

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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An Integrated Approach to Intercultural Communication² is the outcome of research conducted at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Faculty of English Studies in Greece during the academic year 2010-2012. It explores communication, culture, and intercultural communication. The emphasis is on promoting understanding of and appreciation for the rich and varied perspectives encountered in inter/cultural communication opportunities.

Interdisciplinary in nature, the book focuses on the need to develop self-understanding as a first step to intercultural understanding, and highlights the need for the intercultural state of mind to match our multicultural world, the difficulties inherent in the quest of such objective, the excitement of challenges on the way and the rewards of the success that are sputtering with new energy and yet waiting to be discovered.

Furthermore, the book represents an initial step in the process of building competencies which may facilitate effective communication in all types of cross-cultural settings. It gives a unique outlook of how people from differing cultural backgrounds communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves, and how they endeavor to communicate across cultures.

The book grows out of the philosophy that developing better interpersonal, intercultural communication skills will profoundly benefit the five-and-a-half billion people who share this planet and who increasingly interact with each cultural diversity, the challenges of living in a multicultural world, the need to transcend the other by producing some guidelines with which people can successfully cope with the realities of unpredictability of intercultural interactions, the accompanying fears that such interactions often encompass, and the feeling of joy and comfort in the discovery of cultural diversity.

To begin with, Chapter 1 sets out the main theme through a detailed exploration of the concepts of communication and culture where the author discusses the beginnings of communication study, contemporary maxims about communication as well as misinterpretations that occur during the communication process. Author, then, seamlessly moves on to discuss culture, its elements, beliefs, values and norms, popular culture, Confucian cultural patterns, Hall's, Hofstede's, and Bond's taxonomies of cultural patterns, and cultural intelligence. Moreover, she explores the concept of cultural identity, and sheds new light on the notion of cultural diversity (or multiculturalism) which is in her view a broad way of looking at cultural groups at various levels, including assumptions, underlying values, social relations, and customs.

Chapter 2 focuses on the subject of intercultural communication that occupies the central position of the book. In this chapter, the author is keeping with the overall scope of the subject covering a wide array of topics within the field of intercultural communication encompassing overall characteristics of intercultural communication, meaning characteristics, practicing intercultural process thinking, intercultural communication competence and how to improve intercultural communication skills. The author also glimpses on culture shock, stages of culture shock and acculturation. In the last pages of this chapter, she discusses factors influencing intercultural communication, intercultural communication barriers, and basic rules of intercultural effectiveness only to conclude with intercultural training models.

In Chapter 3, the author turns to verbal and auditory intercultural communication and deals with the verbal codes and verbal communication styles. She defines various styles of verbal communication: direct versus indirect style, elaborate versus succinct style, personal versus contextual, instrumental versus affective style, treats the subject of listening, describes the HURIER model and discusses the importance of effective listening across cultures.

Chapter 4 draws the readers in with discussion of nonverbal intercultural communication that is, in the author's opinion, an indispensable and all-pervasive element in intercultural communication. She, then, moves to explore the importance of nonverbal communication in intercultural communication, the influence of non-

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²This book review is a slightly altered original Introduction of the book.

verbal factors on intercultural communication and its classification.

Chapter 5 explores the significance of intercultural health communication that is very important in the health care setting especially if doctors and patients are coming from different cultures. The author debates that effective health care delivery is dependent upon clear and effective communication as an essential element in every form of medicine and health care between all of the individuals who are involved: patients, physicians, and other health care professionals. The author, also, discusses diverse health care belief systems (that largely influence how doctors and patients perceive each other), intercultural health care competence, and health care communication strategies.

Chapter 6 is the final piece of this intercultural communication puzzle where the author analyses main features of intercultural business communication. The focus is on the intercultural skills business people need to function effectively in the business arena. This means managing people in an intercultural setting, negotiation, meetings, language and questions to consider when doing business internationally.

The final pages of the book comprise selected intercultural awareness situations, practice activities and discussion ideas that should serve as an intercultural awareness incentive. The author also provides cultural interpretations for each situation written immediately after a possible response. Cultural dos and don'ts across the globe in the end are a sweepstake for all globetrotters.

Generally, the author's academic vantage point is that this book is intended as an academic reference for undergraduate, graduate students, interdisciplinary researchers, business people, health care providers, tourists, sojourners, expatriates and their better understanding of the key concepts relevant to understanding issues in relation to intercultural communication. It is written in comprehensible English and covers the most important features of intercultural communication.

One of the reviewers, Professor Maria Sifianou from Faculty of English Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece writes:

"The diversity and freshness of the ideas in the book stem from the unique blend of the most important aspects of intercultural communication to provide the reader with an understanding of the depth and breadth of intercultural communication theory and practice in a unique and interesting way. It serves as basis for the journey towards greater intercultural communication competence and understanding of how intercultural communication principles work that is crucial to the development of mutual understanding in the global world."

Conjointly, Professor Spyronikolas Hoidas from Faculty of English Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece), who invited the author to join his team as a visiting scholar on the post-doctoral level, postulates:

"An Integrated Approach to Intercultural Communication" investigates multi-faceted domain of intercultural communication with its multi-cultural focus and interdisciplinary scope – featuring verbal, auditory, nonverbal, health care and business intercultural communication. The book does not only survey past and contemporary theoretical and research grounds but also anticipates future developments by investigating multi-faceted domain of intercultural communication.

Overtly, this book is an invaluable resource for all scholars, students, sojourners, expatriates, and globe-trotters exploring the broad and vast field of intercultural communication. In this important contribution to contemporary thinking about intercultural communication, Bakić-Mirić brings together discourse from widely divergent theoretical fields to explore the arena of intercultural communication.

Ultimately, a desirable and intended effect of this book is also the development of an interculturally open and tolerant mind, which will eventually lead to a better understanding of the different and varied manifestations of language, culture and communication in human society."

Finally Biljana Đorić Francuski, Associate professor from The University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology says (in Serbian language):

"Od ove godine studije kulture bogatije su za jednu izvanrednu naučnu monografiju, koju je pod nazivom *Integrirani pristup interkulturalnoj komunikaciji* (An Integrated Approach to Intercultural Communication) početkom 2012. objavila renomirana britanska izdavačka kuća Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Za nas je to izdanje tim značajnije što je autorka monografije, dr Nataša Bakić-Mirić, naše gore list, te u ovoj knjizi često nailazimo i na primere vezane za Srbiju, što inače nije baš uvek slučaj u literaturi iz oblasti studija kulture, a naročito interkulturalne komunikacije.

U današnje vreme, kada je u nekoliko multidisciplinarnih naučnih grana sve popularnija tematika razumevanja izmenu pojedinaca iz različitih kultura – koji kao nosioci ponekad čak i suprotnih vrednosti i neuskладjenih identiteta pri susretu neizostavno stupaju u interkulturalnu komunikaciju, ova knjiga, koja predstavlja originalno naučno ostvarenje, nesumnjivo je nezaoobilazan priručnik za svakoga ko se – bilo kao stručnjak ili student, bilo kao laik i iz privatnih razloga – bavi procesom sticanja kompetencija u cilju olakšavanja efikasne interkulturalne komunikacije u novoj multikulturalnoj sredini."

Conclusively, the purpose of this book is to delineate some of the choices (either explicit or tacit) that a scholar must make in an investigation of intercultural communication and so, it includes the most important aspects of intercultural communication necessary to provide the reader with an understanding of the depth and breadth of intercultural communication theory and practice and to further research in the field of intercultural communication in a unique and interesting way that is from the author's point of view crucial to the development of mutual understanding in the global world.