two exceptions, we have not gone beyond the difficulty level found in most texts for advanced undergraduate students. Twenty-two essays are new to this edition, eleven of which were written especially for this volume.

*Intercultural Communication: A Reader* is designed to meet three specific needs. The first comes from our belief that successful intercultural communication is a matter of the highest importance if humankind and society are to survive. This book, then, is designed to serve as a *basic anthology* for courses providing theoretical and practical knowledge about intercultural communication processes. Our intention is to make this book useful not only to students of communication theory, but also to readers seeking practical and immediately usable knowledge. Second, the book may be used as a *supplementary text* in existing service and basic communication skills courses and in interpersonal communication courses. Third, the book provides *resource material* for advanced courses in public speaking, communication theory, small group communication, organizational and business communication, and mass communication, as well as for courses in anthropology, sociology, social psychology, social welfare, business, and political science or international relations. It also may serve

as a resource manual for people who find themselves in programs or situations involving intercultural communication.

The book is organized into four closely related parts. In Part One, "Intercultural Communication: An Introduction," the first chapter contains essays that examine the philosophical basis for intercultural communication and discuss what intercultural communication is, what it tries to accomplish, and the nature of intercultural communication. Parts Two, Three, and Four trace the intercultural communication experience by means of a topical sequence. Part Two, "Socio-Cultural Backgrounds: What We Bring to Intercultural Communication," examines the influences of socio-cultural factors on intercultural interaction. In this section, Chapter 2 deals with the understanding of international cultures while Chapter 3 explores nondominant domestic cultures, subcultures, and deviant subgroups. Chapter 4 continues with an exploration of the cultural contexts within which intercultural communication occurs. We believe that through an examination of the cultural differences in what we bring to our intercultural communication acts, we are better able to understand and to appreciate what goes on during the communication event itself. In Part Three, "Intercultural Interaction: Taking Part in Intercultural Communication," our analysis focuses on the problems of intercultural interaction. Chapter 5 in this section examines cultural differences in verbal interaction; Chapter 6 focuses on differences in nonverbal interaction. Part Four, "Intercultural Communication: Becoming More Effective," is concerned with improving intercultural communication. In Chapter 7 the readings offer the knowledge and experiences of successful intercultural communicators and practical suggestions for improving intercultural communication. Chapter 8, the final chapter, examines the ethical dimensions of intercultural communication, the future of intercultural communication, and possible directions for change and improvement.

This book continues to be the outcome of a joint venture. The ideas reflected in it and the decisions necessary for its development and prep-

aration grew out of an association and a dialogue that have persisted since 1967. Both of us share a mutual concern that if the human race is to endure in the decades ahead—decades that will, in both time and space, bring all humans closer together in a global community—we must all be able to communicate with people from cultures far removed from our own.

We wish to express our appreciation to the many authors, professional associations, and publishers whose cooperation has helped make this book possible. In addition, various individuals have played a significant role in the development and completion of this project. Especially, we should like to acknowledge the thoughtful reviews of the manuscript by Mary Jane Collier, California State University, Los Angeles; Jolene Koester, California State University, Sacramento; and Felipe Korzeny, Michigan State University.

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# Part One

## Intercultural Communication: An Introduction

*Precision of communication is important, more important than ever, in our era of hair-trigger balances, when a false or misunderstood word may create as much disaster as a sudden thoughtless act.*

—James Thurber

Intercultural communication, as we might rightly suspect, is not new. As long as people from different cultures have been encountering one another there has been intercultural communication. What is new, however, is the systematic study of exactly what happens when cross-cultural contacts and interaction take place—when message producer and message receiver are from different cultures.

