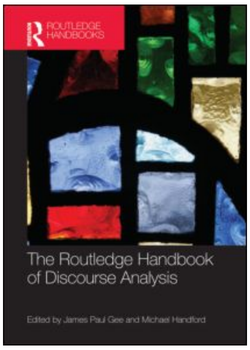

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Intercultural communication

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What is intercultural communication?

The term 'intercultural' literally means 'between cultures', and so, at one level, 'intercultural communication' could refer to all communication between members of two (or more) different social/cultural groups. This, in fact, is how the term has traditionally been used. Difference in nationality or mother tongue has typically been taken as the criterion for membership of different social/cultural groups, and communication between people of different nationalities or different mother tongues has then automatically been classified as intercultural. However, there are several problems with this. If culture is associated with social groups, then nationality and mother tongue are not the only social groups we each belong to. We are all simultaneously members of numerous other groups, such as regional, professional and religious, and so, if communication between members of different social groups is classified as intercultural, virtually all communication would thereby be defined as intercultural. Such a broad definition is clearly unsatisfactory – not simply because it is too all-encompassing, but also because, as Hartog (2006: 185) points out, discourse is not necessarily intercultural just because people from two different cultures meet. In other words, cultural factors do not necessarily impact on the communication process at all times. Žegarac (2007: 41) distinguishes between intracultural and intercultural communication from a cognitive point of view, and identifies an intercultural situation as one in which 'the cultural distance between the participants is significant enough to have an adverse effect on communicative success, unless it is appropriately accommodated by the participants'. In this chapter, we adopt Spencer-Oatey and Franklin's (2009: 3) slightly revised version of Žegarac's definition:

> An intercultural situation is one in which the cultural distance between the participants is significant enough to have an effect on interaction/communication that is noticeable to at least one of the parties.

Verschueren (2008: 23) makes the important point that intercultural communication should not be treated as 'something "special" and different from other forms of communicative interaction', but rather should be viewed first and foremost as communication. So our study of intercultural communication needs to focus on the processes by which communicative intentions are produced and (mis)interpreted and on the ways in which meanings are negotiated and co-constructed. Throughout this endeavour, we need to explore the ways in which contextual and situational factors impact on these processes, including cultural ones.

In this chapter we discuss four main issues in relation to intercultural discourse: achieving understanding, managing rapport, sense of identity and intercultural competence. All of the issues are closely intertwined, but for convenience sake, we treat them sequentially here.

Achieving understanding in intercultural discourse

In this section we concentrate on the 'content' aspect of understanding; in other words, on the (co-)construction of message meaning. The vast majority of this body of research has focused on the difficulties and misunderstandings that have occurred; however, more recently there have been calls (e.g. Bührig and ten Thije, 2006; Verschueren, 2008) for a shift towards the study of communicative success.

It should be remembered, of course, that understanding is not an 'all or nothing' phenomenon. As Roberts (1996: 12) points out, there is

> a continuum from, at one end, sufficient understanding for both parties to continue to, at the other end, total lack of understanding. In addition, many interactions are characterized by the illusion of understanding [...] in which both sides believe, at least for a while, that they have understood each other.

It should also be remembered that misunderstandings obviously do not only occur in intercultural interactions. Quite the contrary; as Coupland *et al.* (1991: 3) point out, 'Language use is pervasively and even intrinsically flawed, partial and problematic.' Nevertheless, the less participants have in common (linguistically, culturally or personally), the greater the expected difficulty in achieving mutual understanding (Gass and Varonis, 1991: 122), and hence the more noticeable the occurrence of misunderstanding in intercultural communication.

Factors that can make communication problematic

A number of factors influence how well participants of an intercultural interaction are likely to understand each other's messages, and one of the most fundamental of these is use of the linguistic code. If people cannot speak a given language fluently and/or if proficient speakers use it in 'unhelpful' ways, it will be very difficult for them to understand each other. For example, Bremer (1996), who carried out extensive research into the discourse of intercultural encounters, provides examples of comprehension problems that were triggered by the following linguistic code factors: mispronunciation or mishearing of a lexical item; unfamiliarity with a lexical item; structural complexity; ellipsis.

