



# COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES

Mutual understanding in a global world

Second edition

Heather Bowe  
Kylie Martin  
Howard Manns

**CAMBRIDGE**

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# Communication Across Cultures

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## Mutual understanding in a global world Second edition

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The study of intercultural communication continues to grow in importance in response to great population mobility, migration and globalisation.

*Communication Across Cultures* explores how cultural context affects the use and (mis)interpretation of language. It provides an accessible and interdisciplinary introduction to language and language variation in intercultural communication. This is done by drawing on both classic and cutting-edge research from pragmatics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, linguistics, anthropology and politeness studies.

This new edition has been comprehensively updated to incorporate recent research, with a particular emphasis on the fluid and emergent practice of intercultural communication. It provides increased coverage of variation in language within and between cultures, drawing on real-world examples of both spoken and written communication. The authors review classic concepts like 'face', 'politeness' and 'speech acts', but also critique these concepts and introduce more recent approaches.

Each chapter provides a set of suggested readings, questions and exercises to enable the student to work through concepts and consolidate their understanding of intercultural communication. The culmination of each chapter is a simple project, which encourages students to conduct their own research. Further resources are available to instructors online at [www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/communication2e](http://www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/communication2e).

*Communication Across Cultures* remains an excellent resource for students of linguistics and related disciplines, including anthropology, sociology and education. It is also a valuable resource for professionals concerned with language and intercultural communication in this global era.

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107685147](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107685147)

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First published 2007

Reprinted 2009, 2012, 2013 (twice)

Second edition 2014

Cover designed by Kerry Cooke, Eggplant Communications

Typeset by Aptara Corp.

Printed in Singapore by C.O.S Printers Pte Ltd

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*A Cataloguing-in-Publication entry is available from the catalogue of the National Library of Australia at [www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)*

ISBN 978-1-107-68514-7 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at [www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/communication2e](http://www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/communication2e)

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# Contents

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*List of tables and figures*

*Transcription conventions*

*Preface and acknowledgements*

Chapter 1 Culture, communication and context

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Culture, self and other

1.3 Communication, language and variation

1.4 Communication across cultures

## **Part I Contextual felicity across cultures**

Chapter 2 Direct and indirect messages

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Grice, cooperative conversation and implicature

2.3 Speech Act Theory

2.4 Ethnography, voicing and indirectness

2.5 Summary

2.6 Review

Chapter 3 Schemas, face and politeness

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Cultural schemas

3.3 First wave of politeness research: the models

3.4 First wave of politeness research: the critiques

3.5 Second wave of politeness research

3.6 Methodologies: natural semantic metalanguage

3.7 Summary

3.8 Review

Chapter 4 Speech acts and politeness

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Requests

4.3 Complaints

4.4 Apologies

4.5 Methodologies: Discourse Completion Tests

4.6 Summary

4.7 Review

## **Part II Structure and contextual update across cultures**

Chapter 5 Conversation across cultures

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Turn-taking in conversation

5.3 Back-channelling

- 5.4 Greetings and leave-taking
  - 5.5 Laughter in conversation
  - 5.6 Conversational styles
  - 5.7 Methodologies: ethnography and S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G.
  - 5.8 Summary
  - 5.9 Review
- 

Chapter 6 Positioning the self: role, power and gender

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Language and role
- 6.3 Language and power
- 6.4 Language and gender
- 6.5 Language, power and gender
- 6.6 Methodologies: Critical Discourse Analysis
- 6.7 Summary
- 6.8 Review

Chapter 7 Positioning the other: naming, address and honorifics

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Pronouns of address
- 7.3 Nouns of address
- 7.4 Honorifics
- 7.5 Methodologies: computer-mediated communication
- 7.6 Summary
- 7.7 Review

Chapter 8 Cultural differences in writing

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Linearity: a key principle of English written discourse
- 8.3 Non-linear discourse structures
- 8.4 Multiple perspectives: the example of Japanese
- 8.5 'Digressiveness': German academic register
- 8.6 The form/content distinction
- 8.7 Letter writing
- 8.8 Academic writing in the global world
- 8.9 Methodologies: investigating writing
- 8.10 Summary
- 8.11 Review

**Part III Professional communication across cultures**

Chapter 9 Translating language and culture

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Translating and interpreting: an overview
- 9.3 Pragmatic equivalence and impartiality
- 9.4 Translators/interpreters as institutional gatekeepers
- 9.5 Translating/interpreting in the workplace
- 9.6 Regulating translating and interpreting
- 9.7 Summary
- 9.8 Review

Chapter 10 Intercultural communication in the workplace

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Workplace cultures in contact

---

10.3 Business contexts

10.4 Medical contexts

10.5 Legal contexts

10.6 Summary

10.7 Review

Chapter 11 Successful intercultural communication

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Individuals and intercultural communication

11.3 Institutions and intercultural communication

11.4 Strategies for intercultural communication

11.5 Summary

11.6 Review

*Appendix*

*References*

*Index*



---

## List of tables and figures

---

- Table 2.1 Felicity conditions for ‘requests’ and ‘thanks’
- Table 2.2 Request form types
- Table 4.1 Examples of nine request categories
- Table 4.2 Directness scales in Hebrew and English: requests
- Table 4.3 Politeness scales in Hebrew and English: requests
- Table 4.4 Directness levels in German and English: complaints
- Table 4.5 Apology formulas: English, Hungarian and Polish
- Table 6.1 Stereotyped gender conversation styles
- Table 6.2 Gender and doctor–patient interruptions
- Figure 3.1 Possible politeness strategies
- Figure 7.1 Use of T/V in relation to equality/inferiority/solidarity
- Figure 7.2 Use of pronouns of solidarity
- Figure 7.3 Interaction, communication and grouping
- Figure 7.4 Superior vs inferior/equal status
- Figure 8.1 Diagrammatic representation of the discourse structure of the Japanese text *May Yokomoto*
- Figure 9.1 Pet food advertisement

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## Transcription conventions

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This book has dialogue examples drawn from a variety of works. We have sought wherever possible to maintain the original transcription conventions of these works. Consequently, the reader will notice slight variations in the transcription conventions used in this book. Transcription conventions and variations in these conventions are outlined here.

