The Meaning and Theories of Intercultural Communication

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DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

EXPLAIN THE MEANING AND THEORIES OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND HOW IT PROMOTES PEACE AMONG COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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INTRODUCTION

We believe that intercultural communication can be understood via the same basic variables and processes used to describe other forms of communication. All communication occurs between people who have varying degree of familiarity with each other. According to (Gabrialla 2008). The key concept in understanding intercultural communication is the concept of stranger. Different cultures and subcultures may have different rules and norms in accordance to which I would point out that understanding the other's culture facilitates cross cultural communication.

THE MEANING OF CULTURE

Culture is the way of life of a people. It is social system which comprises the values, norms and ways of behaving in a human society. Wang, Brislin, Wang, Williams and Chao (2000) defined culture as the human part of the environment.' In other words, culture is the non-biological aspects of life (The teaching and learning unit, University of Melbourne 2000). This definition connotes that everything people learn and do that are not related to their biological traits are, aspects of such people's culture. The concepts of culture and communication are strongly related, in the sense that, an individual cannot learn or acquire any aspect of culture without going through the process of communication. Culture is something that is learnt from parents, schools, the media and the broader community. (Melbourne University: 2000). From the above, we can rightly say that, culture is a product of communication. Also, communication being the basic feature of human life plays the most vital role in shaping human culture and the ways of acquiring them.

Singer (1998) defined culture from an angle that portrays the strong bond between culture and communication, when he said: 'a pattern of learned, group related perceptions including both verbal and non-verbal language, attitudes, values, belief systems, disbelief systems and behaviors that is accepted and expected by an identity group.'

THE MEANING OF COMMUNICATION:

The concept of communication has quite so many definitions. From the etymological analysis of the word, communication is derived from the Latin 'communicare' meaning "to share", and from the French "communis" meaning, 'common' (Alcalugo, 2003, in Andrew Asan Ate, National Open University of Nigeria). Thus, communication means, the sharing of meaning. The concept of communication, basically means, a meaning-making exercise. Chappel and Read (1984) defined it as 'any means by which a thought is transferred from one person to another.' Although, this definition focuses more on channels of communication, the meaning of the concept has been highlighted in the key words in the definition. Seema Hassan (2010) describes communication in the following words 'the process of communication includes transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, knowledge, by using symbols, words, pictures, figures, graphs or illustrations.' Seema tried to project the idea of being communication a one-way process. Contrarily, however, many contemporary scholars of communication emphasize the fact that, for communication to be effective it must be a two-way process. Succinctly, therefore, Solomon Anaeto, Olufemi Onabajo and James Osiyesi (2012) posit that: 'communication is an exchange of meaning,' despite the economy of its wordings, the definition has incorporated the most important gist of the concept of communication.' Each participant comes into the communication situation with his or her own experience that he or she hopes to exchange with other participants. This fact has been corroborated by Prof. Umar Pate and Dr. Sharafa Dauda

(2015) when they expressedly said: 'It is a social process that facilitates exchange of ideas and feelings among and between individuals in societies.' They added that: communication takes place at multiple levels and in different forms but all with the goal of transferring meaning from a source to an intended receiver with a hope of a feedback.' This definition of communication is all-encompassing, as it contains all the essentials of communication process. It is more so as, it answers the questions in Lasswell's (1948) analysis of communication process when he said: 'who? Says what? In which channel? To whom? With what effect?' (Anaeto, James of Olufemi, 2012).

