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Unit 1 An Introduction

***To know another's language and not his culture
is a very way to make a fluent fool of one's self.***

Winston Brembeck

Warm-up Cases

Case 1 Showing Concern

In China:

Xiao Li (*an interpreter*): You must be very tired. You're old...

Catherine (*an elderly American lady*): Oh, I'm NOT old, and I'm NOT tired.

In the West:

A: How are you doing now? Would you like to rest?

B: No, not a bit.

(Ouyang Fasu, 1988)

Comment: What the interpreter said is quite courteous in China. It means, "If you are tired, we can take a little rest, since you are getting on in years." Unfortunately, his translation is too literal and misleading. This clearly shows that translation is an intercultural communication, which requires the translator/interpreter to possess both English cultural knowledge and language competence. The interpreter gave the impression that he thought the elderly lady would collapse any minute

if she doesn't rest immediately. However, in the West, there is a value placed in being young that many people consciously, or subconsciously, are not willing to accept that they are growing old. In addition, the western way of showing concern is generally different from the Chinese way. The former is mainly displayed with question while the latter is usually expressed by statement. For these reasons the foreign lady felt offended. Of course, age is a state of mind, especially with the baby boomers who don't accept society's expectations of how old people should think and behave.

Case 2 First Offer

A Canadian colleague and I traveled to Guilin with our admirable guide Heping Liu in very hot weather. Sightseeing is a thirsty business. We did not trust the water, and enjoyed excellent beer. We politely offered some to Heping but he refused. We said nothing and drank our beer, while poor Heping watched. On another day, Heping quickly accepted our offer of beer. Only when I saw that Heping in fact liked beer, did it occur to me to ask him whether maybe in Chinese culture it was not polite to accept on the first offer. Indeed, it is not. Chinese customs show that Heping was being modest, polite and well-behaved and had every intention of accepting the beer at the second or third offer, impressing his charges with his modesty. But Heping did not understand North American rules, which firmly say that you do not push alcoholic beverages on anyone. A person may not drink for religious reasons; he may be a reformed **alcoholic**¹, or he may be **allergic**². Whatever the reason behind the rule, you do not insist on offering alcohol. And while I certainly did not figure Heping for a **Mormon**³, a **Muslim**⁴ or a reformed alcoholic, so unconscious and so strong are our communicative competence

¹ **alcoholic** someone who regularly drinks too much alcohol and has difficulty stopping

² **allergic** 患过敏症的

³ **Mormon** 摩门教教徒 (1830年由Joseph Smith在美国创设的基督教新教的一派)

⁴ **Muslim** 穆斯林, 伊斯兰教信徒

rules that we equally politely never made a second offer of beer to Heping, who probably thought North Americans are most **uncouth**⁵. (Christina B. Paulston, 1988)

Questions for discussion

In your daily life, do you often accept first offer? If yes, in what situation?

Case 3 Same Language, Different Behavior

(An American traveled to England and was staying with a friend. During his stay, the American decided to talk to the Englishman about some things that were bothering him.)

American: I feel uncomfortable with many of the people here, but I'm not sure why. I speak the same language, so there shouldn't be any problem. Back home, I usually get along with people. You know that I'm very friendly.

Englishman: Yes, that's true, but you're friendly in the way that Americans are friendly.

American: I'm not sure I understand.

Englishman: Well, for example, at the meeting the other night, you immediately called people by their first names. We do that here, but not when we first meet someone.

American: That's how we make people feel comfortable. People feel friendlier toward each other when they use first names.

Englishman: It's different here. For example, when you met my boss you should have used his last name. Also there's something else that you do that English people don't often do.

American: What's that?

Englishman: You touch people on the shoulder quite a bit, especially when you compliment them.

American: I guess I've never thought about that before. I suppose that is what I do at home.

(Deena R. Levine et al., 1987)

⁵ **uncouth** behaving and speaking in a way that is rude or socially unacceptable

Comment: This is an important lesson for the American that though they speak the same language problems may still exist when communicating with English people. He doesn't stop to think that he may have to do things differently. Luckily, he has someone who can help him understand and quickly learns that in England he needs to be able to do more than just speak English.

Once upon a time a **marmoset**⁶ decided to leave the forest and explore the great, wide world. He traveled to the city and saw many strange and wonderful things but finally he decided to return home. Back in the forest, his friends and relatives crowded round. “Well,” they cried, “what did you see?” “I saw buildings made of concrete and glass. Buildings so high that they touched the sky,” said the marmoset. And all his friends and relatives imagined glass branches scratching the sky.

“The buildings were full of people walking on two legs and carrying briefcases,” said the marmoset. And his friends and relatives could almost see the people running along the branches with their tails wrapping firmly around their briefcases.