Perhaps the knowledge that technology has produced the means of our own self-destruction has prompted this concern. Historically, intercultural communication, more often than not, has employed a rhetoric of force rather than reason. Maybe we are now seeking something other than traditional force. Or perhaps the reason for this new study is more pragmatic, brought about by our mobility, increased contact among cultures, and a widening world marketplace. Traditionally, intercultural communication took place only within an extremely small minority. Ministers of government and certain merchants were the travelers and visitors to foreign lands. Until rather recently, we Americans had little contact with other cultures even within our own country. The ghetto or barrio dwellers remained in the ghetto or barrio. If they did emerge, it was to serve the upper class, not to interact as equals. And those who made up the vast white middle America remained at home, rarely leaving their own county. But this has changed markedly; we are now a mobile society among ever-increasing mobile societies.

This increased contact with other cultures, subcultures, and deviant subgroups makes it imperative for us to make a concerted effort to get along with and understand people whose beliefs

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This increased contact with other cultures, subcultures, and deviant subgroups makes it imperative for us to make a concerted effort to get along with and understand people whose beliefs

and backgrounds may be vastly different from our own. The ability, through increased awareness and understanding, to coexist peacefully with people who do not necessarily share our life styles or values not only could benefit us in our own neighborhoods but also could be the decisive factor in forestalling nuclear annihilation.

There remains a great need to specify the nature of intercultural communication and to recognize the various viewpoints that see it somewhat differently. From what we have already said, you should suspect that there are a variety of ways in which the topic of intercultural communication can be explored. There are perspectives that look at intercultural communication from a mass media point of view. Scholars who follow this approach are concerned with issues such as international broadcasting, worldwide freedom of the press, the Western domination of information, and the use of modern electronic technologies for the instantaneous worldwide transmission of information. Other groups investigate international communication. Here the emphasis is on communication between nations and between governments. It is the communication of diplomacy and propaganda. Although both of these approaches are of great value, they are not the domain of this book. Our concern is with the more personal aspects of communication—what happens when people from different cultures interact face-to-face. Hence, we identify our approach as one that examines the *interpersonal dimensions* of intercultural communication. For this reason, the articles and essays we have selected for this collection have been selected because we believe they focus on those variables of both culture and communication that come into play *during* the communication encounter—during the time that participants from different cultures are trying to share ideas, information, and feelings.

Inquiry into the nature of intercultural communication has raised many questions, but it has produced only a few theories and far fewer answers. Most of the inquiry has been associated with fields other than communication: primarily

anthropology, international relations, social psychology, and socio- and psycholinguistics. Although the direction of research has been diverse, the knowledge has not been coordinated. There is still a great need to specify the nature of intercultural communication and to recognize various viewpoints that see the phenomenon somewhat differently. Much that has emerged has been more a reaction to current socio-racial-ethnic concerns than an attempt to define and to explain intercultural communication. But, it is quite clear that knowledge of intercultural communication can aid in solving communication problems before they arise. School counselors who understand some of the reasons why the poor perceive schools as they do might be better able to treat young truants. Those who know that native Americans and Mexicans use eye contact in ways that differ from other Americans may be able to avert misunderstandings. In essence, what we are saying is that many problems can be avoided by understanding the components of intercultural communication.

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# 1

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## Approaches

We begin this exploration of intercultural communication with a series of diverse articles that (1) introduce the philosophy that underlies our concept of intercultural communication, (2) provide a general orientation and overview of intercultural communication, (3) theorize about the analysis of intercultural transactions, (4) provide insight into cultural differences, and (5) demonstrate the relationships between culture and perception. Our purpose at this point is to give you a sufficient introduction to the many wide and diverse dimensions of intercultural communication so that you will be able to approach the remainder of this volume with an appropriate frame of reference to make your further inquiry interesting, informative, and useful.

Dean C. Barnlund in "Communication in a Global Village" traces communication and transportation developments that have led to the apparent shrinking of the contemporary world and the emergence of the global community. He points out the ramifications of the global village in terms of the forms and kinds of interactions that necessarily accompany such a new community of people. Barnlund considers problems of meaning associated with cultural differences, interpersonal encounters, intercultural encounters, and the role of the "collective unconscious" in intercultural interactions.