. or \	final pitch contour, falling intonation
!	exclamatory or animated intonation
> <(e.g. >actually<)	marks emphasis of word(s)
? or / or ↑	rising intonation
xxxxx	inaudible or incomprehensible talk
<X word X>	uncertain hearing; the most likely text
+ or (.)	slight pause
+n+ or (n)	pause of n (number) seconds length
: or double consonants	an extension of the syllable or sound indicated (e.g. a:ah or mmm ...)
[ ] or * *	speakers' utterances overlap
= or (0) (0)	latching, indicates no interval between contiguous utterances such that the second latches immediately onto the first without overlapping with it
~~	speaker breaks off before completion of word
(())	depending on context, used to mark omitted names or relevant body movement

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## Preface and acknowledgements

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The study of intercultural communication continues to grow in importance in response to great population mobility, migration and globalisation. Howard Manns has joined Heather Bowe and Kylie Martin in this revision of *Communication Across Cultures: Mutual Understanding in a Global World* to incorporate insights from research in the field since the publication of the first edition in 2007.

The first edition sought to present relevant research approaches in the field of linguistic aspects of intercultural communication, including pragmatics, discourse analysis, studies of politeness and cross-cultural communication, and to explain and exemplify these for beginning researchers, drawing on material from a variety of languages and cultures. It has been adopted as a required and recommended text for students of intercultural communication, language culture and communication studies in cross-cultural pragmatics and related fields at undergraduate and postgraduate level in Australia and elsewhere, and has also been adopted as a resource for university students of non-English-speaking background exploring issues in using English as a global language.

This second edition incorporates recent research in the field, which now includes research from more global and pluralised perspectives, including hybrid or mixed language practices, and takes account of cultural and linguistic diversity within groups as well as between groups. More recent research involving actual intercultural communication complements the cross-cultural comparative nature of much early research, which, though crucial to an understanding of some of the issues involved, fails to take account of the creative strategies that speakers can use when communicating across cultures.

Heather Bowe's interest in the multifaceted nature of language and the way the components of vocabulary, grammar, metaphor, style, politeness and inference are shaped by sociocultural practices was kindled when she was a student at the University of Southern California. Here, she observed the interaction of the work of Bernard Comrie, Edward Finegan, Elaine Anderson, Elinor Ochs and Robert Kaplan, and fellow students Doug Biber, Bill Eggington, Tsukao Kawahigashi, Keiji Matsumoto and Charles Randriamasimanana.

In addition to her research in the area of Australian Aboriginal languages, Heather responded to the interest of students in the applications of linguistics to intercultural communication in business and global contexts through a focus on language form and the interpretation of similar forms in different cultural contexts. She developed units in intercultural communication at Monash University at the Monash campuses in the Melbourne area for students at both undergraduate and graduate level from the Faculties of Arts and Business, and also at the Monash campuses in Malaysia and South Africa.

Heather's interest in intercultural communication was informed by the work of Michael Clyne and other colleagues in the areas of languages and linguistics at Monash, particularly Marissa Cordell, Georgina Heydon, Helen Marriott, Kylie Martin and Farzad Sharifian, as well as past and present students from a rich variety of cultures, including Margaret à Beckett, Zosia Golebiowski, Angelina Kioko, Kei Miyazawa Reid, Deborah Neil and Mingjian Zhang. Heather also wishes to acknowledge her parents for encouraging her interest in cultures beyond her own, and her husband, Robin, for his

ongoing support of her work.

Kylie Martin's interest in intercultural and international communication began at the University of Adelaide where she was a student of Peter Mühlhäusler, and where she worked on a research project concerning the development of pidgins and creoles in the Pacific region. It was also at this university that she began to develop a research focus on understanding the diverse communication styles adopted by first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) speakers of Australian English in emerging intercultural settings.

Kylie's interest in intercultural communication continued into her postgraduate studies at Monash University, with her MA focusing on the convergence and divergence of Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia language norms used by Malaysian and Indonesian international students undertaking their studies at Australian universities. Her PhD thesis has focused on new innovative and emerging ways of language usage among the Indigenous Ainu people in the urban metropolis of Tokyo, Japan. Her research examines the influences of globalisation processes on the functions and values of Ainu, a severely endangered language, to better understand the relationship between this language and identity maintenance within the urban Kanto Ainu diaspora.

Kylie has worked at universities in both Japan and Australia in the areas of sociolinguistics, intercultural communication and English for academic purposes. She is currently based in the Research Faculty of Media and Communication at Hokkaido University in the northernmost island of Japan.

