EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

A Christian Perspective

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Contents

Introduction

Intercultural communication is a discipline that has come of age. Founded in the 1950s, maturing throughout the following decades, and now considered an independent discipline in hundreds of universities and colleges, its development parallels the development of instantaneous communication for people all over the world. Not surprisingly, Christians have been interested in learning how to understand culture and connect it with Christ's message for far longer than the discipline has existed. However, contemporary intercultural communication offers insights not often understood by Christians historically that will help us to communicate (both as learners and as ambassadors) and partner more effectively for the sake of Christ.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Intercultural communication for Christians rests on three primary theological foundations. First, since we are made in the image of the God who reveals himself to people and listens to their prayers, we are by nature communicating creatures. Second, we serve a Creator who has communicated himself to us by revealing himself to people who recorded the revelations they received. Finally, we are commanded to communicate the message of the good news with others.

Although we are made in God's image, there are realities that impact our ability to communicate. First, we are physical and therefore limited. We are creatures of our environment, but because we are made in God's image we can rise above the constraints our environment places on us. Second, our knowledge of ourselves and our own culture is finite, even more so our knowledge of the

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new cultures where following the evangelistic task and God's call may bring us. Thankfully, we are creatures created to grow and learn, so we always have the opportunity to reach a better understanding of what we face and to learn how to communicate Christ in more effective ways in those settings. Finally, we are categorizers. As humans, we see the world around us and want to make sense of it. Our families and societies offer us "maps" of the world that make sense to them, and we grow up learning how to see and read those particular maps. We use them to make sense of what happens around us, but each culture has unique approaches to this map-making and map-reading process, so there is an almost infinite flexibility in the ways we approach life, even though life is based on certain universals (such as the need for food and water, shelter, relationships with others, and social organization).

The Complexity and Disciplines of Intercultural Communication

Another reality that must be considered is the sheer complexity of the communication process, which we tend to take for granted until we encounter people from cultures that differ from our own. We will explore the reality that communication is always a two-way street. We are always in the role of being *both* sender and receiver.

Further, we will explore how there are levels of interlocking and dynamically changing assumptions in everything we do. Communication—and the worldview on which we base our communication—is dynamic rather than static. We will see that the many factors involved in intercultural communication do not simply add up in a linear fashion; they blend together like ingredients in a cake. They are part of larger systems, which are themselves affected by the worldviews, the environments, and the dynamics of relationships that are always present. As individuals we will come to understand that we use different formulas of factors in different settings; we change depending on the context. Therefore, static models of intercultural communication by definition will never do justice to the complexity of the discipline. We will also see that, to some extent, the "cultures" we discuss are all the products of our own organizational frameworks and are really inventions that help us to understand the maps that people use to guide them through life.

The picture is further complicated by the many closely related disciplines—anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and psychology—that shed light on aspects of intercultural communication. For the Christian, of course, theology and missiology must also be included. It is not surprising that the resulting mix is so complex that most courses focus on teaching people *how* to communicate

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better in new cultural settings rather than laying a full theoretical foundation for the discipline.

As we wrote this book, the discipline of intercultural communication was constantly changing due to the increase of solid empirical research. The very complexity of the events involved in intercultural communication makes appropriate operationalization extremely difficult. There is no coherent, single intercultural communication model that is accepted across the board, though we will see in chapter 1 that the number of approaches is limited, as are the areas of contemporary inquiry.

Outline for the Book

Our task is to walk you through the critical elements that comprise an introduction to intercultural communication for Christian workers of all types. To accomplish this goal, we have divided this book into four major parts with twenty-four chapters followed by a reference list of all cited sources. What follows is an overview of each part and a brief description of each chapter of the book.

Part 1: Introducing Intercultural Communication

For a long time Christians have struggled to communicate the "pure" gospel story across cultural boundaries. In more recent centuries, we have come to realize that the gospel is not naked; it is always enfleshed in culture if for no other reason than it is expressed in and constrained by human language. It is clear that we need to understand what intercultural communication has to offer in our increasingly multicultural world and church.

In part 1, therefore, we provide an overview of the historical development (both secular and Christian) of intercultural communication and deal with implications that are important for people who cross cultures to communicate Christ.