However, even when there are no language code problems of this kind, achieving understanding can still be extremely difficult. This is because, even though human communication to a large extent exploits a linguistic code, it is not feasible for everything to be expressed explicitly in the code. Much has to be left for the participants to work out, and in intercultural interaction this can be particularly problematic, because people may focus on different clues when inferring meaning and/or they may arrive at different meanings from the same clues.

A number of researchers (e.g. Gumperz, 1982; Marriott, 1990; Gumperz and Roberts, 1991; Bunte and Franklin, 1992; Tyler, 1995; Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz, 2002; Miller, 2008) have focused on such matters and analysed the difficulties that participants have experienced in interpreting meaning when the challenges are not simply related to language code problems. We illustrate this type of analysis with an example from Miller (2008), who recorded naturally occurring talk at two advertising agencies in Tokyo. The agencies had both Japanese and American staff, and all of the participants spoke each other's language with various degrees of proficiency.

Example 1: Problems of understanding in workplace interaction (from Miller, 2008: 233)

In this extract, an American copywriter named Ember (E) and one of his Japanese co-workers named Nakada (N) are reviewing some advertisements for which Ember has provided the English copy. They are talking about one advertisement in particular.

E I mean yuh can see through it right
you don't have to use your imagination you can
see every little thing so–(it's?) right
(it?) plays off of the–the visual
(leaves?) nothing <<wh> to the imagination>
(0.5)
N (.hss) Is that so?
(0.2)
N idea is cl-very clear to me [now]
E [no:w]
N this video can do everything=
E =do everything
(0.8)
N But too much pitch for the vi(hihi)sual
E too (hihi) much? [No no no no]
N [too much visual]no?
E no (.) no I don't think so
(0.2)
N {smacks lips} (.hhh) maybe
E (maybe?)
N ye [ahh]
E [I thin] I think it's okay

Ember starts by describing what the advertisement is about (lines 1–5), and after this we would normally expect Nakada to provide some sort of evaluative comment. Instead there is a silence (line 6), followed in line 7 by Nakada giving an inbreathed fricative or <.hss>, and a repair initiator 'Is that so?' Nakada than provides two weak agreement comments (lines 9 and 11), after which he gives an explicit negative assessment in line 14. At the conclusion of this conversation (not transcribed here), Nakada tells Ember to 'think about' this ad copy a little longer, using the Japanese phrase *kangaete okimashô* ('let's think about it'). A few days later Ember finds out that this particular copy has been excluded from the campaign and is very surprised to hear this. He had clearly misunderstood the evaluation Nakada had made. What, then, are the reasons for this?

One explanation is that Ember failed to notice two clues that Nakada used that are commonly associated in Japanese with negative evaluations. According to Miller (1991; 2008: 229), the inbreathed fricative <.hss> (Line 7) is a Japanese paralinguistic hesitation marker that generally indicates an inability to agree with something or an unwillingness to express one's negative opinion. Similarly, the Japanese phrase *kangaete okimashô* ('let's think about it') is, according to Miller (2008: 233), 'a formulaic preface in Japanese for a negative assessment that, when used alone, signals that something "won't do" or "isn't right" '. Nakada uses this English phrase as if it had the same communicative function as it does in Japanese, and presumably assumes that Ember will interpret it accordingly (i.e. as a rejection). Thus one possible reason for the misunderstanding is that Ember failed to pick up on the Japanese-style cues for interpretation that Nakada was using. Nakada probably thought he was being very clear and did not realize that the cues were less obvious to Ember.

Gumperz (1982) proposes the notion of 'contextualization cues' to account for this phenomenon. He defines these as 'constellations of surface features of message form … the means by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes or follows' (p. 131). Communication is likely to be particularly problematic if the participants of an interaction pay attention to different cues, as happened in the conversation between Ember and Nakada.

Another way of accounting for Ember's failure to pick up on Nakada's cues is to draw on the concepts of high-context and low-context communication styles. This is a dimension of cultural difference proposed by the anthropologist Edward Hall (1976). Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) explain it as follows:

> Low-context communication (LCC) refers to communication patterns of direct verbal mode: straight talk, nonverbal immediacy, and sender-oriented values (i.e. the sender assumes the responsibility to communicate clearly). In the LCC system, the speaker is expected to be responsible for constructing a clear, persuasive message that the listener can decode easily. In comparison, high-context communication (HCC) refers to communication patterns of indirect verbal mode: self-humbling talk, nonverbal subtleties, and interpreter-sensitive values (i.e. the receiver or interpreter of the message assumes the responsibility to infer the hidden or contextual meanings of the message) … In the HCC system, the listener or interpreter of the message is expected to 'read between the lines', to accurately infer the implicit intent of the verbal message, and to decode the nonverbal subtleties that accompany the verbal message.
>
> *(Ting-Toomey and Chung, 2005: 172)*

So another interpretation of the misunderstanding is that Nakada's style of communication was more 'high-context' than Ember's. He was thus less explicit than Ember was expecting; conversely, Ember was insufficiently aware of the need to pay close attention to any subtle signals of disapproval that Nakada might give.