Howard Manns had his first encounter with intercultural communication as a student at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. Howard worked for three years as a specialist in Iranian languages and cultures for the US Navy, travelling throughout the Persian Gulf region. He subsequently earned a BA in linguistics at the University of Pittsburgh. A love of language, culture, volcanoes and surf led him to spend the next three years travelling throughout Latin America and Asia.

Howard's PhD thesis explored how Indonesian youth and media negotiate linguistic and social change on the island of Java. Howard works in the Linguistics Program at Monash University, which is a vibrant, convivial and intellectually stimulating place to be. At Monash, he would like to thank Julie Bradshaw and Louisa Willoughby, whose materials and ideas have certainly informed the revisions incorporated in this edition. He would also like to thank Kate Burrige, Anna Margrett, Simon Musgrave and Farzad Sharifian who have all helped in their own ways. Howard is also grateful to many hundreds of students who have inspired, engaged with and challenged the ideas contained herein.

Howard would also like to thank Heather and Kylie who have been enthusiastically supportive of this edition's revisions, and David Jackson at Cambridge University Press (CUP) who has been both supportive and patient while awaiting them. He would also like to thank Isabella Mead at CUP, who oversaw the final stages of this project, and Angela Damis, whose keen editorial eye was invaluable during the project's closing weeks.

Howard acknowledges that any factual infelicities and typos in this revised edition are his own. One or two of these might belong to Howard's son, Oisín, who sat on his lap during its writing. Howard couldn't do much of what he does without Oisín's and his wife Ali's support.

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# 1 Culture, communication and context

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## 1.1 Introduction

THIS BOOK is intended as an academic reference for undergraduate and graduate students and interdisciplinary researchers who do not have specialised knowledge of linguistics. Key concepts relevant to an understanding of language issues in intercultural communication are drawn from the research areas of pragmatics, discourse analysis, politeness and intercultural communication. Relevant academic literature and recent research conducted by the authors is exemplified and explained throughout the book so that students can become familiar with the way research in this field is reported and can follow up on the ideas presented.

An understanding of intercultural communication is crucially related to an understanding of the ways in which the spoken and written word may be interpreted differentially, depending on the context. The message received is not always the one intended by the speaker or the writer. This book systematically examines sociocultural and pragmatic aspects of the language context, and discusses a wide range of factors that contribute to the interpretation of language in context. The authors argue that an understanding of how these principles interact in a given language, and in intercultural communication, is crucial to the development of mutual understanding in the global world.

Speakers engaged in intercultural communication in this increasingly globalised world may choose one or more languages in which to communicate. However, regardless of whether it is their first, second or third language, individuals typically bring their own sociocultural expectations of language use to the encounter. Speakers' expectations shape the interpretation of meaning in a variety of ways. To manage intercultural interaction effectively, speakers need to be aware of the inherent norms of their own speech practices, the ways in which norms vary depending on situational factors and the ways in which speakers from other language backgrounds may have different expectations of language use and behaviour.

Representative research methodologies are exemplified throughout the book, although there is no single chapter devoted to methodology. This book endeavours to show how a variety of methodologies may be drawn on to uncover the nuances of language use in intercultural contexts. These nuances and linguistic behaviours are linked to wider non-linguistic sociocultural and pragmatic processes. We outline these processes throughout the remainder of this chapter. These, in turn, lay the foundation for a more nuanced discussion of language, meaning and (mis)interpretation throughout the remainder of this book.

## 1.2 Culture, self and other

This section provides an overview of sociocultural concepts essential to the study of intercultural communication. Notions of culture, cultural heterogeneity and cultural difference are introduced and critiqued. We then discuss how individuals perceive and categorise the sociocultural practices of the self and the other.

# Culture

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The term culture as we will be using it, refers to the customs, symbols and expectations of a particular group of people, particularly as they affect their language use.

The term **culture** has a wide range of meanings today, because it has actually changed in meaning over time. Goddard (2005, pp. 53) provides an excellent account of some of these changes. In its earliest English uses, *culture* was a noun of process, referring to the tending of crops or animals. This meaning (roughly, ‘cultivating’) is found in words such as *agriculture*, *horticulture* and *viviculture*. In the sixteenth century *culture* began to be used to mean ‘cultivating’ the human body through training and later ‘cultivating’ the non-physical aspects of a person. In the nineteenth century the meaning was broadened to include the general state of human intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development (roughly comparable to ‘civilisation’), giving rise to the ‘artistic works and practices’ meaning that is associated with music, literature, painting, theatre and film.

Goddard reports that the ‘anthropological’ usage of culture was introduced into English by Tylor in the late nineteenth century, in his book *Primitive Culture*. Tylor defined *culture* as ‘that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society’ (Tylor 1871, p. 1).

Goddard (2005, p. 58) makes the point that the ‘anthropological’ use typically related to people living in ‘other places’; however, in contemporary expressions such as *youth culture*, *gay culture* and *kid culture* the principle of differentiation has shifted entirely to the notion of different ‘kinds of people’. It is perhaps unsurprising then that growing numbers of anthropologists are choosing to work for corporations rather than heading off to exotic lands (Ferraro 2002).

We believe Tylor’s definition of culture, albeit dated, provides a starting point for discussing intercultural communication. Tylor’s anthropological approach implicates the relevance of processes that are cognitive (e.g. knowledge, belief) as well as practical (e.g. art, habits). We engage with both cognitive and practical processes in this book.

