Chapter 2

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

• Explain the relationship between culture and sensation.
• Give examples of culture's effect on each step of the perception process.
• Explain how communication differs in high-context and low-context cultures.
• Explain the concept of face and its importance in intercultural communication.
• Give examples of intercultural communication competence skills appropriate to more than one culture.
• Discuss ethical guidelines for intercultural communication.
Perception and Intercultural Communication Competence

Perception is a prerequisite to communication. Perception begins with the reception of sensory data followed by selecting to attend to some of those sensations, organizing those sensations into some meaningful way, and then attaching meaning to them. That then affects how we communicate. For example, if you are 5 feet, 4 inches tall living in a culture that values tall bodies, your perception of yourself as unfortunately short is based on that cultural value and affects how you communicate with others. If your culture is highly class conscious, your communication with others is also affected by your perception of your own and others’ class. The first part of this chapter reviews the effect of culture on our perception of the world external to our minds. Then the second part introduces intercultural communication competence and intercultural communication ethics.

**Sensing**

Can we really say that there is a world external to our minds, that is, independent of our awareness of it? We do make that assumption. Early 20th
century quantum mechanics posits that on a subatomic level the observer is an active part of the observed. Wexler (2008) wants us to recognize how integrated our minds are with the external world by stating, “The relationship between the individual and the environment is so extensive that it almost overstates the distinction between the two to speak of a relationship at all” (p. 39). Sensory input is a physical interaction; for example, cells in our mouths and noses have receptor molecules that combine with molecules from the environment to initiate electrical impulses. Our perception and thought processes are not independent of the cultural environment.

If our perception and thought processes are such a part of “what is out there,” what, then, is the relationship between changes in the cultural environment and who we are? Wexler points out that we humans shape our environment and, hence, it could be said that the human brain shapes itself to a human-made environment. Our brain both is shaped by the external world and shapes our perception of the external world.

**Sensation** is the neurological process by which we become aware of our environment. Of the human senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, including pain, temperature, and pressure, are the most studied (Gordon, 1971). The world appears quite different to other forms of life with different sensory ranges: A bat, for example, senses the world through ultrasound; a snake does so through infrared light; some fish sense distortions of electrical fields through receptors on the surface of their bodies—none of these are directly sensed by humans. But is there significant variation in sensation among individual humans? You need to remember that sensation is a neurological process. You are not directly aware of what is in the physical world but, rather, of your own internal sensations. When you report “seeing” a tree, what you are aware of is actually an electrochemical event. Much neural processing takes place between the receipt of a stimulus and your awareness of a sensation (Cherry, 1957). Is variation in human sensation attributable to culture? Pioneering psychologist William James explained that sensory data don’t come to us “ready-made” but in an “unpackaged” state which we assemble into something coherent and meaningful from rules of perception we learn in our culture.

Nisbett (2003) has demonstrated that humans sense and perceive the world in ways unique to their upbringing by contrasting Eastern and Western cultures. Ancient Greeks had a strong sense of individual identity with a sense of personal agency, the sense that they were in charge of their own destinies. Greeks considered human and nonhuman objects as discrete and separate. And the Greeks made a clear distinction between the external world and our internal worlds. Thus, two individuals could have

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**Focus on Culture 2.1**

**The Greeks Had Aristotle and the Chinese Had Confucius**

Much of the research on sensing and perception and most of the examples in this chapter contrast Eastern and Western cultures. Nisbett (2003) and others contend that Eastern and Western cultures literally perceive different worlds. Modern Eastern cultures are inclined to see a world of substances—continuous masses of matter. Modern Westerners see a world of objects—discrete and unconnected things. There is substantial evidence that Easterners have a holistic view, focusing on continuities in substances and relationships in the environment, while Westerners have an analytic view, focusing on objects and their attributes.
two different perceptions of the world because the world itself was static, unchanging, and independent of perception. It was through rhetorical persuasion that one could attempt to change another’s perception. The attributes of individual objects are the basis of categorization of objects, and categories are subject to behavioral rules that could be discovered and understood by the human mind. Thus rocks and other objects are in the category of objects that have the property of gravity.

The Chinese counterpart to the Greek sense of personal agency was harmony. Every Chinese was a member of a family and a village. The Chinese were less concerned with controlling their own destinies but more concerned with self-control so as to minimize conflict with others in the family and village. For the Chinese, the world is constantly changing and every event is related to every other event. The Chinese understood the world as continuously interacting substances, so perception focused on the entire context or environment. Chinese thought is to see things in their context in which all the elements are constantly changing and rearranging themselves.

**Effect of Culture on Sensing**

How much alike, then, are two persons’ sensations? Individuals raised in diverse cultures can actually sense the world differently. For example, Marshall Segall and his associates (Segall, Campbell, & Herskovits, 1966) found that people who live in forests or in rural areas can sense crooked and slanted lines more accurately than can people who live in urban areas. This demonstrates that the rural and urban groups sense the same event differently as a result of their diverse cultural learnings.

The term **field dependence** refers to the degree to which perception of an object is influenced by the background or environment in which it appears. Some people are less likely than others to separate an object from its surrounding environment. When adults in Japan and the United States are shown an animated underwater scene in which one large fish swims among small fish and other marine life, the Japanese describe the scene and comment more...
about the relationships among the objects in the scene. The Americans were more likely to begin with a description of the big fish and make only half as many comments about the relationships among the objects. Not surprisingly, when showed a second scene with the same big fish, the Americans were more likely to recognize the big fish as the same one as in the first scene (Nisbett, 2003).

More recently, Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, and Larsen (2003) showed Japanese and European Americans a picture of a square with a line inside it (see Figure 2.1). They were then given an empty square of a different size and asked to draw either a line the same length as the one they had seen or a line of the same relative length to the one they had seen. The European Americans were significantly more accurate in drawing the line of the same length, while the Japanese were significantly more accurate in drawing the line of relative length. Differences in the environment and culture affected sensation.

The researchers then compared Americans who had been living in Japan and Japanese who had been living in the United States. The time for both was a few years. Given the same picture and task, the Americans who had been living in Japan were close to the Japanese in the original study, while the Japanese who had been living in the United States were virtually the same as the native-born Americans. While other explanations are possible, one strong suggestion is that even living for an extended time in a new culture can modify sensation and cognitive processes.

**Perceiving**

Culture also has a great effect on the perception process (Tajfel, 1969; Triandis, 1964). Human perception is usually thought of as a three-step process of selection, organization, and interpretation. Each of these steps is affected by culture.