Further insights into the misunderstanding can be gained by considering the nature of the communicative event; and the nature of the relationship between Nakada and Ember also needs to be considered. Nakada had a position of authority in the company, and when Miller spoke to him after the interaction, he explained that he regarded the meeting as an opportunity for a senior (himself) to tell a subordinate (Ember) which ad copy had been selected for use and which had been retracted. When Miller spoke to Ember, on the other hand, he maintained that the purpose of the meeting was for him to explain to Nakada his ideas for the ads. He thus gave his personal opinions freely, disagreeing with Nakada's negative assessment and producing his own assessment (see line 22, 'I think it's okay'). From Nakada's perspective, Ember's expression of a differing opinion was inappropriate; he regarded it as an uncooperative reluctance to accept his decision and thus churlishly argumentative. Ember, on the other hand, thought Nakada had deliberately misled him by not stating his wishes clearly.

Through this example we can also see that various types of background knowledge (e.g. knowledge of linguistic conventions, knowledge of role relations and communicative events) play a major role in the communication process. Leech (1983: 10–11) uses the terms 'pragmalinguistic' and 'sociopragmatic' to refer to the pragmatic knowledge that participants draw on to interpret language. Some aspects of pragmatic knowledge are more linguistic in nature, whereas others are more social in nature. Pragmalinguistics is at the linguistic end and is concerned with the linguistic resources available and conventionally used for conveying a given pragmatic meaning in a given context. Sociopragmatics is at the social end and is concerned with social appropriateness in language use. Thomas (1983) uses the terms pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure to refer to the mismatches that may occur between a speaker's intended meaning and the hearer's constructed meaning.

In the extract, the conventional use of both an inbreathed fricative to convey hesitation and lack of approval and the direct translation of the Japanese phrase *kangaete okimashô* ('let's think about it') to convey a negative assessment are examples of pragmalinguistic transfer and failure. On the other hand, Nakada's and Ember's differing interpretations of the purpose of the communicative event and Ember's 'right' to freely give his views are an example of sociopragmatic failure.

Strategies that can help to promote mutual understanding

Compared with the number of studies that have analysed communication problems in intercultural interaction, relatively few have focused on the positive elements – the factors or strategies that can help to prevent misunderstandings or can promote mutual understanding. Most of those that have (e.g. Bremer *et al.*, 1996; Sunaoshi, 2005; Mauranen, 2006; Chiang, 2009a, b) have concentrated on the management of the linguistic code. This relates quite closely to work carried out in the field of second language acquisition in the 1980s and 1990s on communication strategies (see Dörnyei and Scott 1997 for a review) and the negotiation of comprehensible input (e.g. Long, 1983; Varonis and Gass, 1985). For example, Chiang (2009a) analyses the corrective and preventative strategies that international teaching assistants and American college students use when interacting with each other, and identifies and illustrates the following: clarification requests, confirmation requests, self-reformulations and other-reformulations.

Bremer and Simonot (1996: 159–175) take a slightly broader perspective and explain and illustrate a number of ways in which fluent speakers can maximize mutual understanding when interacting with less fluent speakers. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009: 83–86) and Spencer-Oatey and Stadler (2009: 20–21) also discuss this phenomenon, labelling it respectively as 'linguistic accommodation' and 'language adjustment'. Spencer-Oatey and Stadler give the following authentic example to illustrate its successful use, and also to point out that effective language adjustment is not always as easy to carry out as it might superficially appear. The extract comes from a meeting between some British and Chinese academics who were meeting for the first time at a British university to discuss the potential for collaborative research.