Yet, this book’s focus on meaning and the (mis)interpretation of meaning in social contexts entails by necessity favouring a focus on practical processes. This means adopting a more **relativist perspective** on culture and the view that ‘Cultural meanings are public meanings encoded in shared symbols, not-self-contained private understandings’ (Foley 1997, p. 16). Public meanings are, by their very nature, learned meanings. Clifford Geertz (1973) discusses culture in terms of symbolic practices handed down from generation to generation.

A meaning- and symbol-driven approach entails deconstructing essentialist notions of culture (Hall 1997). Research on intercultural communication has historically discussed cultural groups at the essentialist level of nations and national languages. In other words, for instance, an Indonesian was presumed to speak Indonesian and behave in accordance with Indonesian cultural norms. The behaviours, in turn, could be contrasted with those of a US American who was presumed to speak American English and behave in US American ways.

These understandings of culture and language are often, and, in some ways always oversimplistic. For instance, young Indonesians engage in ethnic, national and religious cultural practices (Manu 2012). Furthermore, they vary these practices from moment to moment to construct heterogeneous selves. An essentialist view of a US American doesn’t take into account intracultural variation (e.g. African American, Southern American). It also doesn’t consider that more than 20 per cent of US Americans speak a language other than English at home (Ryan 2013). Spanish speakers account for

more than half of this number and often mix Spanish and English to express hybrid cultural identities (e.g. Sánchez-Muñoz 2013).

In short, essentialist views of culture and language can be limiting and less relevant in the late modern era (Hall 1995). Yet, it is our view that scholars of culture should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is a rich body of research that discusses culture in nationalistic terms. Ignoring this research implies that there aren't differences between, for instance, Indonesians and US Americans, or that such differences are not relevant. These macro-cultural labels are useful to a degree, but they should also be critiqued. This is perhaps clearest in a review of the traditional models for understanding cultural difference.

## Cultural difference

Many models have been posited for understanding cultural difference. The two most frequently cited models are those proposed by Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall respectively. Both models, however, have been criticised for being essentialist and anachronistic and for having problematic methodologies.

Hofstede's work (1980, 1983, 1998, 2010) has been highly influential in the study of **national cultural differences**. Hofstede's research is based on information gained from studies of multinational corporation (IBM) in 64 countries. He has also conducted subsequent studies concerning students in over 20 countries and 'elites' in 19 countries (Hofstede 1998, p. 11). Hofstede originally proposed four independent dimensions of national cultural differences. He then added a fifth response to criticisms of Western bias (Samovar et al. 2013).<sup>1</sup>

1. **Power distance** relates to the degree to which members of a culture accept institutions and organisations having power. Hofstede classes 'Latin', Asian and African countries as accepting of power asymmetries. Conversely, he cites Anglo and Germanic countries as being less accepting of such asymmetries.
2. **Uncertainty avoidance** refers to the degree to which members feel uncomfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty and thus the degree to which they avoid these. Latin countries and Japan are among those prone to avoid uncertainty and Anglo, Nordic and Chinese culture countries are those more likely to engage in such 'risky' behaviour.
3. The **individualism/collectivism** dimension marks a distinction between those cultures that place a higher emphasis on individual goals (individualism) in comparison to group achievements (collectivism). Anglo, European and 'developed' countries tend to be individualistic whereas Asian, African and less developed countries tend to value collectivism. It is worth noting that Japan falls between these two poles in Hofstede's scale (Hofstede & Hofstede 2013).
4. The **masculinity/femininity** dimension presents a masculine culture as having a 'preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material success' and a feminine culture as having a 'preference for relationships, modesty, caring for the weak, and the quality of life' (Hofstede 1983, pp. 336–7). Therefore, we see that **masculinity** is more achievement oriented and **femininity** has a greater focus on relationships and maintaining a balance among people. Masculinity, as such, is linked to Japan and Germanic countries and femininity to Nordic countries. Anglo countries are moderately masculine and many Asian countries moderately feminine.
5. The subsequently added, fifth dimension, **long-term/short-term orientation** (original



known as 'Confucian dynamism'), posits that some societies (long-term-oriented) emphasise future reward, and pursue these through persistence, savings and flexible adaptation. Other societies (short-term-oriented) align more towards the past and present and do so through national pride, respect for traditions and the perseverance of 'face'. China and East Asian nations have rated highly as long-term-oriented nations whereas Anglo, African and South Asian nations tend to rate as short-term-oriented.

The qualities Hofstede identifies seem to be of value in understanding potentially different patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. However, there are weaknesses in his formulations. For instance Wierzbicka (1991) draws attention to the extreme polarities inherent in Hofstede's framework. Also Hofstede has been accused of Western bias, both in his selection of labels and collection of data (Gudykunst 2001). Clyne (1994, pp. 179–86) finds some of the features of Hofstede's model to be useful in understanding the cultural varieties in his corpus of intercultural workplace interaction. Yet Clyne largely avoids using the labels 'masculinity' and 'femininity', which we ourselves find overgeneralise and perpetuate gender stereotypes. He instead uses such words as *harmony* and *degree of negotiation* as well as *assertiveness* and *weakness*.

In spite of the limitations of Hofstede's model, it does contain a useful inventory of parameters along which cultural value systems and the relations within cultures can be analysed. However, it needs to be understood that such categorisations, while useful, are based on general national cultural differences and such simplifications were shown above to have significant limitations.