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION DEFINED

Basically, intercultural communication means communication across different cultural boundaries. This means that, when two or more people with different cultural backgrounds interact and communicate with each other or one another, intercultural communication is said to have taken place. For example, communication between Fulani and Tiv cultural groups is an intercultural communication, because, it occurs across cultural boundaries. Intercultural communication can thus be defined as 'the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds, where different cultural backgrounds include both national cultural differences and differences which are connected with participation in the different activities that exist within a national unit' (Jens Allwood, 1985). 'Intercultural communication takes place when individuals influenced by different cultural communities negotiate shared meaning in interactions' (Ting-Toomey, S. 1999, in commGAP). What counts as intercultural communication depends, in part, to what one considers a culture. Some authorities like Gudykunst, limit the term intercultural communication to refer only to 'communication among individuals from different nationalities' (Gudykunst,

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W.B; 2003). Other authorities, such as Judith and Nakayama, in contrast, expand the notion of intercultural communication to encompass inter-ethnic, inter-religious and even inter-regional communication, as well as communication among individuals of different sexual orientations. Russell Arent, in his' Bridging the Cross-cultural Gap', expatiate in the following,

'When we talk of other cultures, we mean not only those who speak a language that is different from ours or who live in a different country or region; we also mean those who live in the same city or region but who do not share the same social groups. For example, a 14-year-old teenager does not typically communicate the same way as an 82-year-old senior citizen. Even if they were born and raised in the same neighborhood (in the city or in a rural area), their conservation could be just as "intercultural" as two people who came from opposite corners of the globe because they are from two subcultures," (Arent, R. 2009).

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The chances for contacts with people from other cultures have increased dramatically with changes in the workplace. US business expanding into world markets in a process of globalization, people now connected, via answering machines, faxes, emails, electronic bulletin boards, and the internet to other people whom they have never met face-to-face. The ever-increasing mobility of U.S families and the changing demography within the U.S. and changing immigration patterns as well. It is precisely this increased contact that makes studying intercultural communication so important.

Below is the list of the importance of studying intercultural communication

- Understanding your own identity.
- Enhancing personal and social interactions.

- Solving misunderstandings, miscommunications & mistrust.

- Enhancing and enriching the quality of civilization.

- Becoming effective citizens of our national communities

Understanding your own identity: - The first reason for studying intercultural communication is to develop sensitivity to various cultural heritages and backgrounds to better understand your own identity. In her book "Torn Between Two Cultures", Maryam Qudrat Ased says, "It was through the experience of living and being raised in the U.S that I came to truly appreciate and understand my own religion, heritage, culture & language. Your decisions about the values you want to adopt or continue holding, the lifestyles or orientations you wish to pursue, and even the friends you want to have, not to mention the major occupation or profession you desire, are affected by racial, cultural, gender and social-class factors that affect your personal identity, who you are and who you want to be."

Enhancing personal and social interactions: - The broader you outlook, the more tolerant and accommodating you become. The chances of having close, personal, interactions with those different from you - whether in age, physical ability, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, race, or nationality – are increasing daily. Such relationship help you learn about the world, break stereotypes, and acquire new skills.

Solving misunderstandings, miscommunications and mistrust: - Until recently our nation has not learned, nor has it needed to learn, to be multi-culturally competent. The study of intercultural communication will not just unlock doors closed for generations; it will open those doors and, thus, resolve misunderstandings, miscommunications and mistrust through honest,

open, positive, healthy communication. People not only fear, but they also distrust the unknown. Trust is gained through knowledge and understanding.

Enhancing and enriching the quality of civilization: - Recognizing and respecting ethnic and cultural diversity are important steps on the road to valuing the ways in which diversity enhances & enriches the quality of our civilization. According to Carlos Cortes "many multiculturalists today seem unwilling to deal with growing factor of intermarriage. Too much of multicultural education is frozen into a kind of group purity paradigm, when in fact; intermarriage is one of the enormous changes that are taking place in America. For example, one third of all Latinos born in the U.S., how many know someone who is not Latino. What will these cultural blends be like?" In 2002 there were 1, 674, 000 interracial marriages, close to a 40 percent increase in 22 years when you consider the potential for the new perspectives, cultural insights, and unique wisdom that intermarriages can produce, there is no doubt about the corresponding increase in the quality of our civilization.