Example: 2 Language Adjustment at the start of a meeting (Spencer-Oatey and Stadler, 2009: 21)

Adjusting one's use of language to the proficiency level of the recipient(s) is vital for effective communication; however, it is sometimes easier said than done. Consider the following interaction that took place at one of our meetings:

Chair:	I'm going to ask everybody to speak very clearly and uh without heavy accents if possible
Everyone:	Laughter [as the Chair speaks with a Scottish accent]
Chair:	and we may take some pauses just to make sure everybody uhm uh is keeping up with the conversation cause we can sometimes each of us speak very quickly when we get excited. Uh this afternoon is a chance for us really to explore the research issues ## tell each other what we're doing ## tell each other what we hope to achieve what we're aspiring to ### and it would be wonderful if we could perhaps focus on the use of technology in learning ## if that was of interest to you ##### so what I I'd like to do is I think it would be very helpful for one of our colleagues to volunteer to <as we say in Scotland: start the ball rolling cause we really love football>. Uh I think I think it would be fair to ask one of our colleagues to start the ball rolling and [name of British colleague] if you would like to kick off for us. (An audio clip of this extract is available at http://www.globalpeople.org.uk/)

This excerpt demonstrates a number of adjustment practices. The Chair clearly shows a high level of awareness of this competence by asking participants to speak clearly, to avoid accents, to avoid fast speech and to pause regularly in order to ensure that all participants have the chance to follow the conversation. The Chair then goes on to put her insights into practice by speaking slowly and clearly, by pausing regularly (signalled by #) and by trying to avoid the use of a heavy Scottish accent. However, only seconds later she speeds up (signalled by < >), falls into a more pronounced Scottish accent, uses an idiomatic expression ('to start the ball rolling') that leaves all but one of the Chinese participants with blank faces, and then goes on to repeat the idiom and to use complex vocabulary ('kick off'), which is unlikely to be understood and could easily have been replaced by a more simple word, such as 'start' or 'begin'.

Spencer-Oatey and Stadler (2009: 24–25) also use this example to illustrate another strategy that they identify as being very important for promoting mutual understanding: the building of shared knowledge. The Chair did not immediately focus on the main task (discussing what joint research project they might be able to work on), but rather made sure first that everyone learned about each other's research interests.

Spencer-Oatey and Stadler (2009) report that, in their study of international teams, the establishment of shared knowledge was particularly crucial; and Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009: 82–88) provide a detailed case study that illustrates it. The same also emerges in studies by Sunaoshi (2005) and Marriott (1990), although it is not labelled as such.

Varonis and Gass (1985: 341) point out that '[t]he most conversationally "dangerous" situation arises when interlocutors lack shared background, linguistic system and specific beliefs, yet do not seek to negotiate meaning'. Use of the various strategies discussed in this section can be valuable tools to help in this process; but, needless to say, they cannot guarantee success. Equally dangerous (if not more so) is the situation in which none of the interlocutors is aware of their differing background knowledge and assumptions and of the impact of this on the meanings they are each constructing. No strategy can easily address such challenges, but the careful establishment of shared knowledge can play an important role.

Managing rapport in intercultural discourse

In this section we turn to the management of rapport. Many studies of intercultural discourse (e.g. Bailey, 1997, 2000; Tyler, 1995; Spencer-Oatey and Xing, 2003, 2004; Ryoo, 2005, Gınthner, 2008) have analysed how people manage their relationships in social/professional encounters. A large number of theoretical frameworks have been used for such purposes, and one of the most influential concepts has been the notion of 'face'. This was defined by Goffman (1967: 5) as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself'. Brown and Levinson (1987) built on this concept in their classic theory of politeness, in which they attached central importance to the notion of face-threatening acts (FTAs). These are acts that risk damage to speakers' and hearers' face wants: their negative face wants that their actions are not impeded by others and their positive face wants that their qualities/characteristics are desirable to others. In social interaction, people are said to manage their social relationships by avoiding imposition on and threat to each other's positive and negative face wants. The example from House (2000: 155) illustrates the problems that can occur when face concerns are not addressed.

Example 3: Problems of rapport in social interaction (from House, 2000: 155–156)

Brian, an American student spending a year in Germany, has cooked a meal for Andi, a German friend, who has recently helped him with his German seminar paper. Andi has just arrived.