**Figure 2.1 Stimulus for Culture’s Effect on Sensation**

Selection

The first step in the perception process is selection. Within your physiological limitations, you are exposed to more stimuli than you could possibly manage. To use sight as an example, you may feel that you are aware of all stimuli on your retinas, but most of the data from the retinas are handled on a subconscious level by a variety of specialized systems. Parts of our brains produce output from the retinas that we cannot “see.” No amount of introspection can make us aware of those processes.

In an interesting study by Simons and Chabris (1999), participants viewed video of a basketball game. They were told to count the number of passes one team made. In the video, a woman dressed as a gorilla walks into the game, turns to face the camera, and beats her fists on her chest. Fifty percent of all people who watch the video don’t see the gorilla. Mack and Rock (1998) argue that we don’t consciously see any object unless we are paying direct, focused attention to that object. When we need something, have an interest in it, or want it, we are more likely to sense it out of competing stimuli. When we’re hungry, we’re more likely to attend to food advertisements.

Being in a busy airport terminal is another example. While there, you are confronted with many competing stimuli. You simply cannot attend to everything. However, if in the airport terminal an announcement is made asking you by name to report to the ticketing counter, you would probably hear your name even in that environment of competing stimuli. Just as you’ve learned to attend to the sound of your name, you’ve learned from your culture to select out other stimuli from the environment. A newborn child is a potential speaker of any language. Having heard only those sounds of one’s own language and having learned to listen to and make only those differentiations necessary, anyone would find it difficult to hear crucial differences in speech sounds in another language.

Japanese/English Difficulties With Speech Sounds

If you grew up speaking English, certain aspects of the Japanese language are difficult for you to perceive. These aspects do not occur in English, so you never learned to listen for them and you literally do not hear them. For example, vowel length does not matter in English. You can say “Alabama” or “Alabaaama,” and others would know you’re referring to a southern U.S. state. Vowel length is important in Japanese. Japanese has short-duration vowels and long-duration vowels. Vowel length in the following pairs of Japanese words actually determines their meanings:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{obasan} & \quad \text{aunt} \\
\text{obaasan} & \quad \text{grandmother} \\
\text{kita} & \quad \text{came} \\
\text{kiita} & \quad \text{heard}
\end{align*}
\]

Because vowel length is not a critical attribute in English, perceiving the difference in sounds is a problem for those attempting to understand Japanese.

Other sounds that present difficulties for English speakers are the following:

Doubled consonants:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{shita} & \quad \text{did} \\
\text{shitta} & \quad \text{new}
\end{align*}
\]
Accent:

- *kaki*  |  oyster
- *kaki*  |  persimmon

Pitch:

- *hashi*  |  bridge
- *hashi*  |  chopsticks
- *hashi*  |  edge of a table

If you grew up speaking Japanese, some aspects of the English language are difficult for you to perceive. English has some consonant sounds that do not exist in Japanese. If you grew up speaking Japanese, you didn’t learn to listen for those consonant sounds. English uses the consonant sounds *f*, *v*, *th* as in *think*, *th* as in *breathe*, *z*, *zh* as in *treasure*, *j* as in the *dge* of *judge*, *r*, and *l*. Thus, if you grew up speaking Japanese, it is difficult to distinguish between the sounds *b* and *v*, *s* and *sh*, *r*, and *l*, and so forth, with the result that *lice* and *rice* or *glamour* and *grammar* are frequently pronounced the same way.

Japanese has borrowed thousands of English words. But if you grew up speaking English, you would have difficulty recognizing them. In Japanese, syllables are basically a consonant sound followed by a vowel. Syllables can end only with a vowel sound or an *n*. For example, the Japanese word *iiau* (quarrel) has four syllables—each vowel is pronounced as a separate syllable. A native-born English speaker would not know to do that and would try to pronounce the word as an unsegmented single sound. An English speaker pronounces the word *thrill* as one syllable. In Japanese, consonant sounds do not exist without vowels, so a Japanese speaker would pronounce all three syllables, something like *sooriroo*. The Japanese *r*, by the way, is difficult for English speakers. It’s similar to the Spanish *r* in *pero* or *Roberto*. From our first language, we learned what sounds are critical to listen for. Because languages can have different critical sounds, learning a new language means learning to attend to new sounds.

**Organization**

The second step in the perception process is **organization**. Along with selecting stimuli from the environment, you must organize them in some meaningful way. When you look at a building, you do not focus on the thousands of possible individual pieces; you focus on the unified whole, a building. Turning a picture upside down, for example, can trick you into focusing on individual components rather than your unified concept of the object in the picture.

How are perceptions categorized? One argument is that you somehow grasp some set of attributes that things have in common. On that basis they are grouped together in a category provided by language that gives the conceptual categories that influence how its speakers’ perceptions are encoded and stored. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, however, concluded that there needs be no such set of shared characteristics. Our language provides the symbol to group perceptions of any kind together.
Grouping Like Objects Together

“One of These Things” is a song used on Sesame Street when children are shown a group of four items, one of which is different from the other three. Children are asked to identify the item that does not belong with the others. Look at the three objects in Figure 2.2.

In this case, which two objects would you place together? The chicken and the grass? The chicken and the cow? Or the grass and the cow? Chiu showed such figures to children from China and the United States. Children from the United States grouped objects because they belonged to the same taxonomic category; that is, the same categorization term could be applied to both. The children from the United States would more likely group the chicken and cow together as “animals.” The Chinese children preferred to group objects on the basis of relationships. The Chinese children would more likely group the cow and grass together because “cows eat grass” (Chiu, 1972).

In a similar study, Mutsumi Imai and Dedre Gentner (1994) showed objects to people of various ages from Japan and the United States and asked them to group them together. For example, one object was a pyramid made of cork, which they called a dax, a word that had no meaning to the participants. Then they showed the participants a pyramid made of white plastic and a different object made of cork. They then asked the participants to point to a dax. To which of these two later objects would you point?

Figure 2.2 Stimulus for Culture’s Effect on Organization

Source: Adapted from Nisbett (2003, p. 141).
People from the United States in the study chose the same shape, indicating that they were coding what they saw as an object. The Japanese were more likely to choose the same material, indicating that they were coding what they saw as a substance.