The second most-cited model for categorising cultural difference is also one of the oldest. This model was devised by Edward T. Hall, considered by many to be the originator of the field of intercultural communication (Sorrells 2013). Hall worked for the US Foreign Service Institute and sought to devise training courses for Foreign Service Officers heading to overseas assignments. Not unlike the authors of this book, Hall (1959, 1966, 1976) was primarily concerned with micro-communicative contexts and the ways in which differing expectations might lead to misunderstandings.

Hall (1976) categorises cultures according to whether they are high-context or low-context. **High-context cultures** are those in which much of the meaning exchanged in a context is done so without words or with relatively few words. The messages communicated in such societies are more subtle, indirect and often non-verbal. Furthermore, roles in such societies are more defined and hierarchical. The societies are normally more 'traditional' and more attuned to their environments and one another. Cultures considered high-context include many Asian cultures and the African American and Native American cultures.

**Low-context cultures**, conversely, are those in which detailed verbal messages are favoured. Individuals from these cultures share less background information and intimate information about one another and consequently can rely less on non-verbal contextual cues. The messages conveyed in these cultures tend to be direct and verbose and these cultures value people who 'speak up' and 'say what is on their mind' (Samovar et al. 2013). These societies are typically less 'traditional' and include North American, German and Scandinavian cultures.

Miscommunications may occur when those from a low-context culture communicate with those from a high-context culture. Hall (1959) proposes cultural distance as a major factor in determining whether miscommunication will take place. For example, communication between a Japanese individual (among Hall's highest-context cultures) and a German (among the lowest-context cultures) would be expected to be particularly problematic.

This problematic communication, for instance, might take place along lines of credibility (Samovar et al. 2013). When meeting a high-context Japanese individual, our low-context German might find the Japanese silence to be an indication that he or she is hiding something and thus being dishonest. Conversely, the Japanese individual might find the talkativeness of the German off-putting or even meaningless, and, thus, untrustworthy.

As with Hofstede's framework, there are pros and cons in drawing on Hall's observations. Cultural distance has been found to be less of a predictor of communication problems than intergroup history, especially histories beset with social inequality or intergroup rivalry (Brabant, Watson & Gallo 2007). Further, Hall's discussions of context have received less academic scrutiny and works that have drawn on this model have generally accepted it without question (Cardon 2008). This lack of scrutiny has led to problems in intercultural classrooms where students have found Hall's observations to be dated or inaccurate (Hastings, Musambira & Ayoub 2011).

Hofstede's and Hall's are but two of many frames for illustrating similarities and differences of cultural value systems. There are many other models that emphasise, among other things, cultural adaptation (Kim 1977, 1988) and the negotiation of cultural anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst 1995). A full discussion of intercultural models is beyond the scope of this language-focused book. However, they are addressed in any number of general introductory texts (e.g. Martin & Nakayama 2004; Samovar et al. 2013; Sorrells 2013).

The ways in which individuals interpret culture, cultural practices, contexts and meanings are influenced by their view of the self and the other. Self and other categorisation are dealt with in the following section.

## Categorising self and other

The categorisation of the self and the other are critical in how we create and interpret meanings with contexts. This section introduces traditional and contemporary frameworks for understanding how individuals categorise the self and the other.

Social psychologist Henri Tajfel (1982) suggests that people often categorise themselves positively at the centre (**in-group**) to create and promote self-esteem and pride and classify others negatively on the outside (**out-group**). Positive in-group stereotypes are utilised to develop self-esteem and maintain oneself as being different from the out-group (see also the 'in-group favouritism principle': Ting-Toomey & Chung 2005).

Tajfel's notions of the in-group and the out-group overlap with the concept of ethnocentrism. Sociologist William Sumner (1906, p. 13) defined **ethnocentrism** as 'the technical name for this view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it'. Sumner adds: 'Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders.' This positive valuation of the in-group, often at the expense of the out-group, is perhaps the most potent impediment to successful intercultural communication (Cargile & Bolkan 2013).

Ethnocentrism can be a complex affair as we have multiple selves, or rather social identities, and these vary from moment to moment (see Onorato & Turner 2002; Djenar 2008). These multiple selves are the product of our varied and complex backgrounds and experiences. For instance, as noted above, a US American may also align with Latino culture. This might be because the individual grew up in a Latino country or within a Latino community in the United States. In conversations, the individual

may choose to emphasise his or her US American identity in one context, the Latina/o in another – indeed reduce both in favour of any number of other social identities relevant to the immediate context.

Implicit in the categorisation of the self is the othering of the out-group. While linking certain characteristics to different cultures serves as a useful guide in understanding relations and linguistic communication, such categorisations may lead to some level of stereotyping and overgeneralisation. El-Dash and Busnardo (2001) point out any categorisation of a group results in some level of stereotyping. **Stereotypes** are the generalised and ideological beliefs that any two cultures or social groups are opposites (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012).

Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012) discuss stereotyping in ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ terms. **Negative stereotyping** is seen as a method of reiterating a binaristic contrast as a negative group difference. Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012, pp. 273–4) identify four major steps in negative stereotyping. First, one might contrast two cultures or two groups on the basis of a single dimension, like finding migrant shopkeepers of a particular culture curt and uninterested in their customers. Second, rather than working towards mutual understanding, an individual might focus on this difference as a problem for communication. Third, one might assign a positive value to one strategy or one group and a negative value to the other strategy or group. For example, an individual in Australia, the United Kingdom or the United States might view Anglo shopkeepers in a positive light (e.g. they always say *please* and *thank you* and make small talk) and view shopkeepers from other cultures negatively (e.g. shopkeepers from culture x focus only on the transaction at hand). Lastly, the fourth step entails re-generalising this process to the entire group. For instance, the individual might decide all people from culture x are curt and rude because of an interaction with shopkeepers (or even a single shopkeeper) from culture x.