01	Brian:	hallo Andi how are you?
02	Andi:	yeah fine oh fine really yea;
03	Brian:	so everything's ready now (.) I hope you like it I have cooked it myself [so because]
04	Andi:	[yeah fine]
05	Brian:	that's what we eat in the South
06	Andi:	{in a loud voice} but that's so much that is FAR TOO MUCH rice
07	Brian:	that doesn't MATTER I have paid for it and I have INVITED you (.) [you have]
08	Andi:	[no it] DOES matter it DOES it DOES think of the many poor people who go hungry and would like to eat something like that [well I]
09	Brian:	[II]believe I (0.1) I [find]
10	Andi:	[I find] one should in this common world in which we do all live (0.2) the world in which we are all endowed with material goods so UNequally we should at least on a small scale try to produce no waste no useless [waste]
11	Brian:	[well Andi] I am not I (0.2) [don't believe]
12	Andi:	produce [no waste] and always in our consciousness think that we in the rich western world … {monologue continues for 1½ minutes}

> In the retrospective interview that I conducted with each interactant, Brian said that in his role as host he felt unpleasantly 'talked at' by his friend, who in his view acted like a 'know-all' teacher figure. He was disappointed that his friend did nothing to keep a 'real conversation' going, and he felt overrun by the monologue. In fact he said he often felt in interactions with German friends that they did not want to, or were unable to, engage in any sort of small talk. He had got the impression that it often happened in German conversations that the topic was more important than the human beings discussing it, and that discussions therefore often turned out to be serious, 'deep' and controversial. Andi said he thought they had reflected well on the problems of the so-called 'Third World' and on the way structural problems in the economies of the developing countries might be resolved. He said he was often surprised that Americans had a different outlook on the resources available in different countries and that this kind of 'overly generous' handling of the resources was also reflected in their often rather irresponsible behaviour vis-à-vis food and possessions. He was surprised that Brian had said so little and suspected that he was not interested in the topic.

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory, Andi's disagreement with Brian (turn 8) and his implicit criticism of Brian (turns 8, 10 and 12) both threaten Brian's positive face and are a fundamental reason for his discomfort with the interaction.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory has been hugely influential, but, despite its many strengths, it has been particularly criticized for its lack of applicability in different cultural contexts (e.g. Ide 1989; Mao 1994; Matsumoto 1988). It is not very suitable for analysing intercultural discourse because it takes a universalist approach and thus cannot provide an intercultural perspective on rapport management issues. For example, in relation to example 3, it cannot explain why Brian and Andi evaluated the interaction (and its typicality) so differently.

Another theory of politeness, Leech's (1983, 2007) Politeness Principle, is much more suited to the analysis of intercultural discourse. Leech argues that human communicative behaviour is constrained by a number of politeness maxims or constraints (e.g. modesty, agreement) and that the relative importance of these constraints can vary across cultures; for instance, that modesty is of greater importance in Asian cultures than in Western cultures (e.g. Leech, 1983; Gu, 1990; Chen, 1993). If Leech's framework is used to analyse example 3, the rapport management problems could be explained in terms of the 'agreement constraint' – that 'agreement' is of greater importance to Brian than to Andi, and that, because of this, Brian forms a negative evaluation of Andi's behaviour, as well as of the interactional behaviour of other Germans.

Yet another perspective is provided by House (2000). She argues that 'Andi and Brian have different conceptions of what communicative conventions hold in a conversational opening phase, of the topics appropriate for a dinner table conversation, and of the appropriateness of turn allocation and floor holding during dinner conversation' (2000: 157), and she links this with underlying cross-cultural differences in communicative style preferences. She identifies several dimensions of potential difference, including two that seem particularly applicable to example 3: directness–indirectness and orientation-towards-content versus orientation-towards-other.

Spencer-Oatey (2008) integrates these various perspectives in her 'rapport management' model, arguing that there are three fundamental, interrelated bases to rapport: face sensitivities, behavioural expectations, and interactional goals, each of which can be subject to individual and cultural variation. With respect to behavioural expectations, she gives the following explanation:

> People typically form expectations (conscious or unconscious) as to the behaviour that will occur in a given context, based on the norms, conventions, principles, legal agreements and protocols that are associated with that context. They may then develop a sense that others should or should not perform that behaviour, and prescriptive and proscriptive overtones become associated with that behaviour. As a result, people start perceiving sociality rights and obligations in relation to them, and may feel annoyed if the expected behaviour does not occur
>
> *(Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009: 111).*