**Interpretation**

The third step in the perception process is interpretation. This refers to attaching meaning to sense data and is synonymous with decoding. University of Rochester researchers Netta Weinstein, Andrew Przybylski, and Richard Ryan (2009) showed participants computer images of either urban settings of buildings and roads or natural settings of landscapes and lakes. Participants were asked to study the computer images, note colors and textures, and imagine the sounds and smells associated with the images. The researchers then asked the participants to complete questionnaires about various values, including wealth, fame, connectedness to community, relationships, and the betterment of society. Participants who studied the computer images of natural settings rated close relationships and community values higher than they had after observing the images of urban environments. Participants who studied the computer images of urban settings rated fame and wealth higher. This demonstrates that the same situation can be interpreted quite differently by diverse people. A police officer arriving at a crime scene can be experienced by the victim as calming and relief giving but by a person with an arrest record as fearsome and threatening. Here, too, the effect of culture is great. As you encounter people of your own culture, you constantly make judgments as to age, social status, educational background, and the like. The cues you use to make these decisions are so subtle that it’s often difficult to explain how and why you reach a particular conclusion. Do people in the United States, for example, perceive tall men as more credible? Perhaps. Applying these same cues to someone from another culture may not work. People in the United States, for example, frequently err in guessing the age of Japanese individuals, such as judging a Japanese college student in her mid-20s to be only 14 or 15.

**Dogs as Pets or as Food**

The meanings you attach to your perceptions are greatly determined by your cultural background. Think of how speakers of English categorize life. Most probably use the categories of human life and animal life. Now think of how you typically categorize animal life—probably into wild animals and domesticated animals. Now think of how you typically categorize domesticated animal life—probably into animals used for food, animals used for sport and recreation, and pets. Look at the picture of the puppy and capture your feelings.

Most of us see this puppy in the category of pet, for which we have learned to relate warm, loving feelings. Puppies are cute, cuddly, warm, loving creatures. Now look at the next picture of a man holding up a dog, read the caption, and capture your feelings. Most of us who love dogs find this picture uncomfortable and disgusting. How can people eat dogs? They are pets, not food! It all depends on where you categorize them. Dogs are pets in some cultures and food in others. In the Arab world, dogs are acceptable as watchdogs and as hunting dogs but are not kept in the home as pets because they are...
seen as unclean and a low form of life. To call someone a dog is an insult among Arabs. People in most cultures have strong ideas about which foods are acceptable for human consumption and which are not. People in some countries think the custom in the United States of eating corn on the cob is disgusting because that food is fit only for pigs. Some Ukrainians like to eat salo, raw pig fat with black bread and vodka, which might cause nausea in some, as would knowing that horse meat from California is served in restaurants in Belgium, France, and Japan.

Your reaction of disgust to the picture is a culturally learned interpretation, and that interpretation can be quite strong. In 1989, California made it a misdemeanor for any person to sell, buy, or accept any animal traditionally kept as a pet with the intent of killing the animal for food. More recently, animal rights groups have protested the sale of live animals, such as turtles, frogs, lobsters, crabs, fish, and chicken, for food at Asian-American markets. Asian tradition is that fresh meat is tastier and more healthful, that the best meat “enters your house still breathing.” Animal rights activists contend that the animals are treated inhumanely in the shops and are killed in ways that cause them unnecessary pain. Asian-American groups argue that eating dogs and cats is an extreme rarity among Southeast Asian immigrants and call the law and the animal rights activists racist.

In some cultures, parts of some animals are categorized as medicine. In other cultures, certain animals are considered sacred and certainly would not be eaten. The Hindu elephant-headed God¹ Ganesh is accompanied by a rat whenever he travels. Rats, like cows, are deified in India. No Hindu worship is complete without an offering to Ganesh and his companion, the rat. Rats are fed and rarely killed in India.

**Weather Vane as Christian Cross**

The examples so far have been of practices that could offend some English speakers. Let’s turn that around with an example of what speakers of English do that could be offensive to others. Johnston Pump Company, a U.S. company now based in Brookshire, Texas, has been doing business with Saudi Arabia for more than 70 years. By the 1930s, Johnston Pump was well established in California, its pumps having helped change California’s arid lands into a leading agricultural area. Johnston’s general manager at the time was a world traveler. During a trip to Saudi Arabia, he noted how similar the climate was to areas of California and convinced the Saudi government that vast wastelands could be turned into fertile farmland through the use of Johnston pumps. The first pump was installed in the king’s palace.

Can you explain your feelings about this photograph? Dogs were eaten to celebrate Liu Bang becoming emperor (202–195 BCE) in his hometown in Pei county in the eastern coastal province of Jiangsu. The practice was recognized as a provincial cultural heritage. Dog meat is also popular in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, in the south, Yanbian Korea Autonomous Prefecture, in northeastern China, and in neighboring North Korea. Urban Chinese today are more likely to have dogs as pampered companions. In 2009 China’s first anti–animal cruelty legislation was proposed that would make eating dogs and cats illegal (Ying, 2010).
Over the years, Johnston’s success in the kingdom has largely been due to its respect for the country’s strict religious customs. All personnel in its international division receive cultural training. “Making the deserts bloom for 50 years” was Johnston’s advertising campaign in 1986. Ads in English and Arabic began appearing in various Middle East publications early in the year. With the success of the campaign, Johnston made large posters of the ads to be distributed throughout the kingdom.

Study the Johnston Pump poster and see if you can tell why a Saudi customs inspector would not allow it into the country. Saudi Arabia allows no public worship of any religion other than Islam. No

Focus on Technology 2.1

Using Social Media to Influence Perceptions

Perceptions of the status of animals vary across the world. However, people can use social media channels to influence those interpretations. The director of the International Fund for Animal Welfare has said that the use of social media in China has grown substantially to protest incidents of animal cruelty. More than 100,000 people signed an online petition condemning dog meat festivals and one anti-cruelty message was retweeted 34,000 times by users of Weibo.

churches, temples, or any symbols of other religions are permitted. To the customs inspector, the weather vane in the poster (see circled area on the right side of the image) looked like a Christian cross and would therefore be prohibited from being displayed. It took intervention by the Minister of Customs to allow the posters into the country.

Years later, 10 million bags of potato chips from Thailand were confiscated by the Saudi Ministry of Commerce because toys inside each bag were adorned with crossed triangles that were perceived to be the Star of David. With the perception step of categorization comes a culture’s values, and it is those differing categorizations that can so often impede communication, particularly when one group believes its perceptions are right and any other’s wrong.

**Case Study: Perception and Food**

 Perception interpretations provided by a culture can reveal much about that culture. Cultures use food to reinforce and express identities. One book’s title expresses the importance of cultural identity to food: *You Eat What You Are: People, Culture, and Food Traditions* (Barer-Stein, 1999). In the following case study of food in China, identify the elements of perception and culture that are reflected in food preparation.

China has the oldest continuing culture of any nation in the world. About 500 BCE, the philosophies of Confucianism and *Taoism* became the prime motivating forces in the development of the cuisine. The counterbalance of these two major philosophies became the basis of Chinese cuisine as an art.

Confucius encouraged a sense of balance and harmony. For example, when meats were used as ingredients, they could not overpower the rice included in the same meal. He also emphasized the aesthetic aspects of cooking and eating. He said a proper dish should appeal to the eye as well as to the palate. For example, intricately carved vegetables are a common decoration.