Becoming effective citizens of our National communities; - National communities are co-cultural groupings within the country. National communities were established from the beginning as "Our forefathers acquired the lands of Native Americans, 34 percent of the territory of Mexico in 1848, and the island of Puerto Rico in 1898" prior to the 1960s, most of the immigrants to the U.S. came from Europe, but of the million or so immigrants who now enter the U.S. every year, 90 percent are from Latin America and Asia. A study by the population Reference Bureau suggests that by 2050 the U.S will be a global society in which nearly half of all citizens will be from today's racial and ethnic minorities.

BARRIERS TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

A lot of factors hamper effective intercultural communication. The following is the list of those factors.

- Ethnocentrism

- Stereotyping

- Prejudice

- Discrimination

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THEORIES OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

WHAT IS A THEORY?

A theory is a set of ideas drawn from systematic study in order to explain a phenomenon. Severin and Tankard (1982) in Anaeto et al (2012) defined a theory as 'a set of ideas of systematic generalizations based on scientific observation (and) leading to further empirical observation.'

Baran Stanley and Davis Dennis (2012) quoted John Bowers and John Courtright (1984) saying; 'Theories are sets of statements asserting relationships among classes of variables.' Charles Berger believes that 'a theory consists of a set of interrelated propositions that shipmates relationships among theoretical constructs and an account of the mechanism or mechanisms that explain the relationships stipulated in the propositions.'

Also Emory Griffin (1994) in Baran and Danis (2012) takes a broader view, writing that a theory is an idea 'that explains an event or behavior. It brings clarity to an otherwise jumbled situation; it draws order out of chaos…..(it) synthesizes the data, focuses our attention on what's crucial, and helps us ignore that which makes little difference.' Theory has numerous other definitions. The questions they (theories) produce are testable to varying degree; they are situationally based and they are sometimes contradictory and chaotic.' (Baran and Danis, 2012:14)

Many of the definitions of theory stated above are presuming that it is possible to make predictions when discussing communication phenomena. Deducing from Severin and Tankard's definitions of theory, Anaeto et al (2012) maintained that: 'This means that we can make prediction about the outcome of certain events.' However, it is strongly argued that predictions in social scenes are not possible, because one is dealing with human begins in this field and the behavior of humans is highly dynamic.

From the foregoing, therefore, theories of intercultural communication are sets of ideas, concepts, explanations and principles which seek to explain intercultural communication. The theories of intercultural communication are not exclusively developed. This is partly because the field is a relatively new field of study and, thus, literature in the area is somewhat scanty, or partly because intercultural communications proliferated from the broad field of mass communications which is a sub-field of the social sciences and therefore can use theories developed in other social science fields, such as sociology or psychology to explain its phenomena.

Theories of intercultural communication are classified in the way they are because, 'they vary in their assumptions about human behavior, their research goals, their conceptualization of culture and communication, and their preferred methodologies' (Judith and Nakayama, 2007:49).

There are basically three approaches under which theories of intercultural communication proliferated. These approaches are:

1. THE SOCIAL SCIENCE (FUNCTIONALIST) APPROACH
2. THE INTERPRETIVE APPROACH
3. THE CRITICAL APPROACH

THE SOCIAL SCIENCE APPROACH

The social science approach (also called the functionalist approach became popular in the 1980s and, is based on research in psychology and sociology. This approach assumes:

a) There is a describable external reality.
b) Human behavior is predictable and the researcher's goal is to describe and predict behavior.
c) Culture is a variable that can be measured.

The goal of theories under social science approach is to predict, specifically, how culture influences communication. Researchers who take this approach often use quantitative methods; gathering data by administering questionnaires or observing subjects firsthand (Judith and Nakayama, 2007).