Such binary contrasts are used both within a society and between different societies. For example, the in-group may be Westerners (taken from their perspective) and the out-group Asians. Of course, placing all people of ‘Western’ nations in one category and ‘Asian’ nations in another creates a stereotype already. However, here all Westerners may contrast themselves with all Asians and state that the out-group ‘refuse(s) to introduce their topics so that we [the Westerners] can understand them’ (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012, p. 274). Scollon, Scollon and Jones emphasise that such negative stereotyping ‘leads to the idea that somehow members of the other group are actively trying to make it difficult to understand them’ (2012, p. 274).

**Positive stereotyping**, in contrast, can be divided into two main strategies: the solidarity fallacy and the lumping fallacy. The **solidarity fallacy** relates to falsely combining one’s own group with some other group in order to establish common ground on one single dimension (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012). Scollon, Scollon and Jones review Tannen’s (1994) observations about the conversational norms of North American men and women and Chinese men and women. Tannen observes that US American men have a tendency to stress information over relationship, while US American women favour relationship over information (see also Hofstede’s dimensions). The solidarity fallacy develops when US American women group themselves with Chinese people in general in contrast to US American men to emphasise both the similarities between themselves and the Chinese, and the difference from US American men. While such groupings may assist in understanding the similarities between US American women and the Chinese in general, it can lead to the misconception that a cultural characteristics of the two groups are similar or the same.

The second type of positive stereotyping is the **lumping fallacy**. This occurs when a person makes a false grouping in reference to two other groups (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012, p. 275). An example of this would be the statement that Westerners consider all Asians to be members of the same group.

thus ignoring the contrasts between the groups and that such groupings include a diversity of different cultures and languages. In summary, negative stereotyping involves regarding members of a group as being polar opposites, whereas with positive stereotyping the members of different groups are viewed as being identical (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012, p. 275).

Stereotypes, whether positive or negative, limit our understanding of human behaviour and can lead to miscommunication in intercultural discourse because, as Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012, 272) conclude, 'they limit our view of human activity to just one or two salient dimensions and consider those to be the whole picture'. People need to consider the differences and similarities that exist between people and cultures. In other words, no individual member of a group encompasses or displays all of the characteristics of his or her group. Individuals belong to a variety of different groups and thus their identity and characteristics can be asserted differently, depending on the situation. This is especially so for those who relate to more than one ethnic or cultural group.

Culture has been shown to be a complex phenomenon here. Furthermore, the ways in which individuals position the self and the other with regard to culture(s) have been shown to be potentially limiting. Yet, individuals from different cultures need to communicate with one another perhaps more than ever in the era of globalisation. The remainder of this chapter introduces the role that language plays in intercultural communication and lays the foundation for the rest of this linguistically focused book.

## 1.3 Communication, language and variation

### Communication

**Communication** in its most basic sense may be defined as 'a sharing of elements of behaviour or modes of life' (Cherry 1996, p. 12). Animal communication is often linked to mere response to direct environmental stimulus. For instance, a bee may communicate to other bees the direction and distance to a food source. A male grasshopper communicates to others its desire to mate (as well as its satisfaction at having done so). Communication plays a critical role in the sharing and regulation of behaviour and modes of life for both human and non-human animals alike.

Human beings stand out among animals both in terms of the complexities of our social behaviour and the communicative means through which we manage these behaviours. As established above, human culture(s) and individuals' senses of self and other are complex and shifting. Human language has either evolved to manage these complex relationships or these complex relationships have evolved as a result of human language. In either case, complex social function is linked to an increase in size in the mammalian neo-cortex (i.e. the spongy, outer part of the brain). This growth has been exponentially more significant in humans than other mammals.

Human wants and needs and the information related to these wants and needs are also complex. These wants, needs and information are communicated and achieved through infinitely more sophisticated, patterned ways than those of our animal counterparts. A bee can communicate information about an immediate food source but can't tell you about a tasty food source from last year. A male grasshopper is limited to six communicative messages, all related to lovemaking and territory. Humans, on the other hand, have seemingly infinite ways of communicating information including information about events displaced in time and space. More so, humans can communicate who told them where to find food or mates (or, on a technological plane, how to or who can fix the



computers or cars) and how reliable this information may be.

Humans are, as Terrence W. Deacon (1997) points out, ‘the symbolic species’. Deacon (1997, 423) writes that ‘we humans have access to a novel higher-order representation system that... guides the formation of skills and habits’. He adds that ‘we do not just live our lives in the physical world and our immediate social group, but also in a world of rules of conduct, beliefs about our histories, and hopes and fears about our imagined futures’.

This higher-order representation system is language, and this is the primary focus of this book. Throughout this book, we make reference to cross-cultural and intercultural communication. The terms are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature. However, we use **cross-cultural communication** to refer to research that compares communication practices of one language/cultural group with another. **Intercultural communication**, on the other hand, is focused on communication between speakers from different language/cultural backgrounds.

Most modern research on cross-cultural and intercultural communication takes into account that communication is affected by different aspects of the context, including cultural expectations, social relations and the purpose of the communication. The following sections introduce the fluid relationship between language and context, a theme that underlies the remainder of this book.

