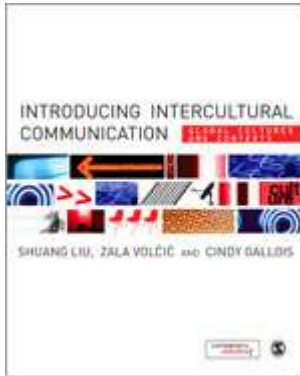


## ***Introducing Intercultural Communication, Global Cultures and Contexts***

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This international edition covers intercultural communication topics from around the world. It is written in easy to follow language, has real life examples and relevant case studies for further analysis and discussion. The book explores the many interconnections between culture, communication, and identities in European, Asian, and Oceanic countries as well as in North America.

It is practical and user-friendly but basic in a sense that it doesn't take into account new and changing directions in intercultural research and work. It asks us to think critically about the world as it is now, e.g., the role the media play in our perception of the world and the role of multiculturalism. Each chapter starts with learning objectives and ends with discussion questions, included are also key terms and further reading lists. In addition, each chapter has "theory corners" which cover key theoretical concepts related to issues being discussed, making the book easy to read. The case studies at the end of each chapter are for further reflection and discussion, showing the practical side of things. However, I felt that the book has many descriptions but not enough in-depth analysis, for example, the chapters dealing with cultural hybridization, cultural hegemony and colonialism could have deeper discussion and analysis.

Apart from chapters covering the most used theories of the intercultural communication field, the reader will also explore issues such as:

- challenges of living in a global society,
- developing relations with culturally different others,
- verbal and non-verbal communication and culture,
- immigration and acculturation,
- intercultural conflict management,
- the mass media, technology, and cultural change,
- becoming an effective intercultural communicator.

A companion website is also provided giving resources for practitioners.

The authors point out that the existing textbooks on intercultural communication primarily concentrate on the US context or use the USA as the criterion reference for comparing other cultures. They also state that many existing textbooks do not really explore the enormous impact of mass media on our identity construction and communication behaviour. Their impetus for writing this book is to help bridge the gap left by existing treatments and have a wider application beyond the US context and to situate intercultural communication in a broader context.

The purpose of the book is also to enable the reader to ask further questions to acquire intercultural knowledge and skills as well as become a critical consumer of information in the wider field of intercultural communication.

The authors ask us questions, such as: “Do we really partake of a unified world because the media bring us closer?” “Who are the inhabitants and the players in this global village?” “What roles can intercultural communication play in meeting these challenges?”

Chapter 1 “Challenges of Living in a Global Society” addresses current key aspects surrounding intercultural issues in our global world. The authors make the point that understanding other cultures is a critical challenge we face today. The case study used to illustrate comes from the 2005 Cronulla riots in Australia.

The nature of human perception is tackled in Chapter 4 and summarized nicely in this saying, ‘We see what we want to see and hear what we want to hear.’

Our cultural lenses influences the way we see the world and think about it. This is illustrated in a quote by P. Fitzgerald (British author, 1916-2000), “However, no two people see the external world in exactly the same way. To every separate person, a think is what he thinks it is – in other words, not a thing, but a think.” How often do we assume things about others based on our own assumptions, beliefs and norms? The chapter’s case study looks at how Eastern Europeans are perceived by the West. The authors comment that different research projects in the last couple of years show that Eastern Europeans are still predominantly perceived by their Western counterparts via stereotypes, such as laziness, backwardness, or violence. Moreover, Eastern Europeans are often grouped together as all being the same – of one culture. The question to think about is, “How could we tackle this?” Some Eastern Europeans may want to hide their country of origin to eliminate prejudice, etc. Eastern Europe is a vast area (what is Eastern Europe anyway?) and each country has its own culture, history, traditions, etc., and all is not Russia.

Chapter 5 summarises Hofstede’s five dimensions of culture and Hall’s high and low context cultural framework. In addition, it compares and contrasts cultures on the different cultural dimensions, explains value orientations and how they influence communication behaviours. The authors stress that Hofstede’s work is not without criticism, but up until now, his model has been included in almost all intercultural communication books. The authors make reference to Markus and Kitayama (1991) who have pointed to the vast individual differences within cultures on the individualism-collectivism dimension. Nowadays with extensive and increasing hybridization, these dimensions may not tell us much about a person.

What does it mean to be ethical in communication with others? The authors advise on being non-judgmental, willing to express ourselves openly and be open-minded about others’ behaviours. Furthermore, we should be aware of the biases we carry in ourselves as a result of our cultural baggage to understand others’ behaviour as it is. They also refer to the platinum rule, “Treat others as you think they would want to be treated.” This is essential, as people may not want to be treated the way we want to be treated, so it would make sense to ask questions, observe and get to know the person if we are to be able to really treat the person as he or she would like to be treated.