Theories which fall under social science approach include but not limited to the following:

i. FACE NEGOTIATION THEORY

ii. THE CONVERSATIONAL CONSTRAINTS THEORY

iii. THE COMMUNICATION ACCOMODATION THEORY

iv. THE ANXIETY UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT THEORY (AUM)

i. THE FACE NEGOTIATION THEORY:

This theory was championed by Ting-Toomey. To her, face is the sense of favorable self-worth, and in all cultures people are concerned about serving face. Ting-Toomey suggests that conflict is a face negotiation process, in which people often have their faces threatened or questioned. She and her colleagues have conducted a number of studies in which they try to identify how cultures differ in conflict style and face concerns. For example, they found that members of individualistic societies like the United States are concerned with saving their own faces in conflict situations and so use more dominating conflict resolution styles. In contrast, members of collectivistic cultures, like china, South Korea and Taiwan, who are more concerned with saving the other persons face in conflict situations and use more avoiding, obliging or integrating conflict resolution style (Ting-Toomey et al, 1991. In Nakayama and Judith, 2012:53).

ii. THE CONVERSATIONAL CONSTRAINT THEORY:

The conversational constraint theory was developed by Min-sun Kim. The theory attempts to explain to explain how and why people make particular conversational choices. It identifies fine universal conversational constraints; which are:

a. Clarity

b. Minimizing imposition

c. Consideration for other's feelings

d. Risking negative evaluation by the hearer; and

e. Effectiveness.

The concern listed above, were given unequal importance by people from individualistic or collectivistic culture. Members of individualistic cultures, tend to place importance on clarity while the collectivistic are more concerned about hurting other's feelings and minimizing importations. Effectiveness and avoidance, receive from these cultural groups, proportionately equal important concerns.

iii. THE COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY:

This theory resulted from a study which tried to identify how and when individuals accommodate their speech and non verbal behavior to others during an interaction. The basic assumption of this theory is that, we accommodate when we feel positive to the other person. Individuals, it is revealed, may change their ways of communication to accommodate others especially, when no significant differences manifested between them and the others.

Simply put, the theory highlights that, 'individuals adjust their verbal communication to facilitate understanding' (Nakayama and Judith, Opp. cit).

iv. ANXIETY UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT (AUM) THEORY:

The theory assumes that the reduction of anxiety and uncertainty plays an important role in successful intercultural communication. It tried to find out whether individuals vary in their strategies for reducing uncertainty on first encounter.

The theorist, William Gudykunst, found that varying strategies exist depending on whether the people were from individualistic or collectivistic cultures. The theory presumes that, an optimal level of anxiety and uncertainty which exist in an intercultural communication often promotes the establishment of successful intercultural intonation.

STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES FO THE SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORIES:

STRENGTH:

Many studies under social science approach have been useful in identifying variations in communication from group to group and specifying psychological and sociological variables in the communication process.

WEAKNESSES:

1.   Scholars now realized that human communication is often more creative than predictable

And, that reality is not just external but also internally constructed.

2.   We cannot identify all the variables that affect our communication. Nor can we predict exactly why one intercultural interaction seems to succeed and another does not.

3.   It is recognized that, some methods in this approach are not culturally sensitive and that researchers may be too distant from the phenomena or people they are researching. In other words, researchers may not really understand the cultural groups they are studying.

THE INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

The approach gained prominence in the late 1980s among communication scholars' (Judith and Nakayama opp. cit). This approach aims at understanding and describing human behavior. It differs from social scientific approach in its view of the relationship between communication and culture. According to this approach, culture is created and maintained through communication while the social scientific theorists see communication as influenced by culture. Cross- cultural psychologists use the terms "etic" and "emic" to distinguish the social science and interpretive approaches. These terms were borrowed from linguistics - etic from phonetic and emic from phonemic. Social science research usually searches for universal generalizations and studies culture objectively with an "outsider's" view, in this way it is "etic". In contrast, interpretive approach usually focuses on understanding phenomena subjectively, from within a particular cultural community or context; in this way, it is 'emic'. The researchers who use this approach focus attention on pattern of behaviors within one cultural group only paying less to cross-cultural comparisons.