In the next article, "Approaching Intercultural Communication," we introduce some of the *specific* topics and issues associated with the study of intercultural communication and present in rather broad terms what it involves. We start by defining and explaining the role of human communication. We then turn our attention to the specific areas of culture and communication and show how they interrelate to form the field of intercultural communication. By examining the major variables that affect intercultural communication, we better understand how it operates. By knowing at the outset of the book what the study of intercultural communication entails, you should have a greater appreciation for the selections that follow.

Next, Dorothy L. Pennington presents us with a somewhat different approach to staking out the territory of intercultural communication. In a manner similar to the previous approach by Porter and Samovar, Pennington begins with the assumption that to understand intercultural communication attention must be paid to the concept of culture and its major components. She identifies nine categories of components: (1) existential world-view; (2) language and symbol systems; (3) schemas (cultural patterns of interpreting, organizing, and classifying data); (4) beliefs, attitudes, and values; (5) temporality (concept of, attitude toward, and use of time); (6) space, proxemics (spatial behavior); (7) religion, myths, and expressive forms; (8) social relationships and communication networks; and (9) interpolation patterns. Following a descriptive discussion of these components, Pennington offers a model of culture and an explanation of what transpires when two or more cultures come together.

The importance of culture in human interaction is underscored by Edward T. Hall in his selection "Context and Meaning." The grand connection between culture and human communicative behavior is revealed when Hall demonstrates how culture provides a highly selective screen between people and their outside worlds. This cultural filter effectively designates what people attend to as well as what they choose to ignore. This link between culture and behavior is further illustrated through Hall's discussion of high- and low-context communication, in which he shows how people from different cultural backgrounds learn to concentrate on unique aspects of their environments.

Anne Pedersen and Paul Pedersen continue the general theme of this chapter as they offer yet another approach to the study and understanding of intercultural communication. Although their approach is more practical than theoretical, it nevertheless presents information concerning the operating ingredients when people from different cultures interact. The Pedersen approach is based on what they call a "Cultural Grid." In a single

framework, the grid combines a personal (individual) perspective of specific behaviors, expectations, and values with a cultural (group) perspective of social system variables. By *combining* the individual and the group perspective, the Cultural Grid can be used to describe a distinctive cultural orientation in each communication situation and to suggest how specific behaviors, expectations, and values are related to social system variables.

Like past experiences, perception also plays a role in human interaction. This influence and impact serves as the nucleus for Marshall R. Singer's article "Culture: A Perceptual Approach." He begins his analysis with two important premises. First, individual patterns of behavior are based on individual perceptions of the external world. Second, because these patterns are learned, they are culturally based. These two ideas lead Singer through a model of culture and perception that helps explain why communication between members of contrasting cultures is often so difficult. The problem, as this essay suggests, is that our view of reality is shaped by our cultural experiences.

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# Communication in a Global Village

DEAN C. BARNLUND

*Nearing Autumn's close.  
My neighbor—  
How does he live, I wonder?*

—*Bashō*

These lines, written by one of the most cherished of *haiku* poets, express a timeless and universal curiosity in one's fellow man. When they were written, nearly three hundred years ago, the word "neighbor" referred to people very much like one's self—similar in dress, in diet, in custom, in language—who happened to live next door. Today relatively few people are surrounded by neighbors who are cultural replicas of themselves. Tomorrow we can expect to spend most of our lives in the company of neighbors who will speak in a different tongue, seek different values, move at a different pace, and interact according to a different script. Within no longer than a decade or two the probability of spending part of one's life in a foreign culture will exceed the probability a hundred years ago of ever leaving the town in which one was born. As our world is transformed our neighbors increasingly will be people whose life styles contrast sharply with our own.