The distinctive process of preparing Chinese cuisine is based on Confucius and his philosophy of balance. There is a division between *fan*, Chinese for grains and other starch foods, and *chai*, vegetable and meat dishes. A balanced meal, then, must have an appropriate amount of *fan* and *chai*.

The main principle of Tao is a life in perfect accord with nature. Taoism as a religion arose from the philosophy of Lao-Tzu. Lao-Tzu, which means “old philosopher” or even “old child,” may have been a Chinese philosopher who lived around the 6th century BCE, or it may refer to a line of thought. The basic assumption of Taoism is that there is an underlying pattern or direction of the universe that cannot be explained verbally or intellectually. Lao-Tzu cautioned against naming things, for doing so subjugates reality through abstraction and analysis. The Tao is this underlying pattern, commonly known as “the Way,” which can never be captured in words. The Taoist ideal is a person who leads a simple, spontaneous, and meditative life close to nature. Taoists are encouraged to explore roots, fungi, herbs, marine vegetation, and other natural foods to discover their life-giving elements.
Focus on Skills 2.1

Interpreting Gestures

Assume you work in public relations for the San Antonio Spurs. All-NBA point guard Tony Parker was harshly criticized in the media for making a gesture identified as a reverse Nazi salute. The Simon Wiesenthal Center, a major Jewish human rights organization in the United States, called on Parker to apologize for using the gesture.

You quickly do some background research and learn that the quenelle has been commonly used in France for many years. French comedian Dieudonné M’bala M’bala was said to have popularized the gesture (one hand pointing downward, the other touching the shoulder with an arm across the chest) to signify antiestablishment disdain. A native of France, Parker was photographed displaying the gesture with Dieudonné 3 years earlier.

Recently Dieudonné has been accused of using the gesture to connote anti-Semitism. Dieudonné has been convicted several times for inciting racial hatred or anti-Semitism. Photos in French news sites show a man doing the gesture in front of the Jewish school in Toulouse where three children and a rabbi were gunned down in 2012. Anti-Defamation League national director Albert Foxman issued a statement: “We recognize that its use is not always anti-Semitic. However, our concern is that French athletes and entertainers have now made the quenelle into a faddish element, which has the potential to be mimicked by other young fans and athletes around the world” (quoted in Monroe, 2013, p. A9).

1. Clearly, cultural background greatly influences perception. Is this a simple example of perceptual interpretation?
2. What would you say in a press release to be issued by Parker and the team?
3. Is the quenelle so offensive as to justify banning it?
4. Do professional athletes and entertainers have social responsibility for their communication?

There is also a belief in a balance that governs all of life and nature—the yin and the yang. Originally, yin meant the shady side of a hill and yang the sunny side. Yin is the dark, moist, cool aspect of the cosmos. Females have more yin quality. Yang is the bright, dry, warm aspect. Males have more yang quality. Foods also have yin and yang qualities. Most water plants, crustaceans, and certain beans are cooling yin foods. Oily and fried foods, pepper-hot flavoring, fatty meat, and oil plant foods such as peanuts are warm yang foods. The kind of food eaten is related to one’s health. When yin and yang forces in the body are not balanced, problems result. Proper amounts of food of one kind or the other must then be eaten to correct this imbalance. For example, a body sore or fever could be due to overeating “warm” foods.

Remember, all elements of a culture interrelate. Half of China is mountainous or unsuited to cultivation. China cannot depend on large animals like cattle that are land intensive. Through necessity, the
Chinese have used all forms of edible ingredients—from lotus roots, birds’ nests, and sea cucumbers to pig brains and fish lips. Because of a scarcity of fuel and raw materials, stir-frying was developed. Small pieces of meat, poultry, fish, or vegetables take only a few minutes to cook and thus save fuel.

For at least 5,000 years, rice has been grown in China. Its importance has made it synonymous with food and life. Rice is the symbol of well-being and fertility. Leaving one’s job is called breaking one’s rice bowl. It’s considered bad luck to upset a rice bowl. And the worst of all insults is to take another’s bowl of rice and empty it onto the ground. At the Chinese table, it’s the unspoken words that matter. The meal is the message. Chi fan!—Dinner is served!

High Versus Low Context

Another way that culture affects perception is whether the culture is high or low context. The concept of high-context and low-context cultures was popularized by Edward T. Hall (1976). Recall that context was defined in Chapter 1 as the environment in which the communication process takes place and that helps define the communication. Table 2.1 shows examples of both types.

In some recent studies, European Americans and Japanese were shown scenes, each with a background scene and foreground objects (Miyamoto, Nisbett, & Masuda, 2006). In these experiments, they compared perceptions of changes in the foreground with perceptions of changes in the background. European Americans were significantly better at detecting changes in the foreground, while the Japanese were significantly better at detecting changes in the background. These studies have argued that Europeans (low context) focus attention on objects independent of context (i.e., perceive analytically), whereas East Asians focus on the context (i.e., perceive holistically).

Cultures in which little of the meaning is determined by the context because the message is encoded in the explicit code are labeled low context. Cultures in which less has to be said or written because more of the meaning is in the physical environment or already shared by people are labeled high context.

In his 1976 book, Hall focused attention on the communication of high-context and low-context cultures. Think of the difference this way: Upon meeting a stranger, your verbal communication with that person is highly explicit—or low context—simply because you have no shared experiences. You cannot assume anything. However, when you communicate with your sister or brother with whom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1 Level of Context, by Culture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<td>Korea</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most Latin American cultures</td>
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<td>Southern and eastern Mediterranean cultures, such as Greece, Turkey, and the Arab states</td>
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you have shared a lifetime, your verbal communication is less explicit because you make use of your shared context. For example, the mention of a certain name can lead to laughter. With the stranger, you would have to explain in language the story that that name represented. Also, with your sister or brother, a certain facial expression can have a shared meaning, such as “There Mom goes again,” but the stranger would have no idea what your facial expression communicated. Again, you would have to explain in words that your mother’s specific behavior was characteristic, somewhat irritating, but so uniquely her.

In low-context cultures, verbal messages are elaborate and highly specific, and they tend to be highly detailed and redundant as well. Verbal abilities are highly valued. Logic and reasoning are expressed in verbal messages. In high-context cultures, most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person. Very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. High-context cultures decrease the perception of self as separate from the group. High-context cultures are more sensitive to nonverbal messages; hence, they are more likely to provide a context and setting and let the point evolve.