Interpretive theorists assume that reality is external to humans and that they construct reality. This assumption has an element of the semiotic model of language, culture and media analyses which olds that 'language is constructed by people using it within cultures to produce meanings. Things and events in themselves do not have meaning. It is the ways that cultures, through their changing use of language, have "agreed" to name things and events that determines how they get

defined' (Branston and Stafford, 2001:6). Interpretive theorists believe that human experience, including communication, is subjective and human behavior is neither predetermined nor easily predicted. The approach uses quantitative methods derived from anthropology and linguistics such as field studies, observations and participant observations.

Ethnography, basically seen as a scientific description of different races and cultures, is one of the interpretive approaches. It is a discipline that examines the patterned interactions and significant symbols of specific cultural groups to identify the cultural norms that guide their behaviors, usually based on field studies. Ethnographers of communication are devoted to descriptive studies of communication patterns within specific cultural groups.

Another example of interpretive research is the rhetorical approach; which is the oldest communication scholarship dating back to the ancient Greeks rhetoricians typically examines and analyzes texts or public speech in the context in which they occur.

A number of interpretive scholars have emphasized that description of the communication rules of a given people must be grounded in their beliefs and values. Most scholarly studies of communication are rooted in a European-American perspective, and this frame of references is not necessarily applicable to communication of all cultural groups. A more recent study was conducted by Molefi Asante (2001) who developed the framework of Afrocentricity to apply to studies about African or African American Communication. He identifies five cultural themes shared by people of African dessert:

a) A common origin and experience of struggle.

b) An element of resistance to European legal procedures, medical practices and political processes.

c) Traditional values of humanness and harmony with nature.

d) A fundamentally African way of knowing and interpreting the world

e) An orientation towards communalism

Similarly Asian scholars have developed Asiacentric frameworks to study communication of people from Asian cultures. Communication scholar Yoshitake Mike (2004) has identified five Asiacentric themes (circularity, harmony, other directedness, reciprocity and relationality). Based on these themes, he developed five propositions on human communication.

Communication is a process in which:

a. We remind ourselves of the interdependence and interrelatedness of the universe

b. We feel the joy and suffering of all beings

c. We receive and return our debts to all beings.

d. We reduce our selfishness and egocentrism

e. We moralize and harmonize the universe.

STRENGTH OF THE THEORY:

The usefulness of the interpretive approach is that, it provides an in-depth understanding of communication patterns in particular communities because it emphasizes investigating communication in context.

LIMITATIONS OF THE THEORY:

The main limitation of the theory is that there are few interpretivist studies of intercultural communication

Researchers are outsiders to the communities under investigation, which means they may not represent accurately the communication patterns of members of that community.

3.   **THE CRITICAL APPPRAOCH:**

In this theory, cultural studies take a different turn. Although it includes many assumptions of the interpretive approach, such as subjectivity and materiality as well as emphasis on the importance of studying the context in which communication occurs, the approach focuses our macro contexts such as the political and social structures that influence communication.

The goal of critical approach is not only to understand human behavior, but also to change the lives of everyday communicators. Researchers using this approach assume that, by examining and reporting how power functions in cultural situations, they can help the average person learn how to resist forces of power and operation. Critical scholars are interested in power relations in communication. For them, identifying cultural differences in communication is important only in relation to power differentials. In this perspective culture is, in essence, a battleground; a plan where multiple interpretations come together but, a dominant force always prevails. Critical scholars, unlike most social scientists and interpretivists, who focus on studying human behavior firsthand, are interested in the historical context of communication.

The methods preferred by the critical scholars are usually textual analyses, which sometimes occur within the economic contexts of the culture industries that produce these texts.

That is, the scholar generally analyzes cultural 'products', such as media (television, movies, journals, and so on), as powerful voices in shaping contemporary culture, rather than observing or participating in face-to-face interaction or conducting surveys.

STRENGTH OF THE APPRAOCH:

The critical approach emphasizes the power relations in intercultural interactions and the importance of social and historical contexts.

LIMITATIONS OF THE APPRAOCH

1.   One limitation is that most critical studies do not focus on face-to-face intercultural interaction. Rather, they focus on popular media forms of communication- TV shows, music videos, magazines, advertisements and so on. Such studies, with their lack of attention of face-to-face interactions, may yield less practical results.