## Language

**Language** refers to the system of sounds, affixes, words and grammar, among other symbols, that human beings use for communication. Monolinguals, like English speakers in Anglo countries, are particularly apt to think of language in isolated, named and monolithic ways (Makoni & Pennycook 2007; Otsuji & Pennycook 2010). These speakers become obsessed with notions of proper English, French, Spanish and so on and prescribe rules for standard usage (e.g. Standard English).

However, some have argued against the view of language in terms of these inflexible named systems. In other words, instead of viewing language in terms of ‘German’, ‘French’ and so on we should think about language in more fluid ways. They advocate a focus on what a sound, word or way of speaking can ‘do’ in a particular context and whether its use is appropriate to that context from the perspective of the interlocutors. Linguistic labels, they argue, have become particularly problematic in the era of globalisation (Blommaert & Rampton 2011). **Globalisation** has meant increased contact between peoples and languages through migration and technology. This, in turn, has led to the increased likelihood that individuals use one or more languages beyond those found in the home. It is now more likely that spouses speak different languages to one another and/or to their children. Also in globalised contexts, people may not attain or maintain full competency in a language as such. For example, recent adult migrants to Australia might acquire enough English to run errands and make basic requests but otherwise speak the language or languages of the country of origin at home and with friends and family (see Willoughby 2007). Conversely second-generation migrants to Australia might select elements of their parents’ languages for identity goals in otherwise English conversations (see also Canagarajah 2013 for young Tamil migrants in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada).

Blommaert (2010) describes language use like this in terms of a truncated repertoire. A **truncated repertoire**, especially that of migrants, consists of ‘highly specific “bits” of language and literacy values combined in a repertoire that reflects the fragmented and highly diverse life-trajectories and environments of such people’ (Blommaert 2010, p. 8). He notes that a truncated repertoire should not be all that surprising as a concept since ‘No one knows *all* of a language... Native speakers are not

perfect speakers' (Blommaert 2010, p. 103). However, we should note, as with culture above, that we do not wish to throw the baby out with the bathwater in our shift away from language labels and towards symbolic meaning and interpretation. There is a rich body of literature that discusses language use in terms of these labels and we ourselves use them in this book for ease of reference. In short, it would be silly to dispense of language labels altogether.

We adopt a largely semiotic approach to language and intercultural communication in this book. Semiotics requires that we introduce the concept of linguistic signs, if briefly. A **linguistic sign** consists of a physical form (pronunciation and meaning) and 'the discrimination it makes in the domain of language which sustains the coordination of behaviour' (Foley 1997, p. 25). For instance, the imperative English command *come!* consists of the physical combination of the sounds *c* (known in phonetic terms as a voiceless, velar stop [k]), *o* (an open-mid back unrounded vowel [ʌ]) and *m* (bilabial nasal [m]). Combined, these sounds carry the general meaning 'movement towards or so as to reach the speaker' (Oxford English Dictionary 2013a). This combination of sounds functions in a discriminatory way to command a hearer to move from his or her current location and towards the speaker. Indeed, we will show throughout this book how risky such behavioural discriminations can be, especially as they take place across cultures.

Peirce (1991) proposes that signs may be classified into three categories: icons, indexes and symbols. An **icon** refers to a form in which there is a perceptible likeness between the form and its meaning. For instance, the ways in which individuals describe eating show iconic similarities across cultures. A US English speaker says *nom nom*, a French speaker *miam miam* and a Thai speaker *ngam ngam*. In each of these cases, the form is repeated as if to mimic the open and closed mouth action of eating. Furthermore, each of the forms is pronounced with the air redirected through the nasal tract rather than the vocal tract. This also mimics, albeit more subtly, the physiological process of eating.

An **index** is a form that only derives its meaning from the context in which it is uttered. Personal pronouns (*I, you, she, he, it, they*) are perhaps the best example of indexes. For instance, the personal pronoun *you* is generally used to address or refer to one or more person or people, animal(s) or personified thing(s) (Oxford English Dictionary 2013b). However, the exact referent (or nature of the thing) only becomes clear in the immediate context. Indexes are also relevant to the discussion of social evaluations of language usage or pronunciation. For instance, though often cited as 'sloppy speech', there is nothing inherently incorrect about double negation (e.g. *he don't got no money*). In informal working-class contexts, among intimate interlocutors, this might be viewed as entirely appropriate (and even required). However, it is generally viewed as inappropriate in formal education contexts, for instance.

The final linguistic sign is the **symbol**, which is entirely conventional in that it is not linked to its context nor does it bear an iconic relationship to its referent. In other words, English speakers generally agree that a furry, four-legged mammal that barks (among other things) is called a *dog*, regardless of the context. Persian-language (Farsi) speakers call the same animal a *sag*, Javanese speakers an *asu* and so on. There is nothing iconic about *dog, sag* and *asu*, yet we can discuss the animal across contexts with speakers of these respective languages.

This section has introduced and deconstructed the concept of language as it relates to intercultural communication. We have also hinted at the relevance of context to interpreting linguistic meaning. The full relevance of context becomes clearer below and throughout this book. However, it is important first to introduce language variation and point out that just as individuals harbor stereotypes and hold prejudices against others, they do the same for languages and their speakers.

# Language variation

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Those engaged with the study of language variation take as their starting point the proposition that there are at least two ways to say the same thing. For instance, bilingual or multilingual individuals might select among two or more languages to refer to the four-legged mammal referred to above (e.g. *dog* in English or *sag* in Farsi). Bilingual individuals often alternate between languages within a single conversation or context in what is known as **code-switching**.

