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How to make sense of intercultural communications and cross-cultural communications: An introduction for media and communication students.

Introduction

Language studies, media and communication studies are often thought of as separate entities. This paper, however, begins with the premise that they are not. 'To communicate' is the generic act, one that is essential to human survival particularly when living in society and language is arguably the quintessential media and tool. However, placing language as a subcategory under communication is arguable because we use language to communicate. At the same time, it is questionable that we can communicate without language while we can use language without any intent to communicate, theoretically: one can use language, hypothetically, without a manifest desire nor purpose of trying to communicate a message or meaning to another, be it an actual external 'other' or the 'other' within (for elaboration on the concept of the 'other' see below). What is inescapable is the concept of culture, the second premise of this paper is that culture permeates every and all aspects of human existence: to be culturally neutral in the field of human contact and communication is impossible.

The objective of this paper is to show that ideas, basic or otherwise, in cross-cultural and intercultural studies, specifically the language based branches, apply equally to

communication and media studies. Moreover, this paper aims to enable communications students to benefit from findings and thinking in the said area. For the purpose of this paper, we are adopting the following definition of cross-cultural (henceforth CCC) and intercultural communications (henceforth ICC). 'Cross-cultural' refers to an area of study that seeks similarities and differences between cultures. This pursuit regards cultural in the 'macro' perspective that views cultures as entities that exist relatively independent of each other. Alternatively intercultural takes the 'micro' level perspective that seeks to study the experience of interaction between persons from one culture with another culture; the host culture, in cases where it involves movement of the person away from his home culture into another (see below). The difference between cross-cultural and intercultural in this perspective lies in the perspective adopted in regarding the culture and the 'other'. In cross-cultural, the 'other' is mainly related to in the abstract and generalized sense, as embodiments of the culture that is the primary concern of the term and perspective. Alternatively in intercultural, the perspective adopted relegates the culture as abstract and hold the 'other' as present and tangible, thereby holding the immediate experience on contact as the primary concern and not the general differences and similarities between the conceptual culture.

It is important therefore to be reminded of the levels of abstraction involved, and the inherent connected but separateness of the concepts involved. To communicate we use language, therefore language is not the communication itself but the tool with which we commit the act. We use language to relay meaning between ourselves and others, hence language is the vessel or media and not the content: the content being the meaning being transferred. This however is not a clear-cut separation because of McLuhan's argument that the media is the message. The perspective adopted here differs from MacLuhan's tenet in that while the media (language) is a tool it is not without meaning.

In general works in intercultural and cross-cultural studies are trying to find the commonalities that tie together all experiences in the respective fields: the cross-cultural studies seek the singularity that explains the differences and similarities between cultures while the intercultural studies

seek the commonalities of contacts between individuals and groups from one culture interacting with a host culture. They generally try to categorize these experiences: placing them into neat boxes that explains experiences. The problem however is that intercultural and cross-cultural experiences do not come in neat packages, rather they bear the result of interaction between the complexities of one culture in contact with another equally complex culture, and in intercultural studies the problem is further compounded by elements of idiosyncrasies of each contact and perhaps each individual and context. None of these elements fit easily into the categories devised to contain them.

What is clear is that both these areas are loaded with great complexities and contact between cultures compounds the complexity. Thus, we suggest is that instead of trying to begin by deciphering the complexities of each contact and extracting from them theories that are then be used to project an understanding on the nature of such contacts, we suggest that the projected explanation will probably involve compounding the complexity of the theories with each contact because the idiosyncrasies of each new contact will then have to be taken into account in developing a better understanding. This however violates the first rule of research, Ockham's razor that says the simplest answers are always the best. We therefore propose to begin work from a platform that can be used to explain how the complexities come about rather than trying to understand each complex experience as it comes. In this way, the student will be able to see how things become complicated before and as they occur rather than having to wait for the complexities to pile before trying to decipher the mass of date to seek the strands of similarity. This is not however to say that we should ignore the unique complexities of each interaction, rather the opposite, we propose a way of anticipating what complexities will occur. To achieve this we propose the metacultural model below. This framework is based on the development of the Dialogic Principle taking the strand from Buber to D'Cruz and Steele (2000).

Framework and terminology.