The technological feasibility of such a global village is no longer in doubt. Only the precise date of its attainment is uncertain. The means already exist:

in telecommunication systems linking the world by satellite, in aircraft capable of moving people faster than the speed of sound, in computers which can disgorge facts more rapidly than men can formulate their questions. The methods for bringing people closer physically and electronically are clearly at hand. What is in doubt is whether the erosion of cultural boundaries through technology will bring the realization of a dream or a nightmare. Will a global village be a mere collection or a true community of men? Will its residents be neighbors capable of respecting and utilizing their differences, or clusters of strangers living in ghettos and united only in their antipathies for others?

Can we generate the new cultural attitudes required by our technological virtuosity? History is not very reassuring here. It has taken centuries to learn how to live harmoniously in the family, the tribe, the city state, and the nation. Each new stretching of human sensitivity and loyalty has taken generations to become firmly assimilated in the human psyche. And now we are forced into a quantum leap from the mutual suspicion and hostility that have marked the past relations between peoples into a world in which mutual respect and comprehension are requisite.

Even events of recent decades provide little basis for optimism. Increasing physical proximity has brought no millenium in human relations. If anything, it has appeared to intensify the divisions among people rather than to create a broader intimacy. Every new reduction in physical distance has made us more painfully aware of the psychic distance that divides people and has increased alarm over real or imagined differences. If today people occasionally choke on what seem to be indigestible differences between rich and poor, male and female, specialist and nonspecialist within cultures, what will happen tomorrow when people must assimilate and cope with still greater contrasts in life styles? Wider access to more people will be a doubtful victory if human beings find they have nothing to say to one another or cannot stand to listen to each other.

Time and space have long cushioned intercul-

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From Dean C. Barnlund, *Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States* (Tokyo: Simul Press, Inc., 1975), pp. 3-24. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Professor Barnlund teaches at San Francisco State University. Footnotes deleted.

tural encounters, confining them to touristic exchanges. But this insulation is rapidly wearing thin. In the world of tomorrow we can expect to live—not merely vacation—in societies which seek different values and abide by different codes. There we will be surrounded by foreigners for long periods of time, working with others in the closest possible relationships. If people currently show little tolerance or talent for encounters with alien cultures, how can they learn to deal with constant and inescapable coexistence?

The temptation is to retreat to some pious hope or talismanic formula to carry us into the new age. “Meanwhile,” as Edwin Reischauer reminds us, “we fail to do what we ourselves must do if ‘one world’ is ever to be achieved, and that is to develop the education, the skills and the attitudes that men must have if they are to build and maintain such a world. The time is short, and the needs are great. The task faces all men. But it is on the shoulders of people living in the strong countries of the world, such as Japan and the United States, that this burden falls with special weight and urgency.”

( Anyone who has truly struggled to comprehend another person—even those closest and most like himself—will appreciate the immensity of the challenge of intercultural communication. A greater exchange of people between nations, needed as that may be, carries with it no guarantee of increased cultural empathy; experience in other lands often does little but aggravate existing prejudices. Studying guidebooks or memorizing polite phrases similarly fails to explain differences in cultural perspectives. Programs of cultural enrichment, while they contribute to curiosity about other ways of life, do not cultivate the skills to function effectively in the cultures studied. Even concentrated exposure to a foreign language, valuable as it is, provides access to only one of the many codes that regulate daily affairs; human understanding is by no means guaranteed because conversants share the same dictionary. (Within the United States, where people inhabit a common territory and possess a common language, mutuality of meaning among Mexican-Americans, White-Americans, Black-Americans,

Indian-Americans—to say nothing of old and young, poor and rich, pro-establishment and anti-establishment cultures—is a sporadic and unreliable occurrence.) Useful as all these measures are for enlarging appreciation of diverse cultures, they fall short of what is needed for a global village to survive.

What seems most critical is to find ways of gaining entrance into the assumptive world of another culture, to identify the norms that govern face-to-face relations, and to equip people to function within a social system that is foreign but no longer incomprehensible. Without this kind of insight people are condemned to remain outsiders no matter how long they live in another country. Its institutions and its customs will be interpreted inevitably from the premises and through the medium of their own culture. Whether they notice something or overlook it, respect or ridicule it, express or conceal their reaction will be dictated by the logic of their own rather than the alien culture.