Variation is also pervasive within a single language variety like English. For example, the English word *dog* may be pronounced differently depending on one's geographic location. A speaker from some areas of the US East Coast pronounces *dog* with the same vowel as in *for* [ɔ] whereas many other English speakers pronounce this with the vowel in *far* [a]. There are innumerable accent, lexicological (e.g. *truck/lorry*) and spelling differences (*favor/favour*) between American, British and Australian Englishes (and other varieties of English again). Many people become angry or confused if a speaker selects a word from another dialect. For instance, Australians, British and New Zealanders bristle at what they perceive to be the Americanisation of English.

Language variation may also be linked to particular situations and over time these situations may foster their own varieties. For instance, in technical scientific discussions or texts, a *dog* might be referred to as *canis lupis familiaris*. Legal discussions (e.g. court, contracts) also take place in a specified way and through a special vocabulary. Most individuals are unfamiliar with legal ways of speaking and writing and need to hire a legal professional to navigate these ways. Furthermore, individuals from minority cultures (e.g. Indigenous Australians) are often doubly disadvantaged because legal ways of speaking are typically rooted in the dominant culture's traditions.

In any case, individuals vary their language from moment to moment in order to respond to or re-create the context at hand and this is known as **stylistic variation**. Stylistic variation includes shifts in usage for features associated with particular speakers (i.e. languages, dialects) or with particular situations (i.e. registers) (Schilling-Estes 2004). It also extends to variation in the way in which individuals accomplish speech acts, such as asking questions, making requests, thanking and so on.

Variation is socially meaningful and this influences how language is used for strategic goals. Languages, language varieties and language features are ideologically non-equivalent (Coupland 2001). For instance, English speakers often link French to culinary superiority and German to technical sophistication and these links are used by advertisers to sell products (Kuppens 2009). Individuals have been found to evaluate language variation along dimensions of **prestige** and **pleasantness**. For instance, Coupland and Bishop (2007) investigated the language attitudes of 500 British individuals and found they rated the Queen's English as most prestigious. However, these individuals rated accents similar to their own among the most pleasant (second only to Standard English).

Stylistic variation is utilised for a number of strategic goals, as will be shown throughout this book. However, accommodation to the hearer is among the strongest factors influencing stylistic variation. Researchers have found that speakers converge towards the speech of a hearer to increase intimacy and diverge from the hearer to decrease intimacy (Giles & Powesland 1975). Discussed under the label **Communication Accommodation Theory**, this behaviour is motivated by a speaker's desire to appear more attractive and promote communicative efficiency with a hearer when that hearer has been evaluated positively (Coupland 2007).

The factors motivating stylistic variation are many. Among other things, stylistic variation has

been linked to upward mobility (e.g. Labov 1972b), topic shift (e.g. Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994), irony (e.g. Clift 1999) and identity (e.g. Coupland 2007). A full discussion of these factors is beyond the scope of this work (for such a discussion see Coupland 2007; Eckert & Rickford 2001). What is critically relevant to this book is that even a monolingual speaker has more than one way to say the same thing and that language variation is socially meaningful. Yet, a speaker's intended meaning critically requires a hearer who understands that meaning or is willing to work cooperatively towards it.

Herein lies the potential flashpoint in intercultural communication. Speakers and hearers do not always share the same understanding of linguistic signs and variation even when they share the same language. This is particularly the case in this era of globalisation, which is characterised by increased contact between diverse peoples. We have established that cultural practices differ (as if you needed to be reminded!) and that individuals tend to evaluate their own group's practices at the expense of others'.

In spite of these potential stumbling blocks, a global world entails the need to communicate across cultures. Language is the means through which we engage with others in global endeavours driven by the economy, educational attainment and personal needs, among other things. This book provides a linguistic perspective on how intercultural communication may successfully be achieved. This emerges from a sophisticated but accessible discussion of linguistic theory as it relates to cross-cultural and intercultural practices. This knowledge will empower the reader to avoid intercultural transgressions wherever possible and to repair these transgressions when they take place. Communication by its very nature is a co-constructed, ritualistic event. Erving Goffman (1959) aptly discusses participation in this event in terms of a theatre performance. To these ends, the dear reader might consider this book her or his acting notes for communicating across cultures.

## 1.4 Communication across cultures

### Studying language, pragmatics and context

This book approaches intercultural communication in terms of pragmatics and unfolding discourse. There are innumerable definitions for the study of pragmatics, each of which suggests a slightly different approach (Archer & Grundy 2011). Crystal (2010, p. 124) explains **pragmatics** as follows:

Pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on others. In theory, we can say anything we like. In practice, we follow a large number of social rules (most of them unconsciously) that constrain the way we speak.

On the one hand, for instance, Crystal (2010) points out, there is no law that one shouldn't tell jokes at a funeral but it is not generally done. On the other hand, comedians violate these unspoken guidelines for a living. Comedian Sacha Baron Cohen often does this when his characters (e.g. Ali G, Borat) ask interview questions that are considered ignorant, ill informed or inappropriate by interviewees. In short, individuals usually have a sense of what is considered appropriate, polite and/or preferred behaviour in cultures with which they are familiar. Engaging with unfamiliar cultures means running the risk of not following the rules or not knowing them well enough to violate them successfully.

Context is an essential, if not *the* essential, concept in the study of pragmatics (see Archer



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