With respect to example 3, Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management model yields multiple interpretive perspectives. There were clearly differences in the participants' preferred communicative styles (in line with House's 2000 perspective), especially in terms of directness–indirectness and of orientation-towards-content versus orientation-towards-other. These gave rise to differing behavioural expectations, such as in the likelihood of 'content talk' versus 'small talk' among acquaintances in a social gathering. Breach of the expectations resulted in several negative emotions, especially on Brian's part, who felt disappointment, sadness and anger (House, 2003). However, these emotions may not only have been due to unfulfilled expectations – it is also quite likely that face sensitivities were at stake. Andi's explicit disagreement with Brian over the amount of food served and his insistence that food quantity is an important matter were probably face-threatening to Brian, and Brian's comments that he felt 'talked at' and treated like an ignorant underling suggest that his self-image had been challenged. Yet another angle is offered by considering Brian and Andi's interactional goals. Although House provides little explicit data on this, the background note implies that Brian's invitation to dinner may have been a 'thank you' gesture for the help that Andi had given, and a retrospective interview comment by Brian indicates that he wanted to establish common ground with Andi (House, 2003: 47). For Andi, however, the upholding of ethical values and principles was a more important interactional goal than the building of common ground on the basis of small talk.

As this discussion implies, it is impossible to gain in-depth insights into rapport management issues by only looking at conversational transcripts and without having access to retrospective interview comments from the participants. The key to understanding (and anticipating) how people perceive face threat/loss, how they react to perceived breaches of sociality rights and obligations, and how they deal with differing interactional goals (and hence how smooth or turbulent their interpersonal rapport is) is not only to analyse the discourse in detail, but also to interview the participants themselves. This can reveal valuable additional insights into how the participants dynamically perceive their relationship, and perhaps how different their perceptions may be.

Strategies that can help to promote positive rapport

Just as relatively little research has investigated strategies that can promote mutual understanding of 'content' (see the section 'Achieving understanding in intercultural discourse'), similarly, relatively few studies have focused on the effective management of rapport. This is a weakness of much current research, and it is something that needs to be rectified. Ryoo (2005), for example, maintains that, in relation to African American–Korean interactions, there has been a disproportionate focus on the negative and conflictive aspects of interactions. In her study of service encounters between African-American customers and Korean shopkeepers, she found that there are many positive aspects to the interactions. She illustrates how the participants used a number of specific rapport-building strategies: (1) in-group identity markers; (2) attitude sharing and support giving; (3) compliments; (4) initiation of personal, phatic communication; and (5) joking and laughing. These interactional rapport-building moves helped create positive and harmonious encounters.

Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) and Spencer-Oatey and Stadler (2009) have also taken a positive approach and have developed an intercultural competency framework, which includes a cluster of competencies for managing rapport. These include contextual awareness, interpersonal attentiveness, social information gathering, social attuning, emotion regulation and stylistic flexibility. They provide authentic examples to illustrate each of these competencies.

Identity and intercultural discourse

There are many definitions of identity, and they foreground different perspectives on the concept. Some definitions emphasize the reflection, understanding and positioning of self and others in 'doing identity'; other definitions underscore the partly cognitive, partly social schemas through which we sort information and reach meaning to interpret our experiences. For example, Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 586) define identity as 'the social positioning of self and other', and Jenkins (2004: 5) argues that 'identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)'.

Traditional theories of group identity recognize two types of group identity (Collier, 1997): (a) *ascribed identity*: the set of demographic and role descriptions that others in an interaction assume to hold true for you; and (b) *avowed identity*: the group affiliations that one feels most intensely. For example, if an individual is assimilated into a new culture, then the values and practices of that destination culture will figure importantly in his/her avowed culture. The concepts of ascribed and avowed identity are important for understanding intercultural communication, because, if a person moves to another culture, others will usually communicate with him/her in accordance with his/her ascribed identity. However, sometimes a person's avowed identity (the groups with which s/he really feels a sense of comfort and affiliation) may differ from that person's ascribed identity. In such cases the interaction is bound to be frustrating for both parties.