At the heart of ICC and CCC is the attempt at understanding people; the differences between cultures, living in and the

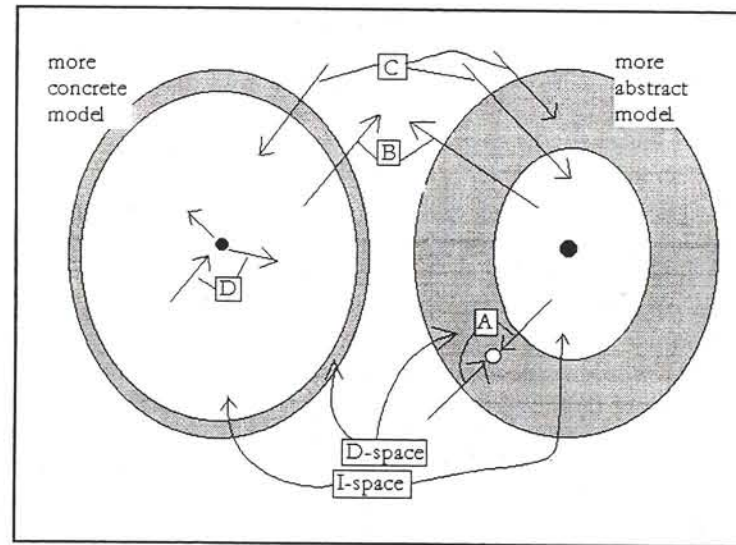
interaction between them. This is, coupled with the universalizing project: they seek theories to explain the ICC experience and CCC trends, then try to project the theories from the particular to the general, hoping that they will be applicable to all similar contexts and experiences. Taking that idea one step further we find that at the heart of the matter is how people relate to each other, other people et cetera.

Skipping ahead over a long tradition, and jumping in on the end, we begin with D'Cruz & Steele's (D'Cruz & Steele 2000, D'Cruz 1979; Coyle 1988; Hazidi 1988) proposal that 'cultures can be usefully related to and described by means of locating them on a continuum of which the twin poles are the metaphors "concreteness" and "abstraction"'. Concreteness is characterized by relating to the 'other' as present and tangible while the abstract is characterized by relating to the 'other' as generalized, and more importantly at both ends there is prioritization of co-occurring sets of values: this we find that the more-concrete poles prioritizes the group over individuals: consensual hierarchical social forms and ethics over egalitarian social forms and ethics: kinship claims and blood loyalties and relationships over all-encompassing but attenuated love. The continuum proposed by D'Cruz and Steele makes it different from 'other' versions of the dialogic principle, for example Gallois et al (1988) who suggests that, 'no modern cultures or discourse system is purely organized as *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft*.' While making the categories not mutually exclusive is useful, they do not make explicit the nature of connectedness between the poles / categories.

To help illustrate the idea, we propose that the relationship between the self and the 'other'; the concrete and the abstract, be visualized as different organization of space around the self. This model organizes the space in which the self and the 'other' interact into three types: intimate space (henceforth I-space), egalitarian space (henceforth D-space) and beyond.

D-space: in Democratic-space, the self relates to the 'other' as generalized, making everyone, including the self, when the idea is further extended, less important than the general principles that govern over all.

I-Space: the Intimate space (I-space) is where the self relates to the 'other' as present and tangible. This means that the person engages the 'other' as whole being, real beings and



The model
The Concrete
model (Left)
and the
Abstract
model (right)

not just ideas or vague notions of another person (or anything else), even when the 'other' is not physically present. The I-space prioritizes direct co-dependent relations, here the 'other' becomes reference points for the person's identity. One simple example is in the difference between Malay and English first person pronouns. In the more-concrete Malay culture the distance between the self and the people around him is important, consequently the language contains first person pronouns that defines social distance much more finely; aku, saya, patik, beta and hamba (ambo), as compared to the generally more-abstract English which used one pronouns; I, for a much wider spectrum of relationships.

The more-concrete culture leaves more I-space around the self than the D-space because one needs more space in which to accommodate the hierarchy of relationships, all of which play a major role in shaping the identity of the person. Alternatively, the more-abstract culture limits the I-space but allows much larger D-space because the person is conditioned to prefer to deal with most people, with the exception of those very close, on egalitarian terms where every 'other' is related to on equal but generalized terms. Consequently, a more-concrete person is more inclined to dependent on 'other's: the 'other' form a basis for their very identity. Moreover, because she is used to having more of these 'points of references' in her

I-space, she seeks to bring more people into the I-space. Even to the point of making it stifling for herself: the more-concrete relationship model is potentially stifling because there is simply more people in the person's I-space.

However her cultural tendency leaves her with several benefits, among them, her experiences are more meaningful because she engages them and the 'other' involved as whole. Secondly, being always in relation with another, she is not always solely responsible for her being, this relieves much of her responsibility, but it also means that she sometimes finds it harder to have agency amidst set rituals that are meant to maintain the hierarchical structure.

