THE MEANING OF
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Communicating between cultures becomes more and more important in a rapidly shrinking world. Thus intercultural communication as the study of communication and interaction between members from different cultures has developed into a special field of studies. A growing number of publications testifies to this (e.g. Wiseman, Rogers and Steinfatt, Jandt).

Originally special studies on intercultural communication were trigged through the tensions between different cultural minorities in the United States like the Blacks, the Hispanic and the Indians. Added to this were other developments like the intercultural needs and dimensions of communication for development, the broadening of linguistic and anthropological studies into a grater awareness of the contexts in which they operate, the experience of students studying in other cultures and especially the communication needs for cross-cultural business and economy.

Intercultural or Cross-Cultural?

There is a clear distinction between intercultural and cross-cultural communication. No culture can live without communicating. This communication creates culture because it enables people to share insights, feelings, and experiences with each other. Thus communication within cultures can be called intracultural communication which is the communication in a given culture. The filed of "ethnocommunication" as the study of the means, structure, flow and effect of communication in a given cultural group answers to problems in this field. But it has not yet developed as a separate field of studies (Eilers,1993: 136-142).
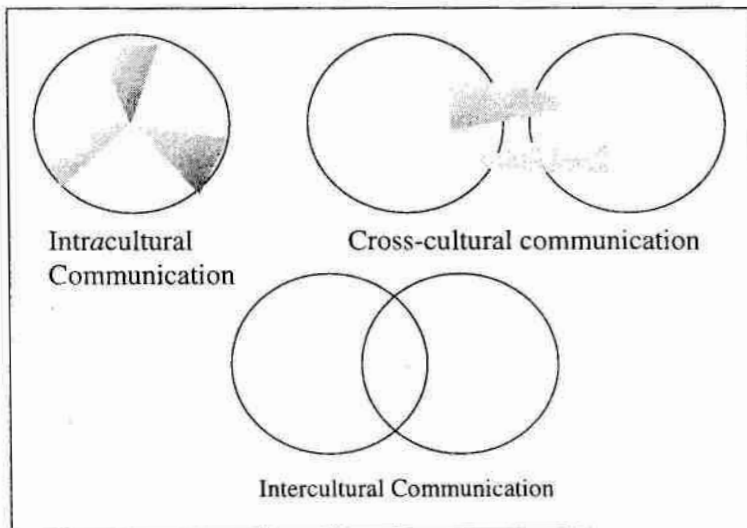
Intercultural communication is the sharing and blending of the intracultural communication of one group or member with another. It is

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a communication between members of different cultures in a converging way. Nobody is 'higher' or 'lower' but both are equal and share on this level.

Cross-cultural communication, however, cuts from one possibly dominating culture into another. It is more coming from the outside to 'cross' a cultural boundary. The attitude of cross-cultural communication would be the attempt to bring a message to the other culture rather than to immerse the existing culture and share experiences. Cross-cultural communication is based on a linear Sender-Receiver model of communication where the communicator is more concerned about how to get his/her message through a learning and listening attempt for mutual understanding. The businessman wants to sell his goods into another culture and is therefore interested to know how to cross into the other culture successfully.
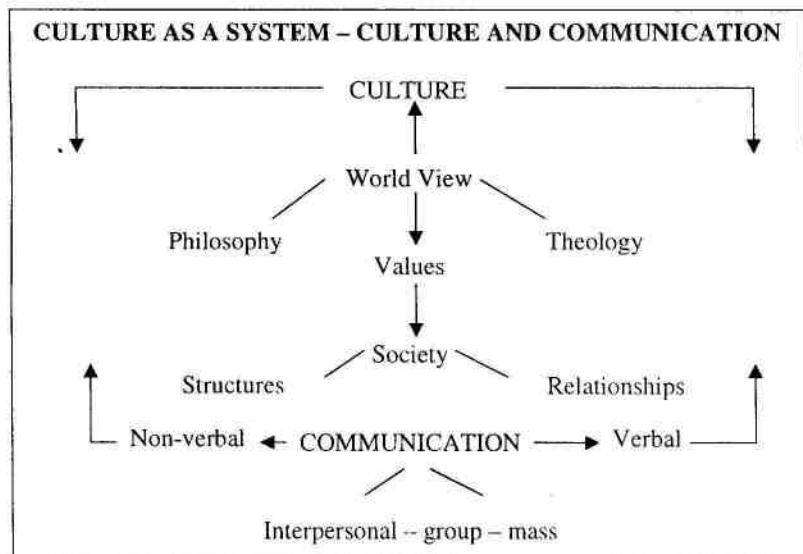
Graphically these approaches can be expressed in the following way:

Intracultural
Communication

Cross-cultural communication

Intercultural Communication

For intercultural communication as a field of study, there are again two approaches. The 'cultural dialogue' school is concerned about the beliefs, values, structures, life and experiences of cultural groups and how to bring them into dialogue. The 'cultural criticism' school is more concerned to discover and possibly remove obstacles and blocks, which hinder intercultural understanding and exchange.