Chapter 1: What Is Intercultural Communication?: We lay some of the important foundations for the rest of the book by defining communication and culture, briefly surveying the development of the discipline, offering a model for the process of communication, and exploring the major approaches and themes found in the contemporary discipline.

Chapter 2: The Story Line of Intercultural Communication: We present two perspectives on the history of the discipline: the secular and the Christian. We also tell the stories of and draw lessons from three people who crossed cultures for Christ before the discipline of intercultural communication existed. Finally, we discuss how Christians currently handle the discipline.

Chapter 3: Perspectives on Intercultural Communication: We examine the differing perspectives on intercultural communication, including theoretical and methodological approaches to the discipline as well as core themes. Then we explore a Christian perspective on the purpose of communication, missiological implications of intercultural communication, and the more significant challenges that the secular discipline presents for Christians.

Part 2: Foundations of Intercultural Communication Patterns

In this section of the book we turn our attention to the foundations underlying patterns of intercultural communication.

Chapter 4: Worldview and Intercultural Communication: We look more closely at worldview, which has long been considered the cornerstone of what people believe, how they behave, and (more recently) how they communicate. No person's worldview is static; it changes as the person changes due to circumstances, environment, religious faith, or other factors.

Chapter 5: Verbal Intercultural Communication: We discuss the issues related to people's use of language as they communicate. Language gives humans a framework for understanding the world around them as well as the categories into which they organize what they observe and what happens to them.

Chapter 6: Societies and Social Institutions: All communication takes place in a social context. Understanding that context is just as important as understanding the ways in which communication takes place—without being able to place communication in its proper context, we will never be able to understand what is being communicated.

Chapter 7: Networks, In-Groups, and Social Change: We deal with the reality that within their social contexts, (1) people have roles and statuses that guide their behavior, (2) groups form, and (3) people network with others to accomplish their goals.

Part 3: Patterns of Intercultural Communication

In this section we focus on the cultural values reflected in the patterns of communication in cultures.

Chapter 8: Nonverbal Intercultural Communication: We explore the broad concept of nonverbal communication through three types of coding: paraverbal, stillness and silence, and nonverbal (including physical characteristics, environmental and artifactual communication, and kinesics). We then explore the functions of nonverbal communication.

Chapter 9: Contexting: We focus on the extent to which people rely on the context in which they communicate to be part of the message. In some

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societies, people live in an "ocean of information" that they glean from the events around them. They learn to value reading the message from that ocean rather than from actual words. In other societies, people are not expected to live in the same ocean of information and therefore rely more on words and what those words convey to grasp the meaning of what is being communicated. The former societies are called high context, the latter low context.

Chapter 10: Polychronic and Monochronic Time: We examine cultural understandings of time. Edward Hall divided cultures along a continuum at one end of which people conceive of time as a commodity that can be sliced into pieces and at the other end people see time as unitary and interwoven. The former societies he called monochronic (one-time) and the latter polychronic (multitime); people's use and understanding of time is radically different in each type of society—different enough to have an impact on how they communicate the things they value.

Chapter 11: Individualism and Collectivism: We address the way in which people define themselves, whether as independent individuals or as members belonging to a group. More than any other set of values, individualism-collectivism is central to understanding the ways that people in different societies communicate.

Chapter 12: Social Power in Intercultural Communication: Our discussion deals with the reality that all societies have ideals related to how they prefer to handle differences in social power. Do they want to level the playing field, or do they prefer to ensure that power differentials are maintained and supported? Geert Hofstede called the way we handle these differences in social power "power distance"; in this chapter we consider how power distance affects communication patterns.

Chapter 13: Gender Roles: We examine how differing societies understand the extent to which gender roles are intermingled or distinguished, and to what degree. We explain the various ideas as well as their impact on communication and ministry.

Chapter 14: Honor and Justice: What role does honor—and the idea of maintaining one's face—play in communication? How is it distinguished from the role of justice and a forensic approach to dealing with conflict? We will explore the impact of these orientations on how people prefer to communicate.

Part 4: Developing Intercultural Expertise

In the final part of the book we examine areas in which developing competency in communicating in a new cultural setting is important.

Chapter 15: Cultural Adaptation: We present what it takes to adjust to living in—and not just visiting—a new culture. This involves a four-step process from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence that incorporates how to handle cultural incidents and differences when they occur.