Alternatively, the more-abstract person has less I-space, because the more space is devoted to the D-space, this coupled with prioritizing individualism makes her more keen on appropriating all relationships into the D-space where the 'other' becomes generalized, to be regarded as 'things' subjected to the overarching rules and principles and the sovereign self. This allows the self / person more access to agency but also commodifies her by making her also answerable to the parameters of the same principles. The more-abstract relationship allows the person several benefits, among them; greater access to agency but only so long as she has the resources to exact it. She also has the ability to plan more efficiently because to her it will be like manipulating objects rather than having to coax each individual. However, she is more prone to loneliness because her I-space is sparsely populated; she is under greater stress because she is burdened by being wholly responsible for her actions and decisions.

A consequence of the priorities of each relationship model there are several relationship tendencies that predominate in the respective societies.

The more-abstract person seeks to maintain space in the I-space so that she can maintain a more independent identity and thus seek to engage the 'other' predominantly in the D-space, unlike a person in the more-concrete model who seeks the 'other' to enrich her I-space (see D in chart). Her, the more-abstract person, entire communicative array is designed to appropriate relationships into the D-space (see A in chart). Rejection of the 'other' is somewhat harder in the more-abstract model because there is ample space for the 'other' to seek rights under the guiding principles of the D-space but as

the chart shows (B) there is less D-space for the rejected relationship to go before it is sent beyond the relational parameters. Relationships however develop easier in the more-concrete model unlike the more-abstract model where there are two possible relationships trying to develop simultaneously, one that operates in the I-space and another that is exclusively appropriated in the D-space . :

Using the framework

Case study one: state of the world

One way students can use this framework is to form an understanding of what is happening in the world at large, for example the phenomenon of globalization: what exactly is globalization and what is its impact on culture. Explaining Fukuyama's view on the developments Krzysztofek (2002:abstract) argues that the '...Central culture – peripheral culture relationships have been replaced by global culture – local culture relationships, with local cultures here standing for any identity – based culture (national, regional, etc)'. In essence this means that where there were several cultures co-existing although with different degrees of dominance, there is now one cultural model that is imposing itself as the global culture enveloping the whole world while 'other' cultural models have been relegated to even lesser roles; from the dominant local culture to the exotic while its place as the normal in its own land is being replaced by the global culture. He then explains Fukuyama's 'end of history as,

'the end of history, however, must not be understood as the "halt of the history clock" and cease of the course of events, but as a resultant direction dominating over contradictory particularizing vectors – a tendency leading to a globalized world.' (Krzysztofek 2002:abstract).

Adding Huntington's perspective, Krzysztofek further adds that now, "a world would need polycentrism rather than universalism". The resulting situation bears a strong tendency of moving towards the more-abstract, with the Western culture as the dominant. While the West, particularly America is trying to impose its cultural values on the rest of the world, it too is being increasingly infiltrated by non-Western cultures.

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This form of domination however is not the same as it was in the age of the empire because it leaves the subject to its own devices but remain shackled to the dictates of the global paradigm. The situation is the solution to a problem, one of global governance,

'what kind of order is needed to extend development and security to the whole planet, to ensure "global governance", that is maintenance of social order world-wide, in which there is no world government and responsibility rests on no actor alone?' (Simai, 1994 Cf. (Krzysztofek 2002)).

The solution is to impose dominion from within but without direct physical domination as it was in the imperial or colonial times: to rule the principles that serve as guide for one's behavior rather than via physical bondage and enslavement: it is done by imposing Western cultural ideals onto 'other's and 'other' forms of culture.

To illustrate how this manner of dominion is enacted Krzysztofek chose two regimes on which the framework of the new world order is being built. The first is human rights,

The Decalogue of human rights is grounded in the canon established in the West, from an American perspective, at any rate: the individual is autonomous, universal human rights are the basis of social organization, violations of these are a threat to peace, and their implementation on a global scale is the obligation of the international community which is legitimated to exact compliance. (Krzysztofek 2002)

The device for enacting this dominance is the United Nations which proposes to unite the world but has become effectively uniting the world under Western hegemony, ideologically under the human right regime and perhaps more overtly under the trade regime,

The second regime is the trade regime presided over the World Trade Organization. Its basic principles are: non-discrimination, reciprocity or privileges, open markets, privatization, and liberalization – the Western liberal trade model. (Krzysztofek 2002)

A student using the framework, should, with practice, readily recognize that the values prioritized here are the values co-located in the more-abstract paradigm; centered the self as sovereign and relating to the "other" as generalized, in the world of things to be manipulated, when the will and power to do so exist, but more importantly to be governed by principles that transcend direct concrete relationships and impose on all with egalitarian equality.

