

BOOK REVIEWS

Theories in Intercultural Communication

Young Yun Kim and William B. Gudykunst, (eds.)

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Clifford Geertz once wrote that the terrain of cultural diversity is "uneven, full of sudden faults and dangerous passages where accidents can and do happen". Crossing this terrain, "or trying to", he notes, "does little or nothing to smooth it out to a level, safe, unbroken plain, but simply makes visible its clefts and contours" (Geertz 1986: 119).

Cultural pluralism has become a predominant phenomenon in late twentieth-century Western society. Ease in transportation, political strife, and economic crisis are among the factors which have precipitated cross-cultural migration. The resulting (ethno)cultural, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity in countries like Canada, the U.S., Great Britain, and Australia, with its ensuing challenges to traditional patterns of interpersonal communications, more than anything, has motivated the evolution of intercultural communications theories and strategies. Still at an immature stage of development as an object of study, new works on intercultural communications theories are a welcome contribution to the field.

Among the recent volumes on cross-cultural communications is an updated version of Volume VII (1983) of the Speech Communication Association series on intercultural communications theory. Additional perspectives, as well as material written outside of the United States (from Britain and Australia), have been incorporated within this second anthology to broaden its scope, although some Canadian case study materials, which could have provided a refreshing lens through which to examine the theoretical terrain, are conspicuously absent. Nonetheless, this volume does represent a significant attempt to consolidate and crystallize the current intellectual core concepts of mainstream intercultural communications theories and to push the field forward toward a more rigorous and coherent state.

The thirteen articles in *Theories in Intercultural Communication* are divided into four sections—Overview, Culture and Meaning, Intercultural Behaviour, and Intercultural Adaptation. Three broad questions, each of which roughly corresponds to the latter divisions, frame the purpose of this book which is to determine how individuals communicate in different cultures; how individuals experience intercultural communication activities; and what the likely consequences of intercultural communication experiences are.

After an initial examination of the overall conceptual domain of intercultural communications, the book elaborates three metatheoretical approaches to the subject which, according to the editors "share a focus on face-to-face communication among members of different cultures and subcultures" (p. 7). These are: the positivist

approach which emphasizes predictability; the humanist approach which emphasizes understanding; and the systems tradition which stresses the goal of both prediction and understanding.

In the first essay, Young Yun Kim provides the reader with an overview of the key concepts and theories to be elaborated in the book. This essay is clearly written and informative to the novice reader. It is followed by a taxonomy of interculturalness by Larry E. Sarbaugh, in which he argues that participants in a communication event can be classified along a continuum of homogeneity/heterogeneity used to establish levels of "interculturalness". One's level of interculturalness, he states, is "dependent on the degree of heterogeneity in the participants' worldview, normative patterns of beliefs and overt behaviors, verbal and nonverbal code system, and perceived relation and intent" (p. 13).

The section on culture and meaning is most interesting. In it, James Applegate and Howard Sypher update their article, "A Constructivist Theory of Communication and Culture", which appeared in the previous volume. Constructivist theory describes the interpretive relationship between an individual's cognitive construction of reality and his/her culture and communication patterns. The essay also elaborates methods of studying the role of culture in cognitive and communication development. The second essay in this section by Vernon Cronen, Victoria Chen, and Barnett Pearce, is on the coordinated management of meaning or CMM. Taking communication to be a primary process, rather than basing critique on individual rights, class relationships, or other sources, CMM is about the interactive process of "coordinating" and "managing" meaning among individuals. The essay is well researched, imaginative, provocative intellectually, and displays a charming sense of wit. As well, it touches on some of the more recent preoccupations of social theorists and cultural studies scholars such as the polyphonic characteristics of culture, the notion that cultures are patterns of coevolving structures and actions, and the recognition that research activity is part of social practice.

Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas write about multiple cultural identities as revealed in discourse. They argue that identity is based on communicative competence of interacting individuals and call for a grounded rules/systems theory as an ideal approach to the study of identity in intercultural communication. Collier and Thomas' piece is interesting and informative.

The third section focuses on different aspects of intercultural behaviour. William Gudykunst opens this part of the book with an essay on psychological uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural encounters, proffering an explanation of intergroup communication that is related to uncertainty reduction theory. This is followed by a chapter called "Communication Accommodation in Intercultural Encounters" (Cynthia Gallois, Arlene Franklyn-Stokes, Howard Giles, and Nikolas Coupland). Communication Accommodation theory conjoins propositions from both speech accommodation theory and ethnolinguistic identity theory and emphasizes discourse, paralanguage and nonvocal behaviour. It "is concerned primarily with the communicative moves

speakers make in interactions relative to the social and psychological contexts that are operating, and relative to each other's communicative characteristics" (p. 158). Joseph Forgas's chapter is called "Episode Representations in Intercultural Communication". A social-cognitive approach to intercultural communication, this essay outlines the role of subjective cognitive representation in interaction situations. The final essay in this section is by Stella Ting-Toomey. "Intercultural Conflict Styles—a Face-Negotiation Theory" explores the relationship between negative and positive, "self"—and "other"—facework maintenance and intercultural conflict styles.

The last section contains four essays on intercultural adaptation. June Ock Yum's "Network Theory in Intercultural Communication", lays out six theorems of intercultural communication in the context of the argument that network theory is "an important alternative to dominant communication theories that focus on the individual and on psychological effects rather than on groups and social effects" (p. 253). Humber Ellingsworth describes a theory of "task-oriented intercultural dyads in which individual adaptation is the central variable in completing tasks and minimizing cultural differences" (p. 259). Lawrence Kincaid focuses on the convergence model of communications and its applicability to intercultural research. In this essay, he specifies the conditions of convergence and divergence in intercultural communications, giving examples from immigrant and host culture research in the United States.

The concluding essay of this anthology (Young Yun Kim and Brent Ruben) addresses the issue of intercultural transformation which results from extensive cross-cultural contact. After reviewing the literature on key approaches to intercultural communications (intercultural communications-as-problem approach, intercultural communications-as-learning/growth approach), the authors argue for the holistic, interactive perspective of General Systems Theory to explain why and how intercultural transformation occurs. The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic is viewed as a central "mover" of individuals toward increasing intercultural attributes. As a collection, these essays cover a lot of the bumpy terrain that constitutes the field of intercultural communications from an interpersonal perspective. Perhaps because of its emphasis on quantitative method, I found it somewhat difficult to read in one sitting. Its tone tends to be somewhat dry and uninspiring, with some exceptions (as noted above). However, I suspect the book, which is indeed a representation of where the field is at, would be very useful in the context of a university course on intercultural communications, a situation in which students could be assigned one essay at a time.

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