Chapter 16: Intercultural Competence: We examine what is involved in not simply adapting but also developing a level of competence in the new culture. While it involves knowing the language, this competence goes beyond just language to include cultural learning as well.

Chapter 17: Intercultural Relationships: Christians cross cultures to develop relationships with people, and we explore what is involved in that process.

Chapter 18: Intercultural Evangelism: We give careful attention to the process of communicating Christ and inviting people to respond in ways that make sense in light of their communication patterns and values.

Chapter 19: Intercultural Discipleship: We present what is involved in helping people who have come to Christ better and more deeply connect to him and to his body in ways that are faithful to Scripture but understandable within their culture.

Chapter 20: Intercultural Church Planting: We introduce significant issues that are part of gathering new believers into vibrant and healthy fellowships for the purpose of building up one another in Christ.

Chapter 21: Cross-Cultural Teaching and Learning: Because so many Christians cross cultures as teachers or trainers, we examine what it takes to teach or train in ways that take into account how people in different cultural settings prefer to learn.

Chapter 22: Intercultural Ministry through Teams: We discuss the steps in building a strong team in which the gifts of its members are properly channeled into ministry for Christ—especially when that team is multicultural in composition.

Chapter 23: Conflict and Culture: Inevitably, conflict will be part of everyone's intercultural experience. Understanding how to engage in conflict in ways that are appropriate to Scripture and local culture is a challenging task, and we direct our attention to what that involves.

Chapter 24: The Future of Intercultural Communication: Finally, to close the book, we briefly address issues related to the future of intercultural communication, especially as it relates to Christian ministry.

A Note on the Case Studies

In most case studies in this book the actual names of the primary characters are fictitious to ensure minimal potential exposure for those who work

in settings where being known as missionaries could be detrimental to their ministry. Unless otherwise noted, or if the name is historically well known (e.g., in chap. 2), the reader should assume that the names used in case studies and sidebars are not the actual names of the people involved. In many cases the circumstances described have been altered in ways that remain true to the issues faced but without giving so much detail that anyone could be identified.

Additional Resources for Students and Teachers

In addition to the reference list, we offer several sets of helpful resources. First, as we have done with the other books in the Encountering Mission series, we have included a case study at the end of each chapter. Most of them leave the reader with a dilemma for which a solution should be sought. For every case study, there are numerous good solutions as well as many bad ones. Having students wrestle with the dilemmas presented in a case study helps them learn to draw from theory in light of practical problems faced in intercultural life.

If you are a teacher, we encourage you to use the case studies in ways that fit your objectives for the class. Students might write an essay on possible solutions to a case study as a homework assignment. Class discussion of the case studies can also be used to determine student awareness of the issues raised. Students can be split into small groups to work together in developing possible solutions to prompt them to think more deeply about the issues involved. *Case Studies in Mission* (Hiebert and Hiebert 1987), from which some of the case studies in this book are drawn, also provides helpful ways to use case studies as teaching devices.

Finally, numerous helpful sidebars are scattered throughout the book. Most offer deeper consideration of a particular issue discussed in the text and include questions for reflection and discussion.

Encountering Mission Series

Effective Intercultural Communication is one of eight books in the award-winning Encountering Mission series. Each book focuses on mission from an evangelical perspective. For many years, J. Herbert Kane's textbooks, including *The Making of a Missionary* (1975), *Understanding Christian Missions* (1976), *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (1976), *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission* (1978), *Life and Work on the Mission Field* (1980), and *The Christian World Mission: Today and Tomorrow* (1981), have been widely used in seminaries and Bible colleges as introductory texts. With the passing of time, however, his classic works have become dated, and Baker

Publishing Group recognized that the time had come to develop a series of books to replace Kane's gifts to the mission community. The *Encountering Mission* series, then, builds on the best of Kane's work but also extends the discussion in significant ways to meet the needs of those who are preparing for effective missional engagement in today's world.

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Introducing Intercultural Communication

At one time in mission history, it was thought that we simply needed to bring the "pure" gospel to the people whom God has called us to serve. Now, however, many—though not all—Christians recognize that our ideals of the "pure" gospel are always tainted by our own cultural viewpoints. The gospel is not naked; it is always enfleshed in culture if for no other reason than it is expressed in and constrained by human language. Evangelistic tools such as the Four Spiritual Laws, at one time considered the pure gospel, are increasingly regarded as culturally conditioned formulations of the gospel message that do not always communicate well in places where the culture differs from the one in which they were developed.

