



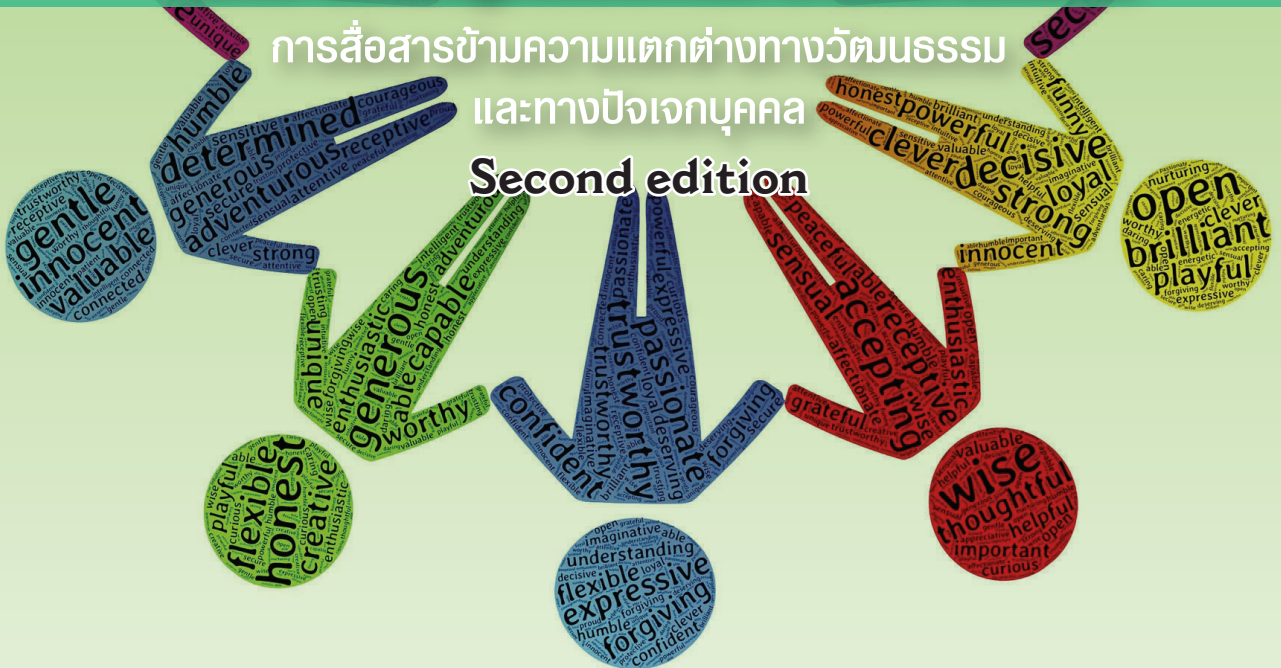
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Communication across Intercultural and Interpersonal Differences

การสื่อสารข้ามความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรม
และทางปัจเจกบุคคล

Second edition



Nuchada Dumrongsiri

This textbook was supported by the grant in 2017 from Research Administration Division, Thammasat University.

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Photocopying instead of using books
is destroying intellectual creativity.

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Faculty of Liberal Arts

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Preface

Communication across Intercultural and Interpersonal Differences is written as a textbook for a course related to intercultural communication that underlines how culture, communication, and language are interrelated. This text is aimed to increase students' awareness, knowledge, and understandings of cultural and individual differences as a strategy to communicate appropriately and effectively in intercultural interactions. Throughout the text, students are reinforced with a neutral mindset through a communication perspective that helps prepare them to overcome difficulties resulting from global diversity.