Culture and Communication

Intercultural communication is concerned about cultures and does see them as a process of communication. Cultures are a "plan according to which society adapts itself to its physical, social and ideational environments" (Luzbetak, 1988: 155,157). They are integrated systems and not just "a heap of unrelated elements" which are "composed of functionally organized elements that unite into larger units and finally into a single whole, in facts these units constitute a kind of living organism with a 'soul'" (Luzbetak, 1963: 195). Such a living organism is created but also maintained through ongoing communication between its members and its institutions. Communication is thus all embracing. Basic elements of every culture, like beliefs and values, are maintained, shared and passed on through communication.

CULTURE AS A SYSTEM – CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

CULTURE

World View

Philosophy   Theology

Values

Society

Structures   Relationships

Non-verbal ← COMMUNICATION → Verbal

Interpersonal -- group – mass

In such a perspective communication is seen as a social communication which is the communication of and in human society. It refers to "the communicative relations of the members of a social systems, their means, structures and processes" (Eilers, 1994: 273). Social communication comprises all the means and ways used by humans to share ideas the information with each other. It includes all traditional forms of communication but also the mass media. In fact, intercultural communication is only in a minor way concerned about the mass media. It takes place more on the interpersonal level, and in view of latest technological developments probably more with multimedia, where the computers, internet, e-mail, video, satellites and other means ·become interrelated more for individual use.

Cultures are Dynamic

With all these considerations, one has to also realize that cultures are not just museum pieces and end products. They are dynamic and influence each other. Greek and Roman cultures are "mixed" with Germanic culture in early European history, and so it is happening all over the world. In the given situations today intercultural communication has also to consider the fact that through the sharing of two cultures a third culture might arise which Fred L. Casmir tries to describe as a "Third-Culture Model" of intercultural communication (Casmir, 1999). It must be noted, however, that cultures are not necessarily identical with nations or political units. Thus, there are many cultures in a country like India. And in many other Asian countries including the Philippines, it is similar. Geopolitical divisions are not necessarily cultural divisions! It means that intercultural communication can be as important within a nation as it is between nations as political units.

Non-verbal and Verbal Communication

The study of intercultural communication is concerned about the means used for this communication as well as other social and cultural elements, which influence such a process.

Basic means for any interpersonal, but especially also intercultural communication, is our non-verbal and verbal expressions. Language is

an essential part of any culture and basis for exchange within and beyond a given culture. Ray L. Birdwhistell believes, that "at most only about 30% of what is communicated in a conversation is verbal" (1970, cf. Condon, 1975: 124). A mere overview of the field of non-verbal communication organized according to the senses used shows the range and possibilities for communicating non-verbally.

1. Visual	4. "Language of Things"
1. Kinesics-body language	• Objects
1.1 Whole body	• Artefacts
▪ Appearance	• Color
▪ Posture	**II Audio**
▪ Motion	1.Sound
1.2 Parts of the Body	2.Paralanguage
• Gestures	3.Silence
• Facial expressions	4.Music
• Eyebrows	**III. Audio-visual**
• Smile	1.Action "language"
• Head nods	2.Cultural expressions
• Looking	• Ritual
2. Proxemics	• Dance
•. Nearness	• Theater
• Orientation	**IV. Haptics-Tactile communication**
3. Chronemics	**V. Olfactory communication**
• Time	**VI. Taste communication**
• Space	• Food
	• Drink

Ways of non-verbal communication are in a special way influenced and determined by culture. Bodily behavior, ways of looking, standing, touching, smelling and eating, the use and interpretation of time and space are heavily determined by the dynamics of a culture. Because they are different in different cultures, an extensive study of non-verbal communications is essential for any successful intercultural communication.

