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The language and intercultural communication reader

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A simple online search for titles on intercultural communication will reveal a dizzying array of introductory texts and readers on this topic. So what makes the text being reviewed unique? To begin with, this reader is organized into six parts or themes, each containing from three to five chapters on language and intercultural communication. In addition to an introductory chapter to the entire volume, each of the six parts starts with its own short introduction and ends with “Notes for Students and Instructors.” These notes, which include study questions, study activities, and further reading selections, will likely prove helpful for self-study as well as classroom instruction and activities. The volume ends with a concluding chapter on methodology, a list of resources (key textbooks, book series, journals, corpora, websites, etc.), a glossary of terms, and an index of languages and cultures (in addition to the usual index). The reader’s 22 chapters (excluding the general introduction and conclusion) span the years between 1956 and 2007, though most were originally published in the last 20 years.

The introduction to the reader both lays out the main themes around which the volume is organized and, regarding each theme, provides a brief overview of the main studies, research questions, researchers, disciplinary backgrounds, and contributions to what is known about the interplay of language and intercultural communication. The three chapters in Part I (Culture, language, and thought) introduce foundational work on intercultural communication. The first chapter,

perhaps not surprisingly, is Whorf's seminal, albeit highly criticized, work on the relationship between language and thought and the linguistic relativity hypothesis (Whorf, 1956). Whorf uses many examples, though mostly anecdotal, to support the claim that language influences habitual thinking and one's perception of the world. The second chapter, by Nisbett, refers back to the Sapir-Whorf Hypthesis but contends that culture influences thinking and how one perceives the world. The author argues that Westerners perceive the world in fixed categories expressed by nouns, whereas Easterners tend to perceive the world through dynamic relationships expressed by verbs. The third chapter, by Samovar and colleagues, provides an overview of Hofstede's (1980, 1991) value dimensions and of Hall's (1976) high context/low context communication. This chapter is perhaps one of the most edited in the volume, so readers may want to carefully read the editor's introduction to it on page 18.

Part II (Cultural approaches to discourse and pragmatics: theoretical considerations) focuses on "culturally specific patterns in language use" (p. 61) and on discourse analysis and pragmatics as pertaining to intercultural communication. Chapter 4, by Scollon and Scollon, revisits the constructs of face and interpersonal politeness. By focusing on three main factors involved in politeness (power, distance, and weight of imposition), as well as three politeness systems (deference, solidarity, and hierarchy), the authors redefine the notions of politeness and face. Chapter 5, by Gu, is an exploration and illustrative (as well as functional) description of politeness phenomena in modern Chinese. One of Gu's main arguments is that polite behavior is "culture-specific and language-specific" (p. 91), which the author demonstrates by discussing and showing examples of four politeness maxims. In the next chapter, Ide argues that Japanese honorifics are used not only for signifying politeness, but also dignity and elegance. They are thus viewed as inextricably tied to Japanese language *and* culture. Ide also explores how linguistic forms and contextual factors are implicated in the notion of linguistic relativity. Chapter 7, by Spencer-Oatey, emphasizes the motivational (i.e., social psychological) aspect in the management of social relationships. Her framework adds to the approaches taken in linguistic politeness. The author explores "rapport-sensitive incidents" as a way to more thoroughly understand and exemplify the motivational bases for managing rapport. In this section's final chapter, Goddard and Wierzbicka introduce the notion of "cultural scripts" as a technique free of cultural and linguistic bias for describing cultures, values, and practices in language. The authors claim that such descriptions are only possible if they consist of simple language with equivalents in all languages.

Whereas Parts I and II set the theoretical stage regarding language and intercultural communication, Part III (Communication patterns across cultures: empirical examples) provides illustrations of “culture-specific interactional strategies and patterns in language use and in nonverbal communication” (p. 133). The focus of Chapter 9, by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, is the study of cross-cultural speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). Their investigation accounts for cross-cultural variability, situational variability, and individual variability in the realization of the same speech acts. The authors zeroed in on requests and apologies. In Chapter 10, by Katriel, a distinct speech event termed “*dugri* talk” (used by native-born Israelis of Jewish heritage) is the focus of investigation. Katriel’s argument is that an examination of *dugri* talk reveals a broader level of analysis of speech acts (i.e., larger discourse units and episodic structures). In Chapter 11, Nazzari offers a detailed account of how Muslims use the Qur’an as a communication resource. Based on the analysis of three conversational excerpts, Nazzari argues that the phrase *Insha’ Allah* (God willing) is used in daily interactions to achieve specific pragmatic functions, such as protecting one’s self-image. Finally, in Chapter 12, Sajavaara and Lehtonen investigate the use of silence as a communication strategy by focusing on Finnish speakers. Basing their discussion off of the stereotypical view of ‘the silent Finn’, the authors explore the communicative goals achieved by silence when used cross-culturally by Finnish speakers.