This book consists of six chapters, with the first three chapters focusing on basic theoretical concepts and definitions of key terms and the last three chapters emphasizing communication between several cultural groups. Chapter 1 presents how culture is redefined in this text based on a communication approach and how the three terms of culture, communication, and language are bound together as intercultural communication. Chapter 2 explains communication process, barriers, and multiculturalism strategy while Chapter 3 discusses cultural influences on use and interpretation of verbal and nonverbal communication. Chapters 4 and 5 address an awareness of and how to bridge differences in gender and other characteristics, including disabilities and stigmatized identities. Lastly, Chapter 6 describes individual and generation differences via an interpersonal communication approach as a practice for effective intercultural communication. All six chapters stem from the synthesis of academic and non-academic resources from language, communication, culture, and psychology fields to provide a well-rounded perspective to better understand group and individual differences for a fruitful communication in intercultural context.

Lastly, the author would like to express appreciation to Thammasat University and Faculty of Liberal Arts for their support, to the reviewers for their suggestions, making this text better, and to my family and loved ones for their encouragement. Without full support from them, this text would not be possible.

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September 2019*



Chapter

1

Culture, Communication, and Language

Objectives:

1. To define culture, communication, and language
2. To understand how culture, communication, and language are connected as intercultural communication
3. To describe cultural dimensions
4. To explain how culture influences attitudes, values, and behaviors

Contents:

- Definitions and Components
- The interrelationships among communication, language, and culture
- Cultural Dimensions
- Culture, Attitudes, and Values

Chapter 1

Culture, Communication, and Language

Chapter Focus

In Chapter 1, key terms, which include culture, communication, and language, are defined and then explained how they are connected as intercultural communication. Also, another focus of this chapter is on what culture is – to be defined commonly and re-defined in this textbook – and how culture is classified in dimensions to understand people’s behavior. Lastly, this chapter discusses how culture, attitudes, and values influence people with different cultural background to behave differently.

Definitions and Components of Intercultural Communication

Understanding Key Terms

Culture, communication, and language. When people meet someone from different culture, language and communications skills are the first thing that plays an important role in initial conversation. Language refers to systems of meaning (Lim, 2003) and reflects thoughts and social reality of its speakers

(Sapir, 1924/1949; Whorf, 1956). Communication is a process to exchange verbal and non-verbal messages to build mutual understanding. The two terms are closely related, but the unit of study is different. Language is medium; communication is interaction. Language scholars study what people said – text and meaning. Communication scholars study how and why people said things – behavior and perception.

Another term that comes to play in intercultural setting is culture. Culture refers to “an accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol system” (Neuliep, 2015, p. 470). When considering this definition, the key concepts are twofold: (1) things that are shared by cultural group members and (2) symbol system or language. In other words, culture and language are related. Culture is in language; culture is shared through language. Language serves as culture in itself and as a tool to transfer culture.

The statement “culture is in language” means that, when using the host language, people can learn the culture that is embedded in it. For example, when speaking Thai language, people use polite words to respect older people, using “mai saab” (ไม้อาบ) instead of “mai ru” (ไม่รู้) to mean “I don’t know.” Thus, it reflects Thai culture that values seniority. However, people can partially learn the host culture in its language. They cannot fully understand the new culture from using the language only. For example, non-Thais are aware to value seniority when speaking Thai language, but they may not learn all Thai values and beliefs that are not reflected in the linguistic aspects such as social manners.

The other statement “culture is shared through language” means that language is used as a medium to teach and learn culture among in-group members and between ingroup and outgroup. Culture is transferred through language and other symbols such as nonverbal behaviors, pictorial signs, and artifacts as well as via people’s interaction.

Re-defining Key Terms

Culture. “One cannot not communicate” is a well-known axiom that raises how communication is important in human communication (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967, p.49). It underlines that people communicate all the time through their behavior. Behavior is informative, and then communicative. When one cannot not communicate, the next question is how one can communicate effectively across various kinds of differences between communicators. The differences include personal and cultural aspects as well as language.

Being a good communicator is to understand the statement “*a person is culture.*” Each person is full of differences in terms of internal and external layers. The internal layer includes individual differences such as personality, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and preferences. The external layer is tied to group belonging such as gender, language, ethnicity, community, and culture. When a person is treated as a total culture, a communicator constructs a message that is tailor-made for the person with an awareness of his/her various differences. What is said is similar to all, but how is said is particular for each person. Then, communication is more effective with “the person-oriented method.”