Chapter 6 addresses verbal communication and cultural issues by describing the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, which maintains that language, thought, and culture are closely connected and influence each other mutually. Thus, successful communication is not only about what is said but also how the message is communicated. However, there are also gender differences in how men and women communicate (e.g., men communicate to report about the world, women to create a rapport to establish a human connection) that need to be kept in mind. They mention the four dimensions of communication style identified by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988): direct/indirect, elaborate/succinct, personal/contextual, and instrumental/affective. The thing to keep in mind is that how, when, where and with whom these communication styles are used varies from culture to culture. For a language to survive, it needs to be taught in schools (Everett, 2002). It might help smaller languages to survive if policy makers keep this in mind.

Chapter 7 looks at nonverbal communication and culture. Reference is made to Mehrabian (1982) who estimated that 93% of meaning is carried through nonverbal communication channels. Other scholars have disputed this. Nevertheless, all argue that a very significant amount of communication is nonverbal. What it means when is that we should not take words at face value but should also look at other nonverbal cues to help us understand the communication situation. Of course, different cultures have different rules, so not all cultures may be described as emotional or talk about emotions, but that doesn't mean they don't have deep feelings.

Chapter 8 deals with how we categorize and looks at subgroups as well as identities. The question, "Who am I?" might be one question that we respond to day by day. The chapter emphasizes that identity is not given or fixed but it is constantly negotiated and reconstructed. The authors point out that people live with multiple identities which change during the course of our lives – life is not static and our experiences can and do change us.

Milton Bennett's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) with its six stages of sensitivity to cultural differences is also explained.

Chapter 9 is on developing relations with culturally different others. It discusses Triandis' (1977) four universal dimensions of social relationships. The authors mention "cultural synergy" and say that to develop it, interlocutors should adapt to each other's cultural differences. Then again, how can we best do this? This takes time to learn, as often person A might adjust behaviour to accommodate B, but person B may not.

Chapter 10 addresses intercultural conflicts and how to manage them. What is seen as a conflict and how best to deal with it is very much culture-bound.

Chapter 11 is on the intriguing topic of mass media, technology and cultural change. The authors state that we must distinguish between reality (the outside world of actual events) and social reality (our mediated knowledge of those events). This is necessary because we think and behave not on the basis of what truly is but on what is perceived to be. In addition, they point out that the reality is socially and culturally constructed, understood and mediated. Furthermore, the authors cite a common observation of the effect of contemporary mass communication on journalism graduates-- they lack the background knowledge needed to carry out anything more than a superficial interview. They stress that this happens when the person doesn't have an understanding of the influence of

the culture on the events themselves and lack knowledge of the context within which the reported events occur.

Chapter 12 addresses issues surrounding immigration and acculturation. Recently, Western Europe has seen an upward trend in nationalistic tendencies and it seems to be getting more serious. What is behind this attitude? The authors use this quote: “the perceived threat to one’s culture from another culture is one of the greatest stumbling blocks in intercultural relations” (Stephan et al. 1999). How do the majority members treat the minority and vice versa? Various countries deal with their concerns towards multiculturalism issues differently, e.g., tighter entry requirements, citizenship policies, etc.

How should we interpret multiculturalism – is it a threat or a benefit? What acculturation attitudes should ethnic majorities have towards ethnic minorities, and vice versa?

Chapter 13 looks at what it takes to become an effective intercultural communicator. It discusses cultural hegemony and colonialism. The authors emphasize that the more global our society becomes the more provincial our attitudes may become. To overcome the barrier of difference, we need to build a mutual understanding with our interlocutors, as well as focus on similarities rather than differences.

How can we accept those who seem strange to us? One way is to avoid them, but this is not a very successful strategy or an interculturally effective one. On the contrary, we should recognize, understand and respect those around us as well as realize that to understand another culture we need to communicate with its people, learn about ourselves and adjust.

I appreciated the practical side of the book, the real life examples and case studies. With its multicultural perspective this book, while it does not break much new ground, it provides a good, well written synthesis of common theory and practice in the field, and as such can be part of basic coursework in intercultural communication studies courses.

*Introducing Intercultural Communication* invites us to ask further questions and think critically about the issues covered in the chapters and in the supporting case studies, e.g., the role of multiculturalism, the role of media in today’s world and immigration issues. I also enjoyed the repetition of key ideas, e.g., cultivating understanding and respect towards others to help build better intercultural relationships, the role of verbal and non-verbal communication, and our misperceptions that can lead to miscommunication. Just be curious, try a new approach and suspend judgment, and you may realize that this might be easier said than done. Do you know what I mean?