It has been said that language separates people. When understood from the perspective of high and low context, that statement makes sense. In high-context cultures, people are brought closer by the importance of their shared context. Those meanings are often lost in low-context cultures. I have often shown films of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony to classes in the United States. The tea ceremony reflects the Zen and Taoist traditions celebrating the beauty in the mundane, the superiority of spirit over matter, and tranquility with busy lives. The ceremony united the host and guest in a concert of harmony. Though not as commonly practiced as in the past, the tea ceremony is an excellent example of a high-context experience. Nothing is spoken; all the meanings are in the context of shared experience, the teahouse, the flower arrangement, the calligraphy scroll, and the ceramics. A typical response from a low-context observer is “Hurry up and drink the tea!” In contrast, your social experiences over coffee take little meaning from the context, rather it is the conversation—the words shared—that give meaning to the experience.

The Japanese tea ceremony, or chanoyu, is a revered tradition derived from Zen Buddhism and is approached with great respect and concentration. Adherence to time-honored rules is essential, both during the ceremony itself and in the construction of the tea house, or cha-shitsu, which should appear rustic, simple, and tranquil.
Focus on Technology 2.2

Web Design in Low- and High-Context Countries

Heeman Kim, James Coyle, and Stephen Gould (2009) compared the design features of South Korean and U.S. websites. For example, the Dongsuh Corporation is a major food manufacturer and importer. Like many South Korean sites, the Dongsuh site (www.dongsuh.co.kr) at the time of their study included animation, streaming video, clickable images, rollover navigation bars, and pop-under windows. An embedded video of a man and woman enjoying a cup of coffee rotated continuously. Five animated circles grew larger when rolled over, and one of these circles included circles within it that also grew larger when rolled over. The navigation scheme included two navigation bars and two pop-under windows. Compared to the Dongsuh site, the Procter & Gamble (P&G) site (www.pg.com) at the time of their study had much less animation and the animation was much more subdued. Unlike the Dongsuh site, the P&G site relied on static navigation bars. The P&G site did not utilize pop-up windows, streaming audio, or streaming video.

After their analysis of 200 South Korean and U.S. corporate websites, Kim, Coyle, and Gould concluded that low-context countries, such as the United States, relied more on less arbitrary textual formats and that high-context countries, such as South Korea, relied more on more ambiguous visual formats.

The Concept of Face

Remember, high-context cultures place great emphasis on relationships, and in those societies the concept of face is critical to understand. In Chinese culture, face is conceptualized in two ways: lien (face) and mien or mien-tzd (image). While these are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings. Hsien Hu (1944) defines lien as something that “represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego’s moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible to function properly with the community,” whereas mien “stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [United States], a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation” (p. 45). Masumoto, Oetzel, Takai, Ting-Toomey, and Yokochi (2000) define facework as the communicative strategies one uses to enact self-face and to uphold, support, or challenge another person’s face.

Raymond Cohen (1997) provides examples of ways one can lose face:

- a rebuffed overture
- exposure to personal insult
- exposure to a derogatory remark or disregard for one’s status
- being forced to give up a cherished value
- making what may later be seen as an unnecessary concession
- failure to achieve goals
- revelation of personal inadequacy
- damage to a valued relationship

High-context societies tend to be more hierarchical and traditional societies in which the concepts of shame and honor are much more important than they are in low-context societies. High-context
High-context cultures make greater distinction between the insiders and outsiders than low-context cultures do. People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems. When talking about something they have on their minds, a high-context individual will expect his interlocutor to know what's bothering him, so that he does not have to be specific. The result is that he will talk around and around the point, in effect putting all the pieces in place except the crucial one. Placing it properly—this keystone—is the role of his interlocutor.

—Edward T. Hall, Beyond Culture (1976, p. 98)

Intercultural Communication Competence

There are many definitions of the terms intercultural communication effectiveness and intercultural communication competence. For the purposes of this textbook, let’s agree to define intercultural communication effectiveness as the degree of the source’s success in accomplishing the goals set out for the interaction. (Review the Western model of communication in Chapter 1.) It would seem that one way to define intercultural communication competence places emphasis on the two behaviors of encoding and decoding (Monge, Bachman, Dillard, & Eisenberg, 1982). Encoding includes expressing ability and decoding includes listening ability.

The formal study of intercultural communication in the United States originated in 1946 when Congress passed the Foreign Service Act, which established the Foreign Service Institute to provide language and anthropological cultural training for foreign diplomats. Outside the Foreign Service Institute, the study of intercultural communication is generally associated with the publication of Edward T. Hall’s book The Silent Language in 1959. While associated with the Foreign Service Institute, Hall applied abstract anthropological concepts to the practical world of foreign service and extended the anthropological view of culture to include communication (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). President John F.
Kennedy’s creation of the Peace Corps in the early 1960s increased interest in knowing more about how to communicate more effectively to people of diverse cultures.

The term intercultural communication competence has a broader meaning. For the purposes of this textbook, let’s agree to define this term as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures (Spitzberg, 2000). This concept adds to effectiveness consideration for appropriateness, that is, that relationship maintenance is valued. Intercultural communication competence requires understanding others’ perceptions and values. There have been many attempts to identify the specific skills needed for intercultural communication competence. Chen (1989, 1990), for example, identifies four skill areas: personality strength, communication skills, psychological adjustment, and cultural awareness.

**Personality Strength.** The main personal traits that affect intercultural communication are self-concept, self-disclosure, self-monitoring, and social relaxation. Self-concept refers to the way in which a person views the self. Self-disclosure refers to the willingness of individuals to openly and appropriately reveal information about themselves to their counterparts. Self-monitoring refers to using social comparison information to control and modify one’s self-presentation and expressive behavior. Social relaxation is the ability to reveal little anxiety in communication. Competent intercultural communicators must know themselves well and, through their self-awareness, initiate positive attitudes. Individuals must express a friendly personality to be competent in intercultural communication.

**Communication Skills.** Individuals must be competent in verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Intercultural communication skills require message skills, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills. Message skills encompass the ability to understand and use language and feedback. Behavioral flexibility is the ability to select an appropriate behavior in diverse contexts. Interaction management means handling the procedural aspects of conversation, such as the ability to initiate a conversation. Interaction management emphasizes a person’s other-oriented ability to interact such as attentiveness and responsiveness. Social skills are empathy and identity maintenance. Empathy is the ability to think the same thoughts and feel the same emotions as the other person. Identity maintenance is the ability to maintain a counterpart’s identity by communicating back an accurate understanding of that person’s identity. In other words, a competent communicator must be able to deal with diverse people in different situations.

**Psychological Adjustment.** Competent intercultural communicators must be able to acclimate to new environments. They must be able to handle the feelings of “culture shock,” such as frustration, stress, and alienation in ambiguous situations caused by new environments.