When a person is culture, a definition of culture goes beyond any boundaries. Culture is commonly perceived as a construct related to geographical or physical limits such as country, continent, race, and ethnicity. Scholars have studied Western culture, Asian culture, Chinese culture, Thai culture, and others that are defined to geography and physical aspects. In this way, culture is studied from the outside border to explain people’s behavior as a group member. For example, Thailand tends to be perceived as collectivist or group-oriented culture. However, a better way to understand culture is to look inside cultural members to explain people’s behavior as an individual who defines himself/herself as “a member of many groups simultaneously” – multiculturalism. For example, although Thailand values group-oriented behaviors, the caution is that each Thai is different in a degree to which collectivism is applied. Some are more collectivist; others are more individualist, depending on individual differences and personal background.

In other words, an alternative view to better define culture and communication across differences is to readjust a mindset when thinking of culture. Culture has been investigated as a group practice to explain a member's behavior. Instead, culture is in each person to reflect collective behaviors of each group to which he/she feels belonged. As our society is becoming a digital community, new communication technologies, especially social media, connect people across time and boundaries and creates a new society online where cultures are blended, but differences among people are maintained at the same time. Thus, to better understand culture that becomes more complex and explain human communication behavior is to shift a focus from collective to individual boundaries – from assigned grouping to self-identifying culture.

Culture and communication as intercultural communication. The study of communication and culture is to look at the two terms – culture and communication – separately and how they are woven together. Communication is “the process by which verbal and nonverbal messages are used to create meaning” (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000, p.412). Culture serves as “the rules of living and functioning in society” (Quintanilla & Wahl, 2017, p.356). These rules include values, beliefs, and behaviors shared among members in a certain society. When the two terms are combined as cultural communication, several perspectives define them in different ways. Anthropology views cultural communication as “a process through which cultural difference is expressed and constructed” (Philipsen, 2003, p. 35). Literature perspective refers cultural communication as speech genres of a society that demonstrate public forms of communication interdependent with everyday speech habits of that society's members (Philipsen, 2003). Communication scholars define cultural communication as a process of activity to produce shared understandings, shared meaning, and coordination among members of a particular society (Philipsen,2003).

Through a communication perspective, culture and communication are bounded as “intercultural communication.” The term ‘intercultural’ emphasizes an interaction between members of different groups. The interaction refers to ongoing communication activities enacted by each communicator to exchange messages and create shared meaning and mutual understanding. During the

interaction, language, which refers to abstract rules (i.e., phonological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic rules) (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Schmidt, 1989, p. 145), serves as a tool to communicate verbal, nonverbal, textual, and sign messages. The communicators encode and decode the messages based on the context where culture in each person comes to play for interpretation.

Accordingly, intercultural communication is comprised of three constructs that are activated during the interaction: culture, communication, and language. Thus, in this text, intercultural communication is defined as “an interaction between two ends using verbal and nonverbal language to exchange messages and build mutual understanding based on an awareness of individual and cultural differences” (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Summary of Three Components in Intercultural Communication