There are, of course, shelves and shelves of books on the cultures of the world. They cover the history, religion, political thought, music, sculpture, and industry of many nations. And they make fascinating and provocative reading. But only in the vaguest way do they suggest what it is that really distinguishes the behavior of a Samoan, a Congolese, a Japanese, or an American. Rarely do the descriptions of a political structure or religious faith explain precisely when and why certain topics are avoided or why specific gestures carry such radically different meanings according to the context in which they appear.

When former President Nixon and former Premier Sato met to discuss a growing problem concerning trade in textiles between Japan and the United States, Premier Sato announced that since they were on such good terms with each other the deliberations would be “three parts talk and seven parts ‘haragei.’” Translated literally, “haragei” means to communicate through the belly, that is to feel out intuitively rather than verbally state the precise position of each person.



Subscribing to this strategy—one that governs many interpersonal exchanges in his culture—Premier Sato conveyed without verbal elaboration his comprehension of the plight of American textile firms threatened by accelerating exports of Japanese fabrics to the United States. President Nixon—similarly abiding by norms that govern interaction within his culture—took this comprehension of the American position to mean that new export quotas would be forthcoming shortly.

During the next few weeks both were shocked at the consequences of their meeting: Nixon was infuriated to learn that the new policies he expected were not forthcoming, and Sato was upset to find that he had unwittingly triggered a new wave of hostility toward his country. If prominent officials, surrounded by foreign advisers, can commit such grievous communicative blunders, the plight of the ordinary citizen may be suggested. Such intercultural collisions, forced upon the public consciousness by the grave consequences they carry and the extensive publicity they receive, only hint at the wider and more frequent confusions and hostilities that disrupt the negotiations of lesser officials, business executives, professionals and even visitors in foreign countries.

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. About some of these codes, such as language, we have extensive knowledge. About others, such as gestures and facial codes, we have only rudimentary knowledge. On many others—rules governing topical appropriateness, customs regulating physical contact, time and space codes, strategies for the management of conflict—we have almost no systematic knowledge. To crash another culture with only the vaguest notion of its underlying dynamics reflects not only a provincial naïvete but a dangerous form of cultural arrogance.

It is differences in meaning, far more than mere

differences in vocabulary, that isolate cultures, and that cause them to regard each other as strange or even barbaric. It is not too surprising that many cultures refer to themselves as “The People,” relegating all other human beings to a subhuman form of life. To the person who drinks blood, the eating of meat is repulsive. Someone who conveys respect by standing is upset by someone who conveys it by sitting down; both may regard kneeling as absurd. Burying the dead may prompt tears in one society, smiles in another, and dancing in a third. If spitting on the street makes sense to some, it will appear bizarre that others carry their spit in their pocket; neither may quite appreciate someone who spits to express gratitude. The bullfight that constitutes an almost religious ritual for some seems a cruel and inhumane way of destroying a defenseless animal to others. Although staring is acceptable social behavior in some cultures, in others it is a thoughtless invasion of privacy. Privacy, itself, is without universal meaning.

Note that none of these acts involves an insurmountable linguistic challenge. The words that describe these acts—eating, spitting, showing respect, fighting, burying, and staring—are quite translatable into most languages. The issue is more conceptual than linguistic; each society places events in its own cultural frame and it is these frames that bestow the unique meaning and differentiated response they produce.

As we move or are driven toward a global village and increasingly frequent cultural contact, we need more than simply greater factual knowledge of each other. We need, more specifically, to identify what might be called the “rulebooks of meaning” that distinguish one culture from another. For to grasp the way in which other cultures perceive the world, and the assumptions and values that are the foundation of these perceptions, is to gain access to the experience of other human beings. Access to the world view and the communicative style of other cultures may not only enlarge our own way of experiencing the world but enable us to maintain constructive relationships with societies that operate according to a different logic than our own.