**Cultural Awareness.** To be competent in intercultural communication, individuals must understand the social customs and social system of the host culture. Understanding how a people think and behave is essential for communication with them.

Chen and Starosta’s (1996) model of intercultural communication competence includes three perspectives:

1. **Affective or intercultural sensitivity**—to acknowledge and respect cultural differences
2. **Cognitive or intercultural awareness**—self-awareness of one’s own personal cultural identity and understanding how cultures vary
3. **Behavioral or intercultural adroitness**—message skills, knowledge of appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills

There are other such lists of intercultural competence skills, but there is no agreement nor is there a coherent theoretical model (Paige, 2004; Yamazaki & Hayes, 2004).

In Chapter 1 you read that the definition of communication itself reflects the culture defining it. In a like manner, the understanding of intercultural communication competence reflects the culture defining it. Consider how it might be defined in high-context, collectivistic cultures. C. M. Chua (2004) showed that intercultural communication competence in collectivistic Malaysian culture differs from Western definitions in that in Malaysia there is more emphasis on relational issues. Komolsevin, Knutson, and Datthuyawat (2010) explain this by showing that people in high-context cultures have a hesitancy to engage in communication—that is, they are reserved and silent—until they have sufficient information to encode messages appropriate for the receiver. So being quiet and reserved in Malaysia and Thailand is a necessary first step for the competent intercultural communicator. But that same behavior might be evaluated negatively in more individualistic cultures.

**Multiple Identities and Intercultural Communication Competence**

In Chapter 1, you read about how culture provides us with an identity and that those identities can vary as cultures do, and in this chapter you have read about intercultural communication competence. In this section we address how being competent in the communication skills of more than one culture affects intercultural communication competence. We’ll look at third cultures, multiculturalism, and postethnic cultures.

**Focus on Theory 2.1**

**The Theory of Rhetorical Sensitivity**

The theory of rhetorical sensitivity describes three types of communicators:

1. **Noble selves**—display egotism and individualism communicating messages with regard to the effect on the receiver
2. **Rhetorical reflectors**—display behavior believed to be desirable by the receiver
3. **Rhetorical sensitives**—combine concern for self with concern for others to encourage engagement

Komolsevin, Knutson, and Datthuyawat (2010) use this theory to explain that Thais use rhetorical reflection to build rhetorical sensitivity. In high-context, collective cultures the development of the relationship contributes to intercultural communication competence.
Focus on **Skills 2.2**

**Assessing Intercultural Communication Competence**

Read the following court transcript (Liberman, 1981):

*Magistrate:* Can you read and write?
*Defendant:* Yes.

*Magistrate:* Can you sign your name?
*Defendant:* Yes.

*Magistrate:* Did you say you cannot read?
*Defendant:* Hm.

*Magistrate:* Can you read or not?
*Defendant:* No.

*Magistrate:* [Reads statement.] Do you recall making that statement?
*Defendant:* Yes.

*Magistrate:* Is there anything else you want to add to the statement?
*Defendant:* [No answer.]

*Magistrate:* Did you want to say anything else?
*Defendant:* No.

*Magistrate:* Is there anything in the statement you want to change?
*Defendant:* No.

*Magistrate:* [Reads a second statement.] Do you recall making that statement?
*Defendant:* Yes.

*Magistrate:* Do you wish to add to the statement?
*Defendant:* No.

*Magistrate:* Do you want to alter the statement in any way?
*Defendant:* [Slight nod.]

*Magistrate:* What do you want to alter?
*Defendant:* [No answer.]

*Magistrate:* Do you want to change the statement?
*Defendant:* No.
Third Culture

John Useem, John Donahue, and Ruth Useem (1963) introduced the concept of binational third culture. Casimir and Asuncion-Lande (1989) refined the concept third culture to refer to a new culture that two or more individuals from different cultures can share which is not merely the fusion of the separate cultures but a new coherent whole. Think of a marriage between an individual raised in Japan and an individual raised in Canada. Imagine it might make a difference where the couple is living—Japan, Canada, or some other culture. In the relationship, one individual could attempt to adopt the culture of the other or both individuals could attempt to build a new culture beyond their original cultures. Using the rhetorical sensitivity theory, the individual who adopts the culture of the other may be a rhetorical reflector initially, but then probably uses that to build rhetorical sensitivity as the relationship continues to develop. The individuals who attempt to build a new culture may be rhetorical sensitives. Rhetorical sensitivity may be critical for intercultural marriages.

Five percent of marriages in Japan in 2008–2009 included a foreign spouse (with four times as many foreign wives as husbands). In South Korea, over 10% of marriages included a foreigner in 2010. In Taiwan, 13% of wives were foreigners in 2009. (Chinese citizens are not considered foreigners in Taiwan.) In France, the percentage of international marriage rose from about 10% in 1996 to 16% in 2009. In Germany, the rise was from 11.3% in 1990 to 13.7% in 2010. Approximately one in five marriages in Sweden, Belgium, and Austria are with a foreign partner (“International Marriage,” 2011).
Reliable data to determine the success of intercultural marriages is largely missing. If we define the success of an intercultural marriage by remaining together and not divorcing, one study in France demonstrated that intercultural marriages may be no more nor less likely to end in divorce than other marriages (Neyrand & M’Sili, 1996).

Another use of the term third culture has been to refer to children in expatriate families who reside outside of their home culture for years at a time (R. Useem & Downie, 1976). Other terms that have been used are global nomads, transnationals, and internationally mobile children (Gerner, Perry, Moselle, & Archbold, 1992). Ruth Useem (1999) argues that these people integrate elements of their home culture and their various cultures of residence into a third, different and distinct culture and may experience cultural marginality because of no longer feeling comfortable in any specific culture. In some ways, President Obama is a third-culture kid. He was born in Honolulu to a mother from the United States and a father from Kenya. At age 2, his father returned to Kenya. His mother remarried and moved to her new husband’s homeland, Indonesia. Obama attended public school in Indonesia until he was 10 and then returned to Honolulu to live with his maternal grandparents. New York Times columnist David Brooks (2008) described Obama as a “sojourner who lives apart” (p. A33).

While most research has been with children from the United States, studies have shown that third-culture kids have a high level of interest in travel and learning languages and feel accepting of cultures and diversity (Gerner et al., 1992). Iwama (1990) found third-culture kids to be more self-confident, flexible, active, and curious and to have greater bilingual ability.

Does biculturalism as represented by third-culture kids represent a way to transcend nationalism and ethnocentrism and a way to create diverse communities (Willis, 1994)? There are suggestions of difficulties: Third-culture kids may have difficulty in maintaining relationships and in direct problem solving (C. A. Smith, 1991).