These realities, and others like them, clearly demonstrate the need for understanding and using principles of intercultural communication in our increasingly multicultural church. In our interconnected world, the ability to communicate well across cultural divides is more important than ever. From business people who travel internationally to short-term cross-cultural

workers to long-term church planters, those skilled in understanding how to communicate well are more likely to succeed in the tasks they face.

To help you understand this principle, in chapter 1 we offer important definitions and a model of communication that sets the stage for all the discussion that follows. In chapter 2 we present two perspectives on the history of the discipline: the secular and the Christian. We consider three historical figures who crossed cultures for Christ before the discipline of intercultural communication even existed and present the ways in which Christians currently handle the discipline before examining the ways people approach intercultural communication in chapter 3. Finally, we explore selected issues from a Christian perspective, including the purpose of communication, the missiological implications of intercultural communication, and the more significant challenges that the secular discipline presents for Christians.

What Is Intercultural Communication?

I n this chapter we lay some of the important foundations for the rest of the book by defining communication and culture, briefly surveying the development of the discipline, offering a model for the process of communication, and exploring the major approaches and themes found in the contemporary discipline.

DEFINING COMMUNICATION

One of the early problems facing the discipline involved the meaning of the two terms at its heart: culture and communication. Neither was clearly or even adequately defined (Saral 1978, 389–90; Kramsch 2002; Levine, Park, and Kim 2007). Although many definitions for each term have been proposed over the decades, there is still no single set on which everyone agrees.

With that in mind, how do we communicate? As early as 1970, almost one hundred definitions of communication had appeared in print (Mortensen 1972, 14). A very general definition is "communication occurs whenever persons attribute significance to message-related behavior."

This definition implies several postulates (Mortensen 1972, 14–21; compare with Porter and Samovar 1982, 30). First, communication is *dynamic*: it is not a static "thing" but a dynamic *process* that maintains stability and identity through all its fluctuations.

Second, communication is *irreversible*: the very fact that communication has occurred (or is occurring) means that the persons in communication have changed, however subtly. The fact that we have memories means that once we begin the process, there is no "reset" button; we cannot begin again as blank slates.

> *One foundational rule that people who are communicating across cultural divides must keep in mind [is this]: . . .* people interpret your words and actions in ways that make sense to them. *Often, therefore, what you think you are communicating is not what they are receiving. If nothing else, knowing this may help you be more humble in attempting to convey the greatest message of all.*
>
> Moreau, Corwin, and McGee
> 2004, 267–68, emphasis in original

Third, communication is *proactive*: in communicating we are not merely passive respondents to external stimuli. When we communicate, we enter the process totally and are proactive, selecting, amplifying, and manipulating the signals that come to us.

Fourth, communication is *interactive* on two fronts: the intrapersonal, or what goes on inside each communicator; and the interpersonal, or what takes place between communicators. We must pay attention to both fronts to understand the communication process.

Finally, communication is *contextual*: it always happens in a larger context, be that the physical environment, the emotional mood of the communication event, or the purposes (which may be overt or hidden) behind the communication.

DEFINING CULTURE

As beings made in God's image and created with the need to learn, grow, and order our world, we learn the rules of the society in which we grow up. Those rules provide us with maps to understand the world around us. None of us escapes the fact that she or he is a cultural creature, and culture has a deep impact on communication.

At the same time, trying to understand any culture is like trying to hit a moving target. Your culture—like all cultures—is not rigid and static. It is dynamic. The rules you learned while growing up will not be identical to the

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rules you pass on to your own children, especially in technologically advanced settings. Scott still remembers learning how to use a mouse for a computer, while his children acquired the skill at such an early age that they have no memories of learning how to use one.

But what is this thing we all are immersed in that is called "culture"? In 1952, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn (38–40, 149) compiled at least 164 definitions of culture for analysis and used close to 300 definitions in their book! One of the reasons culture is so difficult to define is simply because it is so deeply a part of each of us. Every interpretation we make—even every observation—is molded by culture.

One of the most commonly cited definitions is that of Clifford Geertz, who defines culture as a "historically transmitted pattern of meanings embedded and expressed in symbols that are used to communicate, perpetuate, and develop . . . knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (1973, 89). In this concise definition, Geertz indicates both the breadth and depth of culture, helping to frame its richness and complexity.