The result then is an attempt at dominating the world by a cultural paradigm, which becomes manifest, in these illustrations, in two forms, the human rights regime and the trade regime. With these impositions intact physical colonialism is not possible (because it would violate the human rights) but it is also unnecessary because the world, should they all fall under the regimes, would willingly accept the will of the West.

In the resulting climate, culture itself becomes a commodity, as does all things should the model be taken to more extreme reaches, it is no longer a way of life. Culture can now be packages and sold for consumption by all who have the universal carrot; money. Or on a more macro scale,

A cultural regime could be said to exist only if there were a considered strategy for its implementation. But for the moment it is ... subsumed into the trade regime since culture is simply a business and the desired ideological effects are achieved as it were incidentally.
(Krzysztofek 2002)

Culture which formerly exist mainly in the concrete / I-space is then pushed into to the D-space where it becomes a thing, removed from direct concrete relationship with its subject to become centered on things; artifacts that are encased in glass and left on display protected by impersonal alarm devices from human hands that seek to remove it from this impersonal pedestal. However in its embellishment, culture, particularly its artifacts, becomes divorced from the daily lives of its people and its land. The *congkak* board now becomes a museum piece to be proudly displayed with a small card that says it is a popular traditional Malay game while the Malay children now turn their attention to locally, Japanese or Taiwanese made computer games running American designed

games. The *Lesung* now becomes an ornamental serving bowl in hotels while the Malay housewife makes her *sambal belacan* in electrical food-blenders.

What impact does this have on culture itself.

...what we are looking at here is not only the *economization of culture* (its subordination to the marketplace), ... but also a substantial element of *reculturization of economics*: there is simply, a lot of money to be made from consumer culture... Hundreds of thousands of ethnic cuisine restaurants make their money not only from processing culinary matter but also from selling a more or less authentic multiculturalism. Yet multiculturalism is surely more than a cuisine: it comprises the flavours, sounds, and smells of cultures exploited by the tourist industry, the most commercialized nomadism in world history. (Krzysztofek 2002).

If this is the state and the fate the world, how then would people react? A student would now need to explain the impact of these changes on its people, for him to be able to form a fuller understanding of current and further developments. Krzysztofek argues that there are five basic reactions to this development. Firstly, the people could accept the global completely; they simply adapt to it. Thought it seems the easiest path, this path is fraught with much peril. By unquestioningly adapting to the global culture, the people would be opening their own cultures to erosion and total takeover by the global culture. This would then mean that the people will find themselves surrounded by things, rituals, ideas and 'other' aspects of culture alien to their own. This could lead to a serious identity crisis because they are losing the ability to identify with their own uniqueness and to be enriched by it. Instead, if their native culture is more-concrete they will now suddenly be bombarded with all the perils of living as the autonomous self.

Secondly, the people could choose to reject the global culture in total, they would not adapt to it and they would view the global culture as an invading threat. This approach could lead to their objectification of the global culture and

conceptualizing it as something totally alien, identifying as anything that they are not. However based on the understanding that no cultures are mutually exclusive this would mean that their total rejection could mean denying that there are elements of the global culture that are in synch with elements of their own, as in denying that their culture too would have an D-space . This could then lead to embellishing their culture to the point of idealizing it thereby separating their concept of their own culture from the living culture which would have similar elements as the global culture.

Thirdly, they could practice selective adaptation, partial adaptation and partial rejection of the global culture. Krzysztofek (2002) argues that, 'this is characteristic of the majority of changes which do not grow out of the soil of indigenous culture but rather are an effect of cultural diffusion'. Here the other is occasionally engaged, even then the contact is purposeful and agenda driven.

The fourth form of adaptation is hybridization, or co-adaptation of culture. Here the people would try to reach a compromise between the local and 'the universal amalgams' and the compromise could also be seen as a form of bastardization of both the local and the global cultures. The fifth, form of relationship, one which Krzysztofek sees as the ideal is to allow the existence of cultural dualism or pluralization: they would allow both culture to exist simultaneously and interact with each 'other' in their lives concurrently. The choice of which strategy to adopt is not an easy one because whichever relationship the people choose, it would effect not only the penetration of their lives by global culture but also the alteration of their relationship with their own cultures. What makes it more perilous is that by choosing a wrong strategy they could lose their own cultures in the process, even when they try too hard to hold on to it. What is inevitable in this age of ubiquitous communication is that contact with the global culture is unavoidable thus placing their culture under threat if not from the global culture then from negative results of the people's selected strategy of handling the global and the local cultures.