2.   Also, the approach does not allow for much empirical data.

HOW INTERCULTURAL COMMUICATION CAN HELP PROMOTE PEACE AMONG COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

DIALOGUE

Through formal discussion of the cultural disposition of various cultural groups, peaceful coexistence can be realized. Since culture involves any social activity that has been institutionalized and is celebrated by the members of that social group, then, dialogue could be interfaith as well, since religion is also, in a way, a culture. And, interfaith dialogue has been a way of solving religious misunderstandings used by a dominant religious group (which is Islam).

Contemporarily, several institutions have proliferated, the world over, to tackle cultural problems by way of dialogue.

In Nigeria, Ufuk Dialogue Foundation was founded in 2011. An effort by the Turkish and Nigerian humanitarians to foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue, stimulate thinking and exchange of opinions on supporting and fostering democracy and peace all over the world and to provide a common platform for education and information exchange.

The principal goal of Ufuk Dialogue Foundation is "to promote peace in the world and contribute to peaceful coexistence of the adherents of different faiths, cultures, ethnicities and races" (www.ufukfoundation.org). The foundation organizes such events as conferences, dialogue dinners, Ufuk dialogue awards and seminars.

It organized peace conference in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2014, the same year in which it organized peace and dialogue awards in Abuja, Nigeria, where it presented awards to people in recognition of their contribution in fostering dialogue, peace and mutual understanding.

CULTURAL INTERFUSSION

This entails cultural homogeneity where members of different cultural backgrounds interact as though they belong to one cultural group. This method creates harmonized environment and promotes peace in intercultural settings. Various sporting and educational activities at international and local or domestic levels promote cultural interfusion on the communicators concerned, be it consciously or unconsciously.

Intercultural relations established between France and India, for example, play a significant role in promoting cultural homogeneity between the two countries and, consequently, improved peace between them (Encyclopaedia Britannica, extracted from http//en.wikisource.org).

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), for instance, sponsors visits of Indian artists to France. The French people, on the other hand, love Indian music, their literature and several other cultural activities in their country thus, creating a platform where the cultures of these two distinct groups will be homogeneous without hegemony.

In 2013, France tagged India a "Country of Honor". In a recent Indo-French movie, A Hundred Foot Journey, effort was made to establish marital relation between two Indo-French lovers, Hassan and Margret, respectively. As a strong medium of cultural promotion, this movie signifies a scenario where the cultures of these groups have been unified, interlocked and interfused. Critical theorists might use the historically old relationship (since 17th Century) between India and France, to say that the device of marriage has been chosen to show that India and France are now "one" and shall remain so forever.

REDUCES ETHNOCENTRISM AND STEREOTYPING

Intercultural communication reduces ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is an orientation toward one's own ethnic group. It is a tendency to elevate one's own culture above others. Through interpersonal interaction with people from other cultures, one could learn that all individuals and cultural groups share a fundamental humanistic belief in the sanctity of the human spirit and the goodness of peace and that people should respect the well-being of others (Kale, 1994).

Stereotyping, on the other hand, is an attitude (usually negative) toward a cultural group based on little or no evidence (Judith and Nakayama, 2002). Intercultural communication helps one correct their misunderstanding of other people's ideology, consequently, reducing their

stereotyping of such people. When stereotyping is reduced, peace and harmony are certainly assured.

CONCLUSION

All communication is cultural, it draws on ways we have learned to speak and give nonverbal messages. We do not always communicate same way from day to day, since factors like context, individual personality, and mood interact with variety of cultural influences and choices. Communication is interactive, so an important influence on it effectiveness is our relationship with others. According (Gabrialla 2008). Perfecting ourselves in effective communication skills can ease our move through conflicts. A culturally fluent approach to conflict means working overtime to understand these and other ways communication varies across cultures, and applying these understanding in order to enhance relationship across differences.

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