From *China: A Handbook in Intercultural Communication*
(Jean Brick, 1991)

Culture

What is Chinese about a Chinese? Or American about an American? Australian about an Australian? German about a German? French about a French?...

In answering such questions, we would usually give a list of traits, certain ideas, certain ways of behaving, or even certain products that would, in general, be associated with the concept of “a Chinese” or “an American” or “an Australian”, etc. We would, in fact, describe a culture. Members of a particular culture have certain things in common, e.g. certain values and beliefs, certain customs, certain gestures and certain foods. They may also share distinctive **artifacts**⁷, distinctive art, distinctive music, literature and folk stories.

The way of regarding culture as an observable pattern of behavior is a useful one but one that has its limitations. One question that tends to remain

⁶**marmoset** a type of small monkey with long hair and large eyes that lives in Central and South America

⁷**artifact/artefact** an object such as a tool, weapon, etc. that was made in the past and is historically important

unanswered is, “What leads members of a particular culture to agree that certain behaviors have certain meanings.” For example, how does an Australian man know that when another man approaches him in a pub, pats him on the back and says “How ya goin’ you ol’bastard”, he is expressing friendship and intimacy.

Members of a culture share patterns of behavior, and they also share models of how the world works and how its **myriads of**⁸ aspects relate to each other. These models are crucial not only in deciding how to interpret what is going on in any given situation, but also in molding actions and responses. In other words, culture can be seen as shared knowledge, what people need to know in order to act appropriately in a given culture.

However, it is also important to remember that culture is not a **static entity**⁹. It is constantly changing and evolving under the impact of and as a result of contact with other cultures. Changes in certain aspects of culture, especially in the area of behavior and customs, can occur rapidly. Changes in the underlying values, e.g. in ways of looking at the world, tend to be much slower.

For example, many overseas Chinese have lived abroad for many years. Most of their customs and behavior have been assimilated into the local cultures with their underlying values and worldviews still Chinese. This is heard in the song—“My Chinese Heart” sung by Zhang Mingmin, a Hong Kong pop singer.

我的中国心

(My Chinese Heart)

流在心的血，澎湃着中华的声音

(The blood in my heart is surging the Chinese sound)

就算身在他乡也改变不了我的中国心

(Although in another country I am, my Chinese heart could not be changed)

河山只在我梦萦，祖国已多年未亲近

(In my dream is my motherland, which I have not returned for ages)

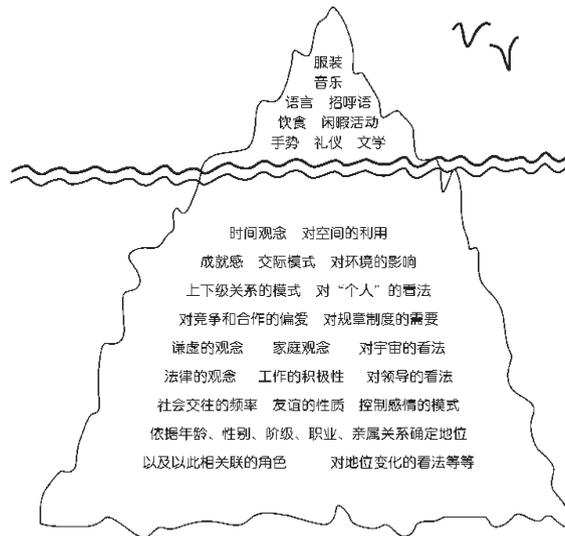
可是不管怎样也改变不了，我的中国心……

(Whatever I have undergone, my Chinese heart will remain the same...)

⁸ **a myriad of/myriads of** (*esp. literary*) a very large number of

⁹ **static entity** not changing/developing unit

What we can see about culture is just the tip of the iceberg; the majority of it is intangible, beyond sight. (See Figure 1.1)



(胡文仲, 1999)

Figure 1.1 An Iceberg of Culture

Communication

Communication is central to our existence. It is through communication that we learn who we are, and what the world around us is like. To a large extent, our identity as both individual and cultural being is shaped through communication. Through this, we explore the world around us, and establish bonds, networks, and relationships with other people. Communication permits us to express our thoughts and feelings to others, and to satisfy our emotional and material needs. As we learn to communicate better, we begin to achieve some measure of control over events that affect us and those around us.

There are three basic aspects to communication: our individual personality, the culture we operate in, and the physical environment that surrounds us.

Each of these aspects has influence on what and how we communicate.

Communication is transactional. Each person encodes and sends messages, and in turn receives and decodes messages. The coding and decoding process is primarily culture-based and involves a diverse set of elements, including words, gestures, symbols, etc.