Case study two: on reading ICC / CCC.

To read ICC and CCC, the student would first need to know what exactly is the difference between the two. Landis & Wasilewski (1999:536) explain that, 'Cross-cultural research deals primarily with the similarities and differences between cultures... Intercultural research tends to focus on the penetration by a member of one culture into another culture'. However reading researches, especially those from the West means to encounter their perspective in looking at ICC and CCC, particularly works using the positivistic philosophy of science which says that a field advances when three conditions exist; '(1) the observer is removed from the situation; (2) manipulation of the environment produces predictable and reproducible results; and (3) when there is a language which can accurately describe the processes which have guided any one set of operations.' (Landis & Wasilewski, 1999:537). All these conditions however come from the assumption that the individual must be an independent observer enacting his or her agency in forming theories pertaining to the phenomenon they observe: the individual is the center of the study and the developed knowledge is the product of this individual's interaction with the culture being studied. This basic assumption comes from a more-abstract cultural model which places priority on individualism; it is, again, the Western cultural ideal.

The problem however is that, 'a fundamental tenet of subjective theory...is that social behavior is learned from the patterns of reinforcement by significant 'other's on the basis of societal norms (Landis & Wasilewski, 1999:540). Thus the researcher's findings are the product of a more limited contact with the culture: it is like observing the culture in a box, the parameters of which are the constraints of the research: this ranges from contact time to economic constraints. In 'other' words, the findings will always be suspect because the researcher still carries with her own cultural baggage which would differ from the cultural baggage carried by the members of the culture who have been socialized into the culture all their lives. Consequently a degree of suspicion must always accompany the reading of these researches.

For example, an observer with a more-abstract background would be used to seeing abstract value based conflict like that of the middle east where,

All parties in conflict in the region, Jews, Christian and Moslem are branches of the one monotheist trunk, with a fundamental assumption that they all hold on common, that there is only one truth. This fundamental assumption 'flavors' all the interactions in the area. (Shillony, 1990 Cf. Landis & Wasilewski, 1999:541)

This form of conflict may be the characteristics of most conflict but it is not the only characteristics, looking at conflict elsewhere, particularly in more-concrete we find that, 'living in Japan brings one into a different terrain, one where confrontations are not between believers and infidels, but between feuding interests and morality means re-establishing social harmony rather than establishing truth or enforcing justice' (Shillony, 1990 Cf. Landis & Wasilewski, 1999:541).

Applying the framework to the intercultural experience, we focus on the Kidder study (1977) and an example. This study focuses on the 'development of negative intercultural attitudes among foreigners who spend long periods in 'other' cultures'. They concluded that the birth of this negative attitude has its roots in the high status accorded to the foreigners and the situation where the foreigner is not socialized into the local world but that of the alien: the foreigner thus enjoy a higher social status and remains in a world that relates to the locals not in the I-space but in the D-space . In addition the distance between the local and the alien is exaggerated by contact between them being limited to people of unequal status: the alien remains an outsider.

To negate the emergence of negative intercultural attitude the study suggests that the contact between the local and the alien be expanded to include people of comparable social status; thereby allowing more commonalities to come into play enabling the foreigner and the local to move the contact into the I-space. This effect can also be achieved by enabling the alien to move further into the world of the alien by leaving their isolation and venturing into the local's world where they are no longer isolated by the privileges accorded to them and enhanced by the separation. (Landis & Wasilewski, 1999:543). To further explain this situation we would need to name three forms of post-contact relation between the local and the foreigner. Firstly, the isolation and the maintenance of that separation encourages the process of exclusion where the

foreign, especially but not exclusively, pushes the local, their "other", out of the I-space and into the D-space. Alternatively we have the process of inclusion which is enabled by emergence of commonalities and more intimate contact; thus inducing the process of inclusion where the relationship with the "other" is moved into the D-space and then possibly into the I-space.

Conclusion.

This paper is not an attempt at explaining the totality of ICC and CCC, rather its objective is to provide communication students with the basic analytical framework with which they can now analyze their observations of intercultural and cross-cultural contact. We believe that the understanding provided by application of this framework, students can now build further understanding and plan action to enhance and enrich their intercultural and cross-cultural contact.

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