Language is part of the identity of a culture. A study of intercultural communication can not do without considering the verbal

ways and means of expressions. Words and languages sets people apart. Languages express and reflect our own view of ourselves, make us part of a social grouping, relate us to friends as well as distinguish us from foreigners. Language further is used for the transfer of cultural goods, ideas, conditions and feelings. Language consists of sounds, shaped into a system. George Gerbner has defined communication as "social interaction through symbols and message systems." Language is such a message system. It encodes a message into such a system, which has to be decoded from the recipient of the other culture in order to be understood. Only the knowledge of such a message system enables persons from different cultures to take part in intercultural communication.

The meaning of a word can have, e.g., three levels: (1) the pictorial meaning, which refers to the outside form and lettering of the word itself; (2) the denotative meaning, which refers to the lexical meaning like the obviously common 'outside' meaning of the word; and (3) the connotative meaning of the word, which refers to the implied or culturally given meaning. This last level has special importance for any communicating between cultures.

Social Structures

Social structures reflecting interrelations and interactions of members of a society are a further important element to be considered in intercultural communication. Though there will be some basic common elements in human societies, like, e.g., the family, the emphasis and priority given to such elements will again differ from culture to culture. Thus, in most Asian cultures bonds of family are very strong and are to quite an extent determining the way of life which is not the case in Western cultures, where individualism is more emphasized. Even within given cultures the bonds of society might differ from class to class and from caste to caste. For intercultural communication the knowledge of the structures and their workings are essential to be able to match and come to successful exchange and mutual understanding. Society allocates roles and indicates relationships, which are to be followed in order to be accepted and to be successful.

Values and Worldviews

As important as the bonds of the society and different social roles people 'play' in social groupings are the values and worldview of a given culture. How do people see the world and how does this shape their values? Worldviews are expressed and exemplified in the philosophical and theological convictions of peoples and their cultures. They in turn influence and determine the values of people, which in turn determine their behavior and their lives. The knowledge and awareness of worldview and values of a given cultural group is essential for mutual understanding and communication. Inter-religious dialogue is to quite an extent concerned about this and can only function with sufficient knowledge of and respect for different values and worldviews.

The Role of Communication

Any culture and society has its own communication networks, which are determined by its own worldviews, values, sociological conditions, technical possibilities and needs. Such networks have, according to Edward T. Hall (1959, 120), three aspects: (1) the overall structure; (2) its components, like switchboards, wires and receivers in a telephone system; and (3) the message itself, which is carried by these networks. The message can be broken down into words, isolating sounds and the pattern applied in using the words, i.e., the codes. Hall believes that "a breakdown of messages into these components... is basic to understanding culture as communication"(1959, 122). For communicating interculturally, it is important to (1) know these elements from both or more cultures, and (2) to see how they can be matched and related in such a way that mutual understanding and interaction take place. The technical means available in such a process can be the same, but the message and the way these means are used are very often determined by cultural conditions and differences, which have to be, bridged by the intercultural communication partners.

Religion

Since religion is basic to any culture as a dimension of the beyond it also has influence on the communication content, presentation and

communication processes within a culture. The religious background might influence or even determine the ways of non-verbally communicating, of selecting words and their presentation; it might have a bearing on who communicates with whom, when and where. Many expressions of art and rituals are communicating religious experiences. Religious convictions are often deeply rooted and determine also the emotions and feeling which people communicate or do not communicate in intercultural communication situations. The initial knowledge and open sharings will help to build bridges for understanding and mutual respect. Basic rules of intercultural communication will help towards a deeper unity.

Handling Intercultural Situations

For handling intercultural situations Sheryl L. Lindsey in a doctoral study has developed (1999) four layers, which are to be considered in any intercultural communication.

The *first* is the "macro-context" which refers to the overall conditions under which communication occurs: what are the overall impressions and possibly prejudices people have from each other? How were the relations between them in the past? What kind of value systems and expectations do they bring into their interaction?

The *second* layer refers to individual language competence. The knowledge of the other's language plays an important role. Bilingual partners are more able to communicate interculturally. This language competence has especially also to consider the connotative meaning of verbal expressions. This "language layer" must also include non-verbal communication competence.

The *third* layer refers to communicative behavior. Such a behavior is strongly influenced by cultural traits like, for example, how people 'confront' each other. In most Asian cultures, unlike in European and American, saving face in public is crucial and direct confrontation is avoided. Respect for the position of a communication partner within his society dictates also the way of communicating. Multiple identities have to be negotiated for intercultural communication to succeed.

The *fourth* dimension in intercultural communication is the individual attribution of meaning, which refers to the decoding process. How is the content and are the expectations expressed by one person interpreted by the other partner from another culture? Very often this communication is selective and follows cultural stereotypes, which have to be overcome to make intercultural communication successful.

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