In Part IV (Teaching and learning cultural variations of language use), the first chapter (Chapter 13) is by Holliday, who introduces a key distinction between a “small culture” approach and a “large culture” approach to conceptualizing intercultural communication phenomena. Through this distinction, the author hopes to clarify the concept of culture as used in Applied Linguistics and even the social sciences as a whole. In Chapter 14, Kasper and Rose target the development of pragmatic competence in second language learners, in terms of both specific speech acts and general discourse ability. The authors discuss universal patterns as well as language-specific developmental patterns. Mearns, in Part IV’s final chapter, sheds light on how misunderstanding is signaled, repaired, and avoided in English as a Lingua Franca communication. The author analyzed L2-L2 interactions in academic discourse communities in countries where English is neither the local language nor the one of most international students.

Part V (Interculturality) differentiates between traditional intercultural communication studies and those of the ‘interculturality’ paradigm. Based on this emerging paradigm of research, Sarangi (in Chapter 16) critically reviews traditional and essentialist views of “culture” in cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics research while advancing a discourse-analytic

approach to the study of the social construction of culture and of intercultural miscommunication. Chapter 17, by Nishizaka, challenges readers to conceptualize interculturality (here, the cultural differences between interlocutors) not as a fixed given, but rather as a phenomenon in its own right. Based on the analysis of interactional data between speakers of Japanese, the author argues that interculturality is constituted *in* and *through* discourse. In this section's concluding chapter (Chapter 18), Higgins provides further support for the view that interculturality is "a continuously dynamic production of identities-in-practice (...), rather than a consequence of fixed social characteristics" (Higgins, 2007, p. 49). To illustrate this point, the author's analysis focuses on how ethnicity is constructed in talk.

The last section of the reader (Part VI: Intercultural communication in a professional context) explores intercultural communication in a variety of professional, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Chapter 19, by Clyne and colleagues, reports on their study of workplace interactions between non-native English speakers in Melbourne, Australia. Based on an analysis of apology and complaint routines, the authors highlight the need for more research on interactions between non-native English speakers. In Chapter 20, Schmidt et al. focus on television commercials from the US and Asia as "suggestions to viewers to buy consumer products" (p. 326). This study highlights the key factors playing a role in the cross-cultural study of the pragmatics of advertising: universal pragmatic principles, cultural norms, and the advertising register. Chapter 21, by Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, investigates "interruptive strategies" used in formal and informal business meetings by British and Italian speakers. One of the authors' main findings is that turn-taking dynamics are strongly related to an individual's status. This study both contradicts findings from the existing literature and supports others. Finally, in the volume's last previously published chapter (Chapter 22), Marquez Reiter and Placencia report on a study of pragmatic contrast on the language of service encounters in Montevideo and Quito. The results from this study underscore the impact of cross-cultural differences in the use of the same language (Spanish) due to historical and sociocultural factors. In the concluding chapter to the reader, the editor discusses methodological issues in intercultural communication, connecting them to the reader's chapters when appropriate. This chapter should be useful to graduate students and beginning researchers, as it offers a bird's eye view of the methods used for conducting research in the field.

Admittedly, this volume leaves little room for improvement. The only exception to this is perhaps the lack of a matrix with author information, relevant themes, contexts of study, etc. For a volume this large (22 chapters written by a total of 37

authors and encompassing various contexts), a reference chart or table would make it easier to use, especially to readers who would prefer to read only certain sections or chapters based on their research question(s) and area(s) of interest. But all things considered, and in closing, this volume represents an invaluable addition to the intercultural communication literature. Altogether, the editor's careful organization of the chapters around key themes, an instructional introductory chapter and useful discussion of methodological issues, as well as practical tools such as the glossary and the 'Resource List', all make for a unique and welcomed resource to both graduate students and researchers in the field.

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