However we may choose to define culture, it is clear that it is a dynamic (Moreau 1995, 121) and interconnected (Hall 1976, 16–17) pattern that is learned (Hofstede 1991, 5) and transmitted from one generation to the next through symbols (Geertz 1973, 89) that are consciously and unconsciously framed (Hall 1983, 230) and shared by a group of people (Dahl 2004, 4); this pattern enables them to interpret the behaviors of others (Spencer-Oatey 2000, 4).

At the same time, culture is neither monolithic nor homogeneous. We can recognize at least four layers of culture (fig. 1.1; see also Hofstede 1991, 6–7; Hesselgrave 1978; Levine, Park, and Kim 2007, 211). The first layer encompasses the universals we all share as humans, including not only such things as language, institutions, values, and sociability, but also our bearing God's image, our need for relationships, our ability to learn and grow, and so on. We elaborate more on these universals later in the discussion of the common human core.

The second layer includes the specific values and worldview of the largest cultural (or national) unit that people identify as their own. They provide the rule book by which people from that culture operate in meeting their universal needs.

The third layer involves the reality that many of us are part of subcultures within the larger societal or national setting. Much intercultural communication research focuses on the second and third layers.

The fourth and final layer in the diagram reflects that people—even those of the most collective cultures—are still individuals and choose how they will live by cultural rules and regulations. It also reflects that as a genetically unique

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FIGURE 1.1
THE LAYERS OF CULTURE

Layer 4:
Individual Idiosyncrasies

Layer 3:
Ethnic/Familial/Community
Specifics

Layer 2:
National/Ethnolinguistic
Particulars

Layer 1:
Human Universals
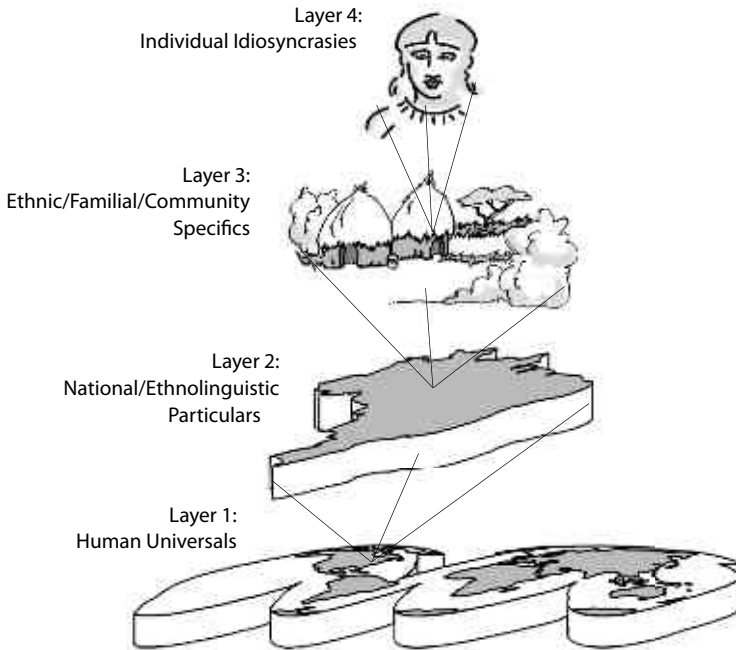
person who has a unique history, everyone has varying skills in applying his or her cultural rules to the situations of life. This is the layer at which individual idiosyncrasy emerges. Some cultures allow this layer to be valued, while others value less idiosyncrasy and greater harmony and conformity.

Characteristics of Intercultural Communication

There are several realities that characterize all communication, whether intercultural or not. They are true of communication in every context (see Moreau, Corwin, and McGee 2004, 266–67). First, everything that we do "communicates"—it is *impossible* for us to stop communicating (Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson 1967).

Second, the goal of communication is always more than just to impart information—persuasion is behind everything we do. Even a simple "hello" is an act that requests a response or an acknowledgment of your existence and relationship with the person to whom you say, "Hello" (Berlo 1960, 12).

Third, the communication process is generally far more complex than most people realize. Because we have been communicating for so long, and because

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we do it all the time, we have the tendency to take it for granted (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989, 180; Filbeck 1985, 2–3).