The post-modern understanding of identity is intertwined with social constructivism (Burr, 1995). According to post-modern beliefs, the self is fragmented and contains multiple, often contradictory identities, which do not constitute a coherent self (Fornäs, 1995: 222, 233). In the post-modern tradition, identity is considered a social construction. Correspondingly, Carbaugh (1996: 23) emphasizes that identities are something one does. They are invoked, applied and implemented in social scenarios (Carbaugh, 1996: 25–27). The changing nature of identities allows certain individual identities to be of more significance in some situations than in others. Thus in certain contexts an individual will view himself or herself first as a national of a certain country, then as a member of a given profession, then as a member of a religious group and so on.

The relative salience of one's identities is dependent upon context and varies over time; for example, in a national rally demonstration, national identity will be prioritized over professional identity or religious identity.

Recently, some identity theorists have moved toward a 'communication theory of identity' (see Hecht *et al.*, 2005). This theory characterizes identity as the interactional achievement of four interpenetrating layers: personal (identity as an individual's self-concepts or self-images), enacted (identity as performed or expressed in communication), relational (identity as a jointly negotiated through communication, including identifying oneself through one's relationships with others) and communal (identities that emerge from groups and networks) (Hecht *et al.*, 2005: 263–264). According to this perspective, a person's cultural group membership is not a static label or fixed attribute. Rather, cultural identities are enacted or performed through interaction. One enacts identity through choice of language, nonverbal signs such as gesture and clothing, discourse strategy, and even dress (Spreckels and Kotthoff, 2007). People may enact identity in very different ways, depending on the situation and on their goals.

Many linguistic studies of identity concentrate on the negotiation of identity through features of language use, focusing on issues such as identity and race, language and gender, and language choice in multilingual environments (Valeš, 2007). Other studies focus on choice of language, demonstrating that choice of language and the use to which language is put are central to a person's definition of himself or herself in relation to his or her natural and social environment. With regard to intercultural discourse, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural and linguistic framework is helpful for the analysis of identity as it emerges in linguistic interaction. Their framework regards identity as the *product* rather than the *source* of linguistic and other semiotic practices, and therefore as a social and cultural phenomenon rather than primarily an internal psychological one. As such, identities encompass macro-level demographic categories, temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles, and local, ethnographically emergent cultural positions. Moreover, identities may be linguistically indexed through labels, implicatures, stances, styles, or linguistic structures and systems and are relationally constructed through several, often overlapping, aspects of the relationship between self and other, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice and authority/delegitimacy (p. 585). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) maintain that identity may be in part intentional, in part habitual and less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation, in part a construct of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an outcome of larger ideological processes and structures.

By using language in one way rather than another, people establish their identities in relation to others. A growing area of research examines ways in which people 'do' identity work in intercultural discourse, and much notable work in this area has emerged from Holmes' project on language in the workplace. This research has examined Māori and Pākehā leadership styles, with 'doing identity' as a major research focus. The researchers were interested in how people's identities (their culture, gender, age, education and previous experiences) affect how they interact in the workplace environment. Analyses of the corpus of workplace recordings demonstrate the dynamic and intersubjective nature of workplace talk: conversational participants realign their identities and goals in the course of interactions through a range of devices, including borrowing and intentional code-switching, style shifting, type of verbal feedback, pauses and use of silence. Stubbe and Holmes (2000: 276–277) explain: 'Rather than viewing Māori and Pākehā communicative styles as given, this approach problematizes ethnic identity and examines it as a social construction with discourse playing a crucial role in the process.' Such an approach is most fruitful for intercultural discourse analysis.

An increasing trend in the pragmatics literature on intercultural communication is to examine the interconnections between face and identity (e.g. Spencer-Oatey and Ruhi, 2007) and to conceptualize face in the context of a more general concern for identity in interaction (Locher, 2008). In intercultural studies more broadly, there is an important focus on identity and personal growth. When people move into culturally unfamiliar contexts, such as when they go abroad to live or study, or when they take up a job in a very different type of organization, they often experience some challenges to their senses of identity. For example, they may find that their perception of themselves as 'competent persons' is brought into question, they may be unsure how to fulfil their role, and/or they may feel unsure which group they 'really' belong to. Although this can be deeply unsettling, it can also lead to development and growth and to journeying towards 'intercultural personhood' (Kim, 2001). Fougère (2008: 200), for example, speaking of one of his research participants who was in an intercultural situation and quoting from Kim (2001: 196), notes: 'His journey is far from over, and he seems to be on his way to developing an intercultural personhood through "a 'working through' of all cultural experiences, so as to create new constructs – that is, constructs that did not exist previously".'