**Multiculturalism**

Definitions of intercultural competence grounded in communication have tended to stress the development of skills that transform one from a monocultural person into a multicultural person. The multicultural person is one who respects cultures and has tolerance for differences (Belay, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 1996). Using rhetorical sensitivity theory, it could be argued that the multicultural person is more likely to be a rhetorical sensitive.

As you read in Chapter 1, nation-states have become the predominant form of cultural identification. Most Western nation-states developed a single national identity in the 18th and 19th centuries. Increasing immigration has been perceived as a challenge to those single national identities. Multiculturalism concerns “the general place of minorities, programs designed to foster equality, institutional structures created to provide better social services, and resources extended to ethnic minority organizations” (Vertovec, 1996, p. 222); these became the way to respond to cultural and religious differences.

The Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism is often credited with developing the modern political awareness of multiculturalism beginning with a preliminary report in 1965 (R. L. Jackson, 2010). Initially a policy to protect indigenous cultures, multiculturalism became an official Canadian policy in 1971; soon Australia and most member states of the European Union followed.
In the United States the origins of multiculturalism date back as early as 1915 to philosopher Horace Kallen (1915, 1924/1970), who set forth the idea of cultural pluralism to describe the United States. He employed the metaphor of a symphony orchestra. Each instrument was an immigrant group that, together with other immigrant groups, created harmonious music. Kallen’s opponents included John Dewey (Westbrook, 1991), who warned that cultural pluralism supported rigid segregation lines between groups. Hollinger (1995) has described the issue as a two-sided confrontation between those who advocate a uniform culture grounded in Western civilization and those who promote diversity.

Several European heads of state have denounced multicultural policies: UK Prime Minister David Cameron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Australian ex–prime minister John Howard, Spanish ex–prime minister Jose Maria Aznar, and French ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy have all challenged their countries’ multicultural policies. Several European states—notably the Netherlands and Denmark—have returned to an official monoculturalism (Bissoondath, 2002). Chancellor Merkel, for example, announced that multiculturalism had “utterly failed” (Weaver, 2010).

The same concern that multiculturalism has failed exists in the United States. Increased immigration and international terrorism and domestic terrorism have led to renewed pressures against multiculturalism. In April 2013, 3 people were killed and 264 injured when two bombs exploded at the Boston Marathon. The FBI identified two suspects, brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. Although they had never lived in Chechnya, the brothers identified as Chechen. Their family emigrated in 2002 and applied for refugee status. Both spoke English well. Tamerlan enrolled in a community college and married a U.S. citizen. He was quoted as having said that he “didn’t understand” Americans and had not a single American friend (Weigel, 2013). Dzhokhar became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 2012 and enrolled in a university program in marine biology. He was reported to be greatly influenced by his older brother. Some believe that the brothers were motivated by an anti-American, radical version of Islam that Tamerlan had learned in the Russian republic Dagestan or they had learned in the United States.

Some columnists began to label the tragedy as an example of the failure of multiculturalism. Mike Gonzalez (2013), for example, asks how two refugees recipients of free education in the United States could not assimilate. Assimilation, Gonzalez asserts, does not connote coercion and loss of ancestral culture, but it does mean patriotism.

Global Voices

a decade in america already, I want out
—Dzhokhar Tsarnaev tweet,
March 14, 2012 (quoted in Gonzalez, 2013)

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev received asylum from the United States, obtained citizenship and enjoyed the freedoms of a United States citizen, and then betrayed his allegiance to the United States by killing and maiming people.

—Court papers filed by the U.S. Department of Justice (quoted in Serrano & Semuels, 2014)

Postethnic Cultures

You read earlier in this chapter that John Dewey criticized cultural pluralism as encouraging people to identify themselves as members of one group. If a person is born female in Texas of immigrant parents from Mexico and then becomes an attorney, a Republican, and a Baptist and currently lives in Minneapolis, who is she? In the United States, can she identify herself as any one of these? As all of these? Will others most likely identify her first as Hispanic?
A postethnic perspective recognizes that each of us, like the Minneapolis attorney, lives in many diverse groups and so we aren’t confined to only one group. Angela Davis (1992) used the image of “a rope attached to an anchor”: While we may be anchored in one community, our “ropes” should be long enough to permit us to move into other communities.

A postethnic perspective does not assume that “everyone is the same.” Rather, it recognizes our interdependent future and stretches the boundaries of “we”; using the rhetorical sensitivity theory might be an example of noble selves.

Hollinger (1995) describes a postethnic perspective as a challenge to the “right” of our grandparents to establish our primary identity. Postethnicity “prefers voluntary to prescribed affiliations, appreciates multiple identities, pushes for communities of wide scope, recognizes the constructed character of ethno-racial groups, and accepts the formation of new groups as a part of the normal life of a democratic society” (p. 116). Postethnicism recognizes that groups based on affiliations are as substantive and authentic as groups based on blood and history.

In one sense, postethnicism is an idealistic attempt to redefine groups rigidly based on ethnicity into groups based on voluntary interests. However, if viewed from the perspective of dominant U.S. cultural values—particularly individualism—postethnicism is a reaffirmation of the individual’s right to define herself or himself by individual interest and not by heritage. Postethnicism in the United States may be an extension of extreme individualism.

It’s important to recognize the criticism of postethnicism: that it is idealistic to assume that others will not continue to label some people as members of a group and communicate with them as members of that group and not as individuals.

Focus on Culture 2.2

A Postethnic Identity Claim

In 2012 Elizabeth Warren (originally from Oklahoma of working-class upbringing) was elected the first woman to the U.S. Senate from Massachusetts. During her career as a Harvard Law School professor, she had listed herself as Native American in law school directories. Challenged to provide proof of her ancestry by her Republican opponent, Warren said her “family lore” was that she had an Indian ancestor. The New England Genealogy Association found indications, but not proof, that Warren had a Cherokee great-great-great-grandmother, which would make her 1/32nd American Indian.

In an essay titled “Elizabeth Warren Says She’s Native American. So She Is,” David Treuer, an author and Ojibwe Indian from Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota, wrote,

“An Indian identity is something someone claims for oneself; it is a matter of choice. It is not legally defined and entails no legal benefits. Being an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe, however, is a legal status that has nothing to do with identity and everything to do with blood quantum. . . . (Elizabeth Warren is not enrolled in a tribe and doesn’t seem to have sought such status. She doesn’t claim an Indian identity, just Indian ancestry.)

Intercultural Communication Ethics

Closely related to intercultural communication competence is ethics. We saw that the understandings of communication and of intercultural communication competence are specific to culture. Are there ethics that transcend all cultures or are all ethics, too, specific to culture? As a branch of philosophy, ethics addresses the question of how we ought to lead our lives. Kenneth E. Andersen (1991) makes clear that ethical theories tend to reflect the culture in which they were produced and, therefore, present challenges in intercultural communication. Western ethics tend to focus on the individual and individual freedoms and responsibilities (Fuse, Land, & Lambiase, 2010). Other ethics focus more on community.

