Introduction

Why Study Intercultural Communication?

Throughout our lives we become members of and learn to communicate in an ever-increasing range of social groups: our families, friends, colleagues, and strangers in familiar and unfamiliar situations. Our interactions in these communities helps us "acquire the culturally requisite skills for participating in society, including appropriate ways of acting, feeling, and thinking" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008, p. 3). We perform different social roles in various social groups, and mostly weave seamlessly among our social selves, without much awareness of the subtle rules that guide our beliefs, behaviors, and communication. Typically, there is little consequence to our lack of awareness, and it is not until we embark upon an intercultural journey – traveling to a new country or meeting people with different cultural backgrounds from ours – that our assumptions are put to the test, and we are confronted with the revelation that how we have always communicated might not work everywhere or in every situation.

Since the world is increasingly connected socially, politically, economically, and technologically, due to growing immigration and innovations that have made travel and communication easier (Mauranen, 2012; Neuliep, 2018), such intercultural encounters are now the norm rather than the exception. Consequently, learning how to interpret and participate in this interconnected world is a basic necessity and responsibility of twenty-first-century global citizenship. Being aware of our beliefs, behaviors, and communicative practices – the way they shape our thinking and interactions – can facilitate more effective encounters with members of other cultural groups.

Martin and Nakayama (2018), Jackson (2014), and Oetzel (2009) identify several imperatives for studying intercultural communication: peace, economics, technology, demographics, ethics, and self-awareness. Striving for *peace* through improved communication can help mitigate conflict and

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the continued effects of power and dominance disparities that arose during colonial times and still persist to this day. Even at the individual level we can make a great deal of difference by volunteering for organizations that improve the lives of refugees or immigrants, for example. The interconnectedness of global *economies* is another reason to study intercultural communication; learning how to participate effectively in diverse cultural encounters is a strategic necessity, since many companies today employ an international workforce and conduct business beyond national boundaries. The world is also intertwined *technologically* through social media, online news, and telecollaboration. Technological progress facilitates learning about other cultures and getting to know people from around the world, which can lead to but also requires improved intercultural communication skills. The fourth imperative is prompted by *demographic* developments. Due to increased mobility around the world, we are likely to live somewhere other than where we were born, bringing diverse cultures into sharper contrast if value systems (are perceived to) differ too profoundly. *Ethics*, which Martin and Nakayama (2018) define as "principles of conduct" (p. 29), pertain to notions of right or wrong. Understanding divergent ethical views can improve intercultural encounters by offering effective ways of talking about and participating in dissimilar or conflicting value systems responsibly. The final imperative highlights the need for improved *self-awareness* of our own cultural identities and how we communicate in various social spheres. Self-awareness is the most crucial stepping-stone towards understanding other people's perspectives, improving our tolerance of divergent viewpoints, avoiding ethnocentrism, and increasing empathy. Self-awareness is also an excellent coping tool in novel cultural situations, a skill that we can foster throughout our lifelong commitment to improving intercultural communication.

Intercultural Communication and L2/Lx Learning

Learning a new language offers excellent opportunities for improving self-awareness and developing intercultural communication skills, since the other language and its associated cultures can serve as a 'mirror' for exploring one's own linguistic and cultural beliefs and practices. Whether a learner needs to adapt to new beliefs and practices as a consequence of language learning depends in large part on the context in which language learning takes place (Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013). A frequently made distinction distinguishes between foreign and second language learning. *Foreign* language learning takes place when the language

being studied is not spoken by the broader community (e.g., learning English in Thailand), whereas *second* languages are learned when they are spoken in the surrounding social environment (e.g., learning Swahili in Tanzania). While it is unclear whether the same cognitive processes are involved in language development in both contexts (Gass et al., 2013), access to L2 input and opportunities for L2 output are dissimilar. Learners often have little need to use nonacademic language in foreign language contexts and tend to rely on the relatively 'sterile' standardized language presented in textbooks (Liddicoat, 2005). Consequently, "learners are often isolated from the communities they are studying and their experience of linguistic and cultural diversity as it relates to their language is necessarily mediated primarily through the classroom" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 8). In contrast, second language learners need to participate in diverse speech communities and communicative contexts immediately, which reflect considerable linguistic variation. The activities presented in this book can be implemented in both learning contexts, although the availability of source materials may be easier in second language contexts and often depends on Internet access. The learning context may influence learning outcomes as well, including how well and what aspects of language the learner might prioritize (e.g., formulaic expressions used in everyday interaction or grammar).