Whether a communication is successful or not depends greatly on the circumstances. The key is whether the participants have some similar cultural background, knowledge, and experiences. In cross-cultural situations, this shared area may be very small.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication occurs whenever there is communication between people from different cultural backgrounds, for example, what happened on the Silk Road, Marco Polo's stay in China, Monk Jianzhen's mission to Japan, and Zheng He's seven voyages to the Western Seas—they tell us that intercultural communication is as old as history. Nevertheless, as a discipline, its history is short.

Intercultural communication as a field of study first emerged in the U.S. in the 1950s as a result of the four trends that lead to the development of the global village:

(1) Convenient transportation systems:

In the form of transportation and communication systems, new technology has accelerated intercultural contact. Supersonic transports now make it possible for tourists, business executives, or government officials to enjoy breakfast in San Francisco and dinner in Paris.

(2) Innovative communication systems:

Innovative communication systems have also encouraged and facilitated cultural interaction. Communication satellites, sophisticated television transmission equipment, and digital switching networks now allow people throughout the world to share information and ideas

instantaneously.

(3) Economic globalization:

As we enter the 21st century, the United States is no longer the dominant economic force in the world. For example, according to Harris and Moran (Samovar & Porter, 2003), there are now more than 37,000 transnational corporations with 207,000 foreign **affiliates**¹⁰. This expansion in globalization has resulted in multinational corporations participating in joint ventures, licensing agreements and other international business arrangements.

(4) Widespread migrations:

In the United States, people are now redefining and rethinking the meaning of the word “American”. It can no longer be used to describe a somewhat **homogeneous**¹¹ group of people sharing a European heritage. As Ben J. Wattenberg tells us, America has become the first universal nation, a truly multi-cultural society marked by unparalleled diversity. (Samovar & Porter, 2003)

Edward Hall is considered the father of intercultural communication with his publication of *The Silent Language* in 1959 and his many other works. The 1960s was the period of conceptualization of the field by communication scholars. The 1970s showed a rapid development, reflected in the publication of numerous studies. During the 1980s the field moved toward integration and a clearer identity. The 1990s stressed diversification of methods, displayed increased concern with domestic co-cultures, and also witnessed efforts to redress historical and colonial imbalances. By the end of the 20th century, there was as many as nineteen specific intercultural communication theories put forward. (Gudykunst, 2003)

What is intercultural communication? Generally speaking, intercultural communication refers to communication between people whose cultural

¹⁰ **affiliate** a small company, organization, etc. that is connected with or controlled by a larger one

¹¹ **homogeneous** consisting of people or things that are all of the same kind

backgrounds are distinct enough to alter their communication. Cultural influence on individuals and the problems inherent in the production and interpretation of messages in intercultural communications are illustrated in Figure 1.2 by Samovar & Porter.

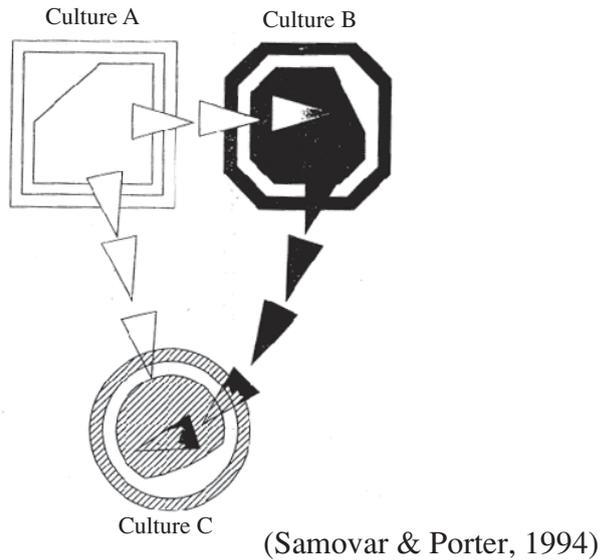


Figure 1.2 Model of Intercultural Communication

Here, three cultures are represented by three distinct geometric shapes. Cultures A and B are similar to one another and are purposely represented by a square and an irregular **octagon**¹² that resembles a square. Culture C is intended to be quite different from Cultures A and B and is differentiated both by its circular shape and its physical distance from Cultures A and B. Within each represented culture is another form similar to the shape of the influencing parent culture. This form represents a person who has been molded by his or her culture. The shape representing the person, however, is somewhat

¹²**octagon** a flat shape with eight sides and eight angles

different from that of the parent culture due to various individualistic factors such as gender, age, class, status, etc.