As described in Chapter 1, Confucianism supports a just, orderly society with rituals for relationships that create a harmonious society. Interpersonal relationships and the concept of face are central to Confucianism. Confucian ethics revolve around the concept of *li* or the social norms, rituals, and proprieties which characterize an orderly society. A recent study demonstrated that Confucian ethics guide people’s lives today. Zhong (2008) found that U.S. students display a strong sense of individualism, while Chinese students tended toward collectivism. Confucianism is an example of ethics that privilege the community and society, as opposed to Western ethics that focus on individuals and rights.

What, though, guides the interactions of people from cultures with diverse ethical perspectives? Are there global values to guide intercultural interactions? Kale (1997) argues that peace is the fundamental human value. The use of peace applies not only to relationships among countries but to “the right of all people to live at peace with themselves and their surroundings” (p. 450). From this fundamental value, he developed four ethical principles to guide intercultural interactions:

- Ethical communicators address people of other cultures with the same respect that they would like to receive themselves. Intercultural communicators should not demean or belittle the cultural identity of others through verbal or nonverbal communication.
- Ethical communicators seek to describe the world as they perceive it as accurately as possible. What is perceived to be the truth may vary from one culture to another; truth is socially constructed. This principle means that ethical communicators do not deliberately mislead or deceive.
- Ethical communicators encourage people of other cultures to express themselves in their uniqueness. This principle respects the right of expression regardless of how popular or unpopular a person’s ideas may be.
- Ethical communicators strive for identification with people of other cultures. Intercultural communicators should emphasize the commonalities of cultural beliefs and values rather than their differences.

Developing ethical principles to guide intercultural interactions is a difficult task. Even though Kale’s principles may be more acceptable in some cultures than in others, they are certainly a beginning step.

SUMMARY

Perception and thought are not independent of the cultural environment; therefore, our brains both are shaped by the external world and shape our perception of the external world. Sensation is the
Focus on Theory 2.2

Is the Academic Discipline of Intercultural Communication Intercultural?

Is the intercultural communication field of study truly intercultural? Is there an ethical issue applying a Western perspective to other cultures? As you read in this chapter, the discipline originated in the United States and has been developed in U.S. universities. Even scholars from the non-Western cultures have “failed to utilize the experiences of their own cultures . . . to demonstrate that they, too, have been able to see through the same eyes as those European and U.S. American scholars who have pioneered in this field” (Asante, Miike, & Yin, 2014, p. 4). Yoshitaka Miike (2003a) has raised the question about whether “the topics we pursue, the theories we build, the methods we employ, and the materials we read adequately reflect and respond to the diversity of our communicative experiences in a globalizing world” (pp. 243–244).

One major criticism of Eurocentric intercultural communication research has been that the discipline has facilitated the commercial interests of the dominant North American and European cultures with consumers in other cultures (see, for example, Chapter 13 in this text). Western theories of communication often begin with the expression of unique individuality and a means of demonstrating independence. From an Asiacentric perspective, then, communication is a process in which we remind ourselves of the interdependence and interrelatedness of the universe.

In a dialogue with Miike, Asante asserted, “The future of intercultural communication must reside in the courage of scholars to engage indigenous knowledge from all areas of the world. . . . We must learn to embrace new paradigms and their expert concepts that grow from the wisdom and teachings of diverse peoples” (Asante & Miike, 2013, p. 12).

For Additional Reading:


neurological process of becoming aware of our environment and is affected by our cultures. The Greek idea of a strong individual identity and the Chinese idea of harmony affected both the sensation and perception process in each culture. Perception is usually thought of as having three steps—selection, organization, and interpretation—each affected by culture.

The concept of high-context and low-context cultures was popularized by Edward T. Hall (1976). Cultures in which little of the meaning is determined by the context because the message is encoded in the explicit code are labeled low context. Cultures in which less has to be said or written because more of the meaning is in the physical environment or already shared by people are labeled high context. Low-context cultures, such as the United States, with a greater concern for privacy and autonomy, tend to use direct-face negotiation and express more self-face maintenance, whereas high-context cultures, such as China, with a greater concern for interdependence and inclusion, tend to use indirect-face negotiation and express more mutual face or other-face maintenance.
The formal study of intercultural communication in the United States originated with the 1946 Foreign Service Act, which provided for language and anthropological cultural training for foreign diplomats. Outside the Foreign Service Institute, the study of intercultural communication is generally associated with the publication of Edward T. Hall’s book *The Silent Language* in 1959. Since that time, there have been many attempts to define the skills that make one an effective and competent intercultural communicator. The concept of intercultural communication competence is applied to individuals who have multiple cultural identities such as third cultures, multiculturalism, and postethnic cultures. Finally, ethics of intercultural communication are presented as a guide for intercultural interactions and intercultural communication studies.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. My veterinarian once said that he wished he could be a cat just for a few minutes to experience how a cat senses the world. He speculated, though, that such an experience would forever change him. Explain in what ways the experience of “two realities” might be so disconcerting.

2. Even within one culture, subgroups may have diverse perceptions. Compare the diverse perceptions that hunters, vegetarians, and even political parties might have of a moose.

3. Consider specific countries that have diverse populations and those with fairly homogeneous populations. How does the concept of high and low context help explain political debate, dispute resolution processes, and other forms of public communication?

4. Describe how the concept of face can help explain dispute resolution. How might a student confront an instructor over a grading error? What might that interaction look like in a U.S. classroom versus a Chinese classroom?

5. What are the most critical elements of intercultural communication competence?

6. Kale suggests that peace is a fundamental human value that could guide intercultural interactions. Evaluate this proposition.

**KEY TERMS**

- Aboriginal
- face
- facework
- field dependence
- high context
- intercultural communication competence
- intercultural communication effectiveness
- interpretation
- low context
- multiculturalism
- organization
- Peace Corps
- perception
- postethnicity
- selection
- sensation
- Taoism
- third culture
- yang
- yin
1. The word God is capped throughout this text, but no endorsement of any religion is implied. The intent is to honor all religions.

All readings are from Intercultural Communication: A Global Reader (Jandt, 2004).

Akira Miyahara, “Toward Theorizing Japanese Interpersonal Communication From a Non-Western Perspective” (p. 279)

Kiyoko Suedo, “Differences in the Perception of Face: Chinese Mien-Tzu and Japanese Metsu” (p. 292)

Ram Adhar Mall, “The Concept of an Intercultural Philosophy” (p. 315)

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