Competence in intercultural interaction and the need for new research directions

Underlying much research into intercultural communication is a concern with 'effectiveness' or 'appropriateness'. Yet the concept of intercultural communicative competence has attracted very little explicit attention from linguists, despite their long-term interest in communicative competence (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009). Most theorizing has been carried out in the fields of psychology, business and management, communication studies, and foreign language education. However, intercultural competence is now identified as an objective in many national foreign language curricula, and it is thus very important that linguists (including discourse analysts) take up the challenge of researching this area. There are several important contributions that the field can make.

Most conceptualizations of intercultural competence include communication as one of the key components (Spencer-Oatey, 2010), and yet few of them offer any detailed unpacking of what this entails. Scholars working in the fields of psychology, communication studies, and business and management have provided a large number of frameworks of intercultural competence (for an overview, see Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009 and Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009), and yet they nearly all fail to provide detailed descriptions of the component competencies of intercultural communication. Even fewer provide authentic examples to illustrate their generalized descriptions. Linguists and discourse analysts, on the other hand, typically publish very detailed analyses of specific examples of authentic interaction, but rarely link their analyses to higher-level conceptualizations of intercultural competence. Two recent exceptions are Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) and Spencer-Oatey and Stadler (2009). There is thus, currently, a massive gap between the worlds of psychology, communication studies, and business and management on the one hand, and the world of linguistics and discourse analysis on the other. All fields are the weaker for this, and there is an urgent need for more crossings of these disciplinary boundaries, so that new insights may be gained from synergistic collaborations.

As explained above, within linguistics (including pragmatics and discourse analysis) there has been a tendency to focus on problematic intercultural interaction and to conduct detailed analyses of the problems that occur in achieving understanding and/or in managing rapport in particular encounters. Despite some recent calls for a greater focus on the nature of successful intercultural communication (see the section 'Achieving understanding in intercultural discourse'), as yet there have been relatively few intercultural discourse studies that have taken this approach (Ryoo, 2005 is an exception). If we are to understand the nature of intercultural communicative competence more fully, this is insufficient. We need far more studies of effective intercultural interaction, as well as of problematic encounters.

A further challenge for linguists who analyse intercultural discourse is to make their research more relevant to professionals. As Chick (1996) points out, linguists have been slow to draw on their research insights into intercultural (mis)communication in order to help improve the practice of intercultural communication in the future. He implies that this slowness is due to a reluctance to 'meddle' (p. 331) with the cultures under study. However, he asserts that, in an increasingly interdependent intercultural world, it is vital that those who know so much about intercultural communication should contribute to its improvement. Roberts (2003: 132) proposes a more fundamental shift. Referring to medical discourse research and publications, she argues as follows:

> If applied linguistics research is to be practically relevant and to have some kind of intervention status, then the design and implementation of the research needs to be negotiated from the start with those who may be affected by it. And since with discourse-based research the insights are in the analytic writing rather than in the results which can be implemented, how applied linguists and health professionals can present and write together is also an issue.

The same can be said for research into intercultural discourse. There is a great need for analysts of intercultural discourse to work closely with professionals who are regularly engaged in intercultural interaction and who feel they could benefit from insights into the communication processes. Currently much intercultural discourse research is initiated for academic reasons and is disseminated within independent silos. As a result, it is barely read by academics working on this topic in related disciplines, and virtually never read by professionals. This needs to change. Linguists need to cross disciplinary and professional boundaries, so that we can all achieve greater insights into the processes of intercultural interaction and reap practical benefits from doing so.

Further reading

Bremer, K., Roberts, C., Vasseur, T., Simonot, M., and Broeder, P. (1996). *Achieving Understanding. Discourse in Intercultural Encounters*. London: Longman.

This book offers an in-depth analytic study of the discourse of intercultural encounters among adult immigrants in several European countries, focusing particularly on the challenge of achieving understanding.

Deardorff, D. (ed.) (2009) *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book provides a detailed exploration of intercultural competence from a multidisciplinary point of view, but with little input from linguists.

Spencer-Oatey, H. and Franklin, P. (2009) *Intercultural Interaction: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book takes a multidisciplinary approach to the study intercultural interaction and provides a useful overview of theoretical conceptualizations and research findings in this broad area.

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