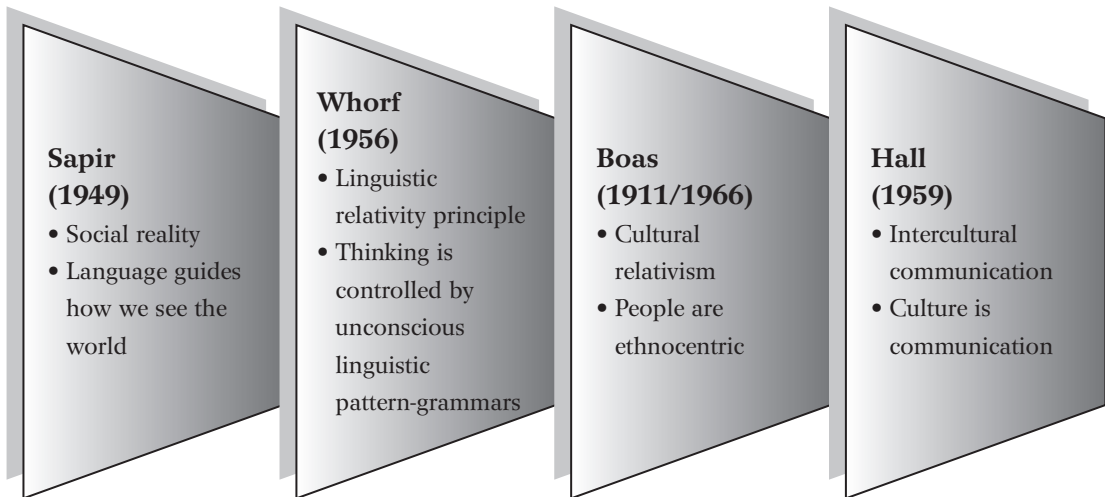
Key Terms	Language	Communication	Culture
Definition	System of meaning	Process of message exchange	Self-identifying group belonging
Function	Medium	Interaction	Interpretation
Unit of analysis	What people said (text and meaning)	How people said (behavior and perception)	What, how, and why people said (symbol system, behavior, and perception)
<p>Intercultural Communication: an interaction between two ends using verbal and nonverbal language to exchange messages and build mutual understanding based on an awareness of individual and cultural differences</p>			

In summary, a traditional approach defines culture by typically using characteristics such as race, nationality, ethnicity, or geographic region to operationalize culture. An alternative approach defines culture as a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms that affect the behavior of a group of people. With the shift of focus, culture is not tied to where members are born or what they appear physically such as skin color and language use. Instead, culture reflects in “the commonalities in and interpretations of members’ behaviors” (Wiseman, 2003, p. 192). Thus, the alternative approach, as a framework of this textbook, includes more subculture/subpopulation in intercultural communication where dominant members interact with those in non-dominant groups such as elderly people, people with physical disabilities, people who are deaf, people who differ in sexual orientations, or people who design their own genders.

The Interrelationships among Culture, Communication, and Language

History of the Study of Intercultural Communication

The three constructs – culture, communication, and language – are interrelated to each other as a new term “intercultural communication.” The study of intercultural communication was started as an academic discipline when Hall (1959) firstly introduced the term “intercultural communication” with the belief that culture is communication. He suggested that studying culture alone is not enough to understand people’s behavior across cultures. Rather, it is better to look at the interaction – how people from different culture interact with one another. Although Hall was an anthropologist, his view of studying culture is consistent with scholars in communication field. Hall is recognized as the founder of intercultural communication (Neuliep, 2015) (see Picture 1.1).



Picture 1.1: History of Intercultural Communication

Source: Based on literature review by the author

Before Hall (1959) suggested the term intercultural communication, the study of culture and communication was prevalent during the World War II when military were sent oversea for services and needed training for communicating with others in different culture. Hall's works were influenced by Franz Boas, the famous anthropologist, who observed that people are ethnocentric – they perceive their own native culture as a preferred standard to judge behavior of other cultures (Neuliep, 2015). Thus, to understand people behavior and their interaction is to understand their language and cultural practices. This idea was termed later as “cultural relativism” (Boas, 1966).

Intercultural Communication as a Complex Process

Intercultural communication is a process, and the process is complex. The intercultural communication is a process in which interactions are dynamic to exchange messages between communicators in intercultural setting. The process is complex as the communicators exchange not only messages, but also beliefs and values rooted in each to build an understanding shared between them. Those beliefs and values include personal, social, political, and cultural aspects that tend to be different between the communicators. Moreover, the

process becomes much more complex when the communicators use different languages.