Regardless of the context, however, this book takes the position that the native-speaker competence often held as the gold standard in second language acquisition research is not realistic for most language learners (this issue is discussed in depth in Chapter 2) for several reasons. First, defining a 'native speaker' is problematic (Kramsch, 2009). Native speakers are not homogeneous in their abilities: Which native speaker do we measure learning against? Someone without formal education? Someone with a high school diploma or a professor of literature? The language performed on social media or in a formal speech? Second, native speakers use different language varieties, some of which are excluded from a conceptualization of 'norms' and 'ideals' due to racism, socioeconomic or other prejudices (Davies, 2003). Which variety is 'acceptable' from language learners? Third, language competence is complex, and even native speakers vary in their ability across aspects of language use; some may be better speakers, others are more comfortable with writing. At the same time, learners of a second language may have similar control of the linguistic system as an educated native speaker, yet retain a 'nonnative' accent, which marks them as nonnative speakers, even though their overall competences are outstanding. Thus, instead of a deficiency-oriented

paradigm (Llurda, 2009), this book emphasizes multilingual learners'
ability to function effectively or successfully in another language.
Consequently, it adopts Cook's (1999) term *L2 user* in addition to *learner*.
This label, he argues, reflects the wide range of experiences in which second
or foreign languages are used – often quite successfully – with imperfect
knowledge of another language. Nonetheless, for many multilingual speak-
ers, 'learner' and 'user' are not mutually exclusive: I have lived in the
United States for three decades and am comfortable speaking and writing
in English, but I still *learn* new expressions, new understandings of the
world every day. In other words, as a language user, I am also a language
learner. In a related vein, Dewaele (2017) suggests using the term *Lx users*
for multicompetent people, since for many individuals, the 'second' lan-
guage is actually their third, fourth, or fifth. However, since L2 is com-
monly recognized, in this volume, I combine these practices and use the
terms L2/Lx learner and user (previous research on second language
acquisition that refers to L2 learners will retain that label), with the under-
standing that language users are legitimate participants in L2/Lx commu-
nicative practices, who enact a wealth of linguistic and cultural repertoires
in their intercultural interactions.

The Intended Audience and Objectives of This Book

Given the issues discussed above, the intended audience for this volume
includes pre- and in-service instructors of second and foreign languages.
The book aims to provide a sound theoretical background and a thorough
review of research on intercultural communication, while also presenting
the application of theory to L2/Lx pedagogical practice. Specifically, it
offers concrete tools for teaching intercultural communicative competence
in the L2/Lx classroom, responding to Byram and Masuhara's (2013) call to
make the language-communication link explicit.

In line with these objectives, Part I lays the theoretical and methodolo-
gical foundations for the book. The first chapter introduces readers to basic
concepts in intercultural communication, highlighting its dynamic nature,
dependent on the culturally complex individuals who participate in spe-
cific interactions. There is a special emphasis on recognizing culture as
layered experience: a person belongs to multiple cultural groups, and in
every interaction some aspects of culture will be more salient than others.
Chapter 2 details the evolution of language pedagogy from its early origins
to an emphasis on intercultural communication. Chapter 3 introduces
concrete analytic tools – the ethnography of communication, interactional

sociolinguistics, and multimodal analysis – that are relatively accessible for non-experts (i.e., language learners). Learning to conduct systematic analysis can help improve learners' awareness of and skills for navigating intercultural communication.

Part II includes chapters on teaching vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, paralinguistics, nonverbal communication, and cultural/contextual background knowledge systematically. Each chapter reviews relevant research from applied linguistics (where available) and offers concrete teaching activities. The final chapter in this part offers suggestions for assessing intercultural communication, addressing what can and should, or perhaps cannot and should not, be assessed within the classroom context (its inclusion in Part II is strategic, as I explain in the chapter). Additionally, the appendix includes a four-year curricular plan for the pedagogical components that follow the language proficiency guidelines established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages[1] and the Common European Framework of References for Languages[2].