Fourth, we always communicate our messages through more than one channel, and we always communicate more than one message. At times, these "multiple" messages may contradict one another, causing our audience to respond negatively to our primary concern. At other times, they enhance and reinforce our message, helping to elicit a more positive response from our audience (Kraft 1983, 76).

Fifth, and finally, if we seek to communicate effectively across cultural barriers, the foundational consideration for all our communication should be, "What can I do to build trust on the part of the audience?" (see Mayers 1974, 30–79).

Terminology

The discipline of intercultural communication has remained largely within communication studies, though its genesis came from anthropologists (Kitao 1985), and recently calls have been made for anthropology to add its voice to the ongoing discussion (e.g., Coertze 2000). Today the discipline of intercultural communication includes interracial communication, interethnic communication, cross-cultural communication, and international communication (Kitao 1985, 8–9; see table 1.1 for terminology).

Working Model of the Communication Process

In figure 1.2 we present a working model of the communication process (see also, e.g., Mortensen 1972; Applbaum et al. 1973; Hesselgrave 1991b, 51; Singer 1987, 70; Poyatos 1983; Dodd 1991, 5; Gudykunst and Kim 1992, 33; Eilers 1999, 242–43; Klopf 2001, 50; and Neuliep 2009, 25). In it we have Participant A, Participant B, and a whole host of communication issues within and between each. To make the following discussion easier to follow, we refer to Participant A as Megumi (from Japan) and Participant B as Jabulani (from Swaziland).

Communication Participant A (Source-Respondent)

The left side depicts Megumi, in this case the one who initiates communication and then responds to the feedback that comes from Jabulani. One of Megumi's purposes will be to convey some type of "meaning" to Jabulani such that they share understanding of what is being communicated.

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Table 1.1

Terminology

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Term	Basic Concept
Intercultural communication	Communication between members from differing cultural backgrounds (Y. Y. Kim 1984, 16).
Cross-cultural communication	Comparison of the same communication phenomenon in two or more cultures (Gudykunst and Kim 1992, 14).
Interracial communication	Communication between members of differing racial groups (Rich 1974; see also Jackson and Garner 1998).
Interethnic communication	Communication between members of differing ethnic groups (Rich 1974; see also Jackson and Garner 1998).
International communication	Formal communication at national levels related to a political situation (Sitaram 1980, 91–92) or communication that flows between nation-states (Braman, Shah, and Fair 2001, 161; see also H. Schwartz 1969).
Intercommunication	Communication that crosses national or cultural boundaries (Prosser 1973).
Cultural communication	Communication within a particular culture or subculture (Y. Y. Kim 2001b, 147).
Intracultural communication	Communication between individuals of the same culture (Sitaram 1980, 93).
Minority communication	Communication between the people of two subcultures within a dominant culture (Sitaram 1980, 93).
Transracial communication	The understanding that persons from differing ethnic or racial backgrounds can achieve in verbal interaction (Arthur Smith 1971).
Transcultural communication	Communication that assumes there are universal constants (e.g., prohibitions against murder or incest; Christian doctrines about God, Christ, humanity, etc.) and relates them to communication (Küster 2005, 418).

Adapted in part from Saral 1978.

Our first dilemma is determining what is meant by the term "meaning" (on the different theories of how things "mean" and the steps we take to discover "meaning," see Hesselgrave 1978, 44–50). Ultimately, as David Hesselgrave points out:

> Meaning is in a sense contractual. Only by agreement in the area of semantics can we think about the same "thing." Only by agreement on the relationships that exist between linguistic symbols can we say anything significant about the "thing." And only as we agree on standards of right and wrong, truth and error, and good and bad can we make value judgments about any "thing." (1978, 40; note also Carson's discussion of this issue, 1985, 207–8)

Meaning System

For Megumi to choose what signals to use to convey meaning, she will need to encode the message she wants to convey. A lifetime of sensory inputs

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FIGURE 1.2
A SIMPLIFIED WORKING MODEL OF THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Message Stream Flow

Meaning System A
- Common Human Core
- Culture Specifics
- Personal Specifics
- Encounter Specifics

Contextual Noise

Meaning System B
- Common Human Core
- Culture Specifics
- Personal Specifics
- Encounter Specifics

Message Stream Flow