In intercultural setting, which refers to an interaction between people who are members of different groups and hold different sets of shared beliefs and behaviors, the first barrier that comes to mind is language. People learn to speak other languages in addition to their own native language to communicate better in intercultural context. However, language is not enough. Although people speak the same language, misunderstandings are common. The next question is what is in the intercultural setting that makes the communication difficult to create shared understanding.

In addition to the language barrier, misunderstanding in intercultural interactions comes from a lack of knowledge of the other's culture. Thus, to be competent in intercultural communication, people need knowledge of another culture, motivation to communicate with those coming from different culture, and skills to actually perform communication behaviors in a real situation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

Firstly, knowledge refers to awareness and understanding of the other's culture. Competent communicators know communication rules, context, and normative expectations when interacting with members of the other culture. To obtain the needed knowledge, people need a flexible cognitive system to be open-minded and sensitive to feedback of the other person.

The next component is motivation, which refers to feelings, intentions, needs, and drives to communicate or not to communicate with others from different cultures. Fears, dislikes, and anxieties when meeting strangers create negative motivation, and then avoid the intercultural interaction.

Lastly, skills refer to actual performance of behaviors to be effective and appropriate in the communication context. Skills include verbal, nonverbal, and role. They are goal-oriented and consistent. Communicators are perceived as competent when they can replicate the same behavior with the same effect expected. In short, to be competent in intercultural interactions, people need an awareness of cultural differences and language and communication skills.

Cultural Dimensions

Scholars have offered a number of cultural typologies. This textbook focuses on cultural patterns that are frequently studied. Culture is categorized into five well-known primary dimensions to understand behavior of people with different cultural backgrounds. Cultural dimensions help explain why people from different cultures communicate and behave differently. The five cultural dimensions include Hall's (1976) one dimension and Hofstede's (1984) selected four dimensions.

High-Low Context Culture

People consider the importance of context and its meaning differently. The degree to which importance is assigned to the context influences communication and language use. Hall (1976) suggested two categories of culture: high-context and low-context. When placing high importance on context, people interpret others' behavior depending on the contextual or situational cues such as social status, relationship, reputation, dress code, seniority, and nonverbal language. What is not said verbally (i.e. implicit/indirect messages) is meaningful and more important. High-context culture includes China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and Arab and African cultures (Lussier, 2010; Neuliep, 2015).

On the other hand, when placing low importance on context, people depend less on contextual or situational cues to give meaning to others' behavior and things around them. What is actually spoken or written (i.e., explicit/direct messages) is more meaningful than the cues. Low-context culture includes France, Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Lussier, 2010; Neuliep, 2015).

Members of high-context and low-context cultures communicate and use language differently. Being competent in intercultural interactions between members of high- and low-context cultures requires an awareness of cultural and linguistic differences to avoid misunderstanding and false interpretation. For example, silence and talking are valued in different ways. In a high-context

culture such as Japanese and Native American cultures, silence and less talking are considered proper and comfortable as a way to show politeness (Petkova, 2015). Unlike in a low-context culture such as in the United States, small talk is considered more important and enjoyable as a way to initiate the conversation and engage strangers in communication (Jones, 1999).

Individualist-Collectivist Culture

Individualism and collectivism are placed along a continuum where individualism is on one end and collectivism is on the other end. As reflected in its term, individualist culture prefers independence over interdependence; it values personal interest, individual achievement, uniqueness, and equality (Hofstede, 1984). Behaviors of individualists are guided by personal goals over group goals. They believe that they are responsible for their own happiness and achievement. They communicate verbally and nonverbally to express personal freedom in thinking and acting. For example, individualists tend to use direct words to voice their opinion rather than remain silent to preserve relationships. Most individualist cultures include the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, Netherlands, New Zealand, Italy, Belgium, and Denmark, respectively (Hecht, Andersen, & Ribeau, 1989).