Finally, Part III explores the personal journey in intercultural communication, focusing on intercultural transitions, identity, and intercultural conflict, concluding with a discussion of what successful intercultural communication entails, and how we can facilitate its development as language educators.

[1] www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012
[2] www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/home

PART I

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

The chapters in Part I present theoretical and methodological concepts in intercultural communication, underscoring that it is layered and shaped by both cultural and interpersonal forces. In order to acknowledge this complex and dynamic process in L2/Lx pedagogy, several analytic tools are proposed that foster learners' awareness of and skills for navigating intercultural communication.

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CHAPTER I

Key Concepts in Intercultural Communication

Chapter Overview

The scholarship on intercultural communication is grounded in interdisciplinary research in anthropology, communication studies, education, linguistics, and, more recently, applied linguistics. Given this interdisciplinarity, it is useful to establish a shared understanding of how key concepts such as culture and communication are used in this book. Additionally, this chapter highlights the nature of culture as layered and of communication as dynamically co-constructed by participants and the social context in which their interaction takes place. Finally, the discussion turns to prominent models of intercultural communication from a social-scientific perspective, which offer fruitful points of analysis in language pedagogy as well.

Culture: An Elusive Definition

Defining the term 'culture' is a challenging endeavor, and since this book explores it in depth, here I only offer a brief review of seminal works that attempted to capture the meaning of 'culture.'

Saville-Troike (2003) described it as a "set of codes and rules … for contextually appropriate behavior in a community or group; in other words, culture was conceived to be what the individual needs to know to be a functional member of the community" (p. 6). Others note the importance of shared beliefs, values, thought patterns, and rules of making and interpreting meaning (Byram, 1997; Haslett, 2017; Nostrand, 1989). Schiffman (1993) echoes this view and describes culture as "the set of behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and historical circumstances associated with a particular language" (p. 120). Similarly, Ting-Toomey and Takai (2006) highlight the collective frame of reference that culture provides:

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> [A] learned system of meanings that fosters a particular sense of shared identity-hood and community-hood among its group members. It is a complex *frame of reference* that consists of a pattern of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of an identity group. (p. 691; emphasis mine)

These definitions point to the cohesive power of culture, connecting groups of individuals. Culture, in this sense, serves as a lens for making sense of interactions with others, "a frame of reference for its members … for making sense of the world" (Oetzel, 2009, p. 6). Yet, Spencer-Oatey (2008) recognizes a duality in her definition of culture as "a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour" (p. 3). That is, culture as a cohesive force helps individuals connect with each other, but at the same time, these individuals have the freedom and flexibility to adhere to shared culture practices in some ways and diverge from them in others.

Layers of Culture

While cultural cohesion is grounded in shared experiences, culture is not monolithic. Instead, cultures are layered constructs, and each individual reflects affiliation with and is influenced by broader and narrower social forces that shape our communicative practices. Broader cultural forces might include supranational (beyond the nation) communities, such as Doctors without Borders or *Harry Potter* fans around the globe. Nations – the most common association with the term 'culture' – that determine laws, as well as language and other social policies, also have a significant impact on cultural practices. For example, it is usually the state that determines procedures or traditions for electing, appointing or inheriting leadership (e.g., democracies versus a monarchy), including verbal and nonverbal communication that such procedures entail. Within each politically defined nation, there are mid-level cultural groups – e.g., based on ethnic identity, social class, or geographic region – whose values and practices may align more or less with dominant trends in the nation-state (Bonvillain, 2020; Haslett, 2017; Myers-Scotton, 2006; Neuliep, 2018). Religious groups that share linguistic rituals or an indigenous community revitalizing its heritage language represent two examples of such mid-level groups. Representing the next layer, smaller cultural groups influence

family-level coherence, building and maintaining traditions such as naming children, creating shared jokes, or celebrating symbols of a clan. However, some practices are particular to an individual (e.g., idiosyncratic use of emojis).