The amount of influence a culture has in intercultural communication varies depending on its similarity with another culture, which is marked by both shape and distance in Figure 1.2. The more similarities two cultures share, the less influence culture will have on communication. Therefore, the less messages will be changed during communication; the less the cultures are alike, the greater the influence of culture on communication will be, and the more likely the messages will be changed. Misunderstanding in intercultural communication often arises here. In Figure 1.2, the variation in shape and distance indicates that Culture A is more similar to Culture B than it is to Culture C. If we take Chinese culture as Culture A and Japanese culture as Culture B, we can suppose Culture C to be American culture. If people from Chinese culture go to Japan, due to the similarities between Chinese and Japanese cultures, they can communicate with Japanese people without causing much misunderstanding. Or, people of the Japanese culture could understand most of what they say without their messages being altered too much. However, when Chinese people communicate with American people, problems often occur because Chinese culture and American culture differ from each other greatly.

Since the popularity of the Internet, instantaneous communication is commonplace. Wherever you are, as long as you are online, you can, within seconds, reach your friends in any corner of the world. Psychologically, are we ready to be global villagers? At the innermost depth of our heart, are we flexible and broadminded enough to accommodate multiculturalism instead of **ethnocentrism**¹³? The 21st century calls for people with intercultural personalities.

¹³ **ethnocentrism** 民族中心主义

Exercises

A. Comprehension Check

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

- _____ 1. As a phenomenon, intercultural communication has existed for thousands of years. However, as a discipline, its history is only about fifty years.
- _____ 2. Intercultural Communication as a discipline first started in Europe.
- _____ 3. Culture is a static entity while communication is a dynamic process.
- _____ 4. Culture can be seen as shared knowledge, what people need to know in order to act appropriately in a given culture.
- _____ 5. Although cultural stereotype has its limitations (over-generalization), it still contributes to a person's cultural cognition.
- _____ 6. In intercultural communication, we should separate one's individual character from cultural generalization.
- _____ 7. Cultural mistakes are more serious than linguistic mistakes. The linguistic mistake means that someone is not fully expressing his or her idea while cultural mistakes can lead to serious misunderstanding and even ill-feeling between individuals.
- _____ 8. All people of the same nationality will have the same culture.
- _____ 9. Although two cultures may share the same ideas, their meaning and significance may not be the same.
- _____ 10. One's actions are totally independent of his or her culture.

B. Questions for Discussion

1. What are the contributions of Edward Hall to the study of intercultural communication?

2. Discuss the four trends that make our world more interdependent.
3. Discuss the relationship between the technological development and the intercultural communication.

C. Euphemism Understanding

Give the Chinese equivalents of the following euphemisms.

1. landscape engineer
2. tonsorial artist
3. sanitation engineer
4. shoe rebuilder

D. Classroom Activities

1. Please Discuss what you think of the word “culture”.
2. Please Name as many cultural groups as you can.
3. Please Work together to develop a list of characteristics that make each of the cultural groups different from the others.

e.g.

language	religion	music	ethnicities	history
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E. Cultural Puzzles

Read the following situations and choose the appropriate answer(s). There may be more than one possible answer for each cultural puzzle.

1.
What would you do if someone told you to use his or her first name, but you felt uncomfortable doing this?

- a) You could continue to use the person's last name without explaining why.
- b) You could try to use the person's first name even though you feel uncomfortable doing this.
- c) You could ask the person, "Is it OK if I use your last name?"

2.

Situation: An American woman received a letter from a recently married Japanese friend. The Japanese woman wrote in her letter, "My husband is not very handsome. Your husband is much more handsome than mine." The American woman was very surprised at what her friend wrote.

- 1) Why do you think the American was surprised?
 - a) The American woman saw a picture of her friend's husband and thought that he was very handsome.
 - b) The American woman didn't think her own husband was handsome.
 - c) In the U.S., it is disrespectful to say that one's husband is not handsome.

- 2) Why do you think the Japanese woman wrote, "My husband is not very handsome"?
 - a) The Japanese woman was trying to tell her American friend that she did not like her husband very much.
 - b) It is uncommon in Japan to compliment one's husband.
 - c) The Japanese woman didn't think her husband was handsome, but she liked his personality.

F. Log Writing

Log is a kind of short, informal record on readings, lectures, intercultural contacts, etc. Try to use log to develop ideas and questions, to reflect on in-class and out-of-class discussion, and to plan for the final paper. Remember that log writing is a free exercise. Don't revise it or agonize over correctness. Consider it a form of conversation on paper in which the dialog, not the form,

is what matters.

Suggested topic: My First Intercultural Communication Experience

G. Video Watching

Gua Sha 《刮痧》

H. Suggestions for Further Reading

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