Alternatively, collectivist culture values group interest and harmony over personal benefit (Hofstede, 1984). As they are group-oriented, group loyalty, relationships, and levels become more important than individual freedom. When communicate, they may suppress emotions especially if it is against the group mood or group maintenance. Behaviors of collectivists are guided by interdependent between group members. They rely on each other when doing things and follow social and relational role expectations. For example, a person with a higher status is expected to oversee lower-status people who are expected to respect and obey the higher-ranking one in return. Most collectivist cultures include Venezuela, Colombia, Pakistan, Peru, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Chile, and Hong Kong, respectively (Hecht et al., 1989).

Later, researchers believe that cultural patterns may not be completely classified as individualism or collectivism. Triandis (1995) suggested that

differences may exist within individualism or collectivism. He then further differentiated individualism and collectivism into horizontal and vertical aspects (Triandis, 1995). Horizontal pattern underlines equality in which its cultural members perceive themselves as the same as other members. Vertical pattern emphasizes hierarchy in which its cultural members see themselves as different from other members.

Uncertainty Avoidance Culture

Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory posits that "when strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction or increasing predictability about the behavior of both themselves and others in the interaction" (p.100). This theory is based on communication perspective and can be applied theoretically to understand intercultural context (Gudykunst, 2003), where uncertainty is higher than intracultural interaction.

During interactions, uncertainty is reduced through an exchange of information that allows each person to predict the other's attitudes and behaviors (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In a certain situation such as intercultural meeting, uncertainty is high as people do not know the other's culture well (e.g., language, greeting, social manners, and business practices). Then, anxiety is usually high.

People from different culture consider and manage uncertainty in different ways. Uncertainty refers to risk and ambiguity in which the degree of tolerance and avoidance is varied by culture (Hofstede, 1984). Members of high avoidance uncertainty culture have lower tolerance of ambiguity. When facing uncertainty, they express high level of anxiety and need formal rules and truth. They tend to be low-risk taking, fear of failure, and prefer rules of behavior as a way to help predict others. For example, in classroom, students in high-uncertainty avoidance culture may feel more comfortable with structured teaching and learning where teachers are expected to be knowledge providers.

Differently, members of low avoidance uncertainty culture have high tolerance of ambiguity and are more flexible to diversity and differences without excessive stress and anxiety. Uncertainty is a part of daily life and treated as it occurs. For example, in classroom, students in low-uncertainty avoidance culture

may be more comfortable with open teaching and learning where knowledge is shared through discussion among teacher and students.

An awareness of these cultural differences helps people to communicate in intercultural contexts better. High-uncertainty avoidance culture includes Japan, Mexico, Greece, France, Chile, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Argentina, and Egypt (Lussier, 2010; Neuliep, 2015). Low-uncertainty avoidance culture includes Canada, New Zealand, Denmark, India, Jamaica, Great Britain, Sweden, South Africa, the United States (Lussier, 2010; Neuliep, 2015). Thailand tends to be scored in high-uncertainty avoidance culture (Country comparison, n.d.).

Masculine-Feminine Culture

Gender is culture and has been overlooked as one of cultural differences (Hecht et al., 1989). People's behaviors are influenced by its cultural view of gender role expectations. Hofstede (1984) underlined how gender roles are distributed in a culture, which is classified into masculine and feminine cultures.

Masculine culture follows traditional roles of males and females. Males place high value on competition, achievement, and assertiveness, whereas nurturance, affection, and emotionality are expected for females (Hofstede, 1984). Thus, masculine culture is a society in which social gender roles are clearly different. Men are tough and have material success; women are tender and take care of quality of life. For example, men are expected to be successful in profession as a provider for their family. Women are expected to nurture children and be responsible for household quality. Masculine culture includes Japan, Arab, Austria, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States (Hecht et al., 1989; Lussier, 2010; Neuliep, 2015).

On the other hand, feminine culture is a society in which social gender roles can be overlapped. Male and female roles tend to be flexible – not to follow traditional ones. For example, women are accepted to have professional success rather than to nurture their family as a major responsibility. Feminine culture includes Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, Netherland, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, and Thailand (Lussier, 2010; Neuliep, 2015).