In his discussion of culture, Oetzel (2009) identifies four interconnected levels, which are shown in Figure 1.1: (1) the individual (e.g., sense of self, personal attributes), (2) interpersonal relationships with others (e.g., friendships, families), (3) organizations that scaffold everyday life (e.g., healthcare, education, work, hobbies), and (4) broad cultural forces (e.g., values, belief systems shared across larger society). The outer layers influence each circle going inwards (top-down effects, such as media informing individual preferences or behaviors), while the inner circles may have outward impact (bottom-up effects, such as leaders who affect local or world events).

Neuliep (2018) offers a similarly layered notion of contexts that shape communication. In this model, communication is most broadly influenced by the *cultural context*, defined as the "accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by an identifiable group of people with a
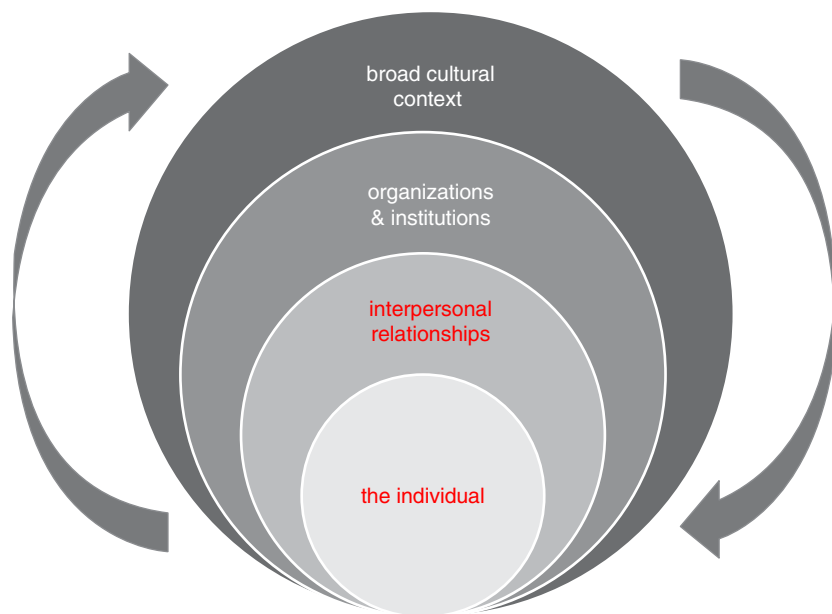

Figure 1.1 Layers of culture and impact (adapted from Oetzel, 2009).

common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol systems" (p. 21). Within broad cultural contexts exist *microcultural contexts*, the way smaller social groups (e.g., ethnic groups) view and understand the world. The next layer is the *environmental context*, referring to the ways in which the physical location and immediate surroundings affect communication (e.g., whispering during a religious ceremony but yelling at sports games). The most immediate influence on interactions is each individual's *perceptual context*, "the individual characteristics of each interactant, including cognitions, attitudes, dispositions, and motivations" (p. 22). Moreover, interactions take place within *sociorelational contexts*, or "the relationship between the interactants," both familial and professional, such as friends, parents and children, mentor and pupil (p. 22). It is within this context that interactants use verbal and nonverbal communication to create and interpret messages.

Oetzel's layers and Neuliep's contexts reflect multiple cultural and individual factors that influence specific communicative events. These factors impact our interactions in different ways at different times. What is *salient* – relevant, impactful – varies across situations. For example, whether an individual is shy or has a particular way of speaking, whether the interlocutors are familiar with each other or not, and what each person wants to achieve with the interaction plays an important role in determining how an interaction progresses, and what its outcomes might be.

Figure 1.2 illustrates how broader societal forces and highly individual, local factors may converge: an American athlete, the captain of the U.S. women's soccer team[1], will likely interact differently during training or at an international press conference than she might with her friends at home; she might also interact differently if she is stressed or has a disagreement on a consequential issue, as opposed to discussing what movie to watch Saturday night. In any of her interactions with others, a different aspect of her identity might be most salient: her being on the American as opposed to the German team may influence her attitude towards winning; her being the captain of the team versus another player determines who represents the team to the media; her being with friends rather than strangers affects her language choices, her verbal and nonverbal behaviors. When analyzing interactions, it is important to understand how various contextual and cultural forces interplay to shape an interaction, and how participants consequently enact their social personae, or identities, through

[1] www.ussoccer.com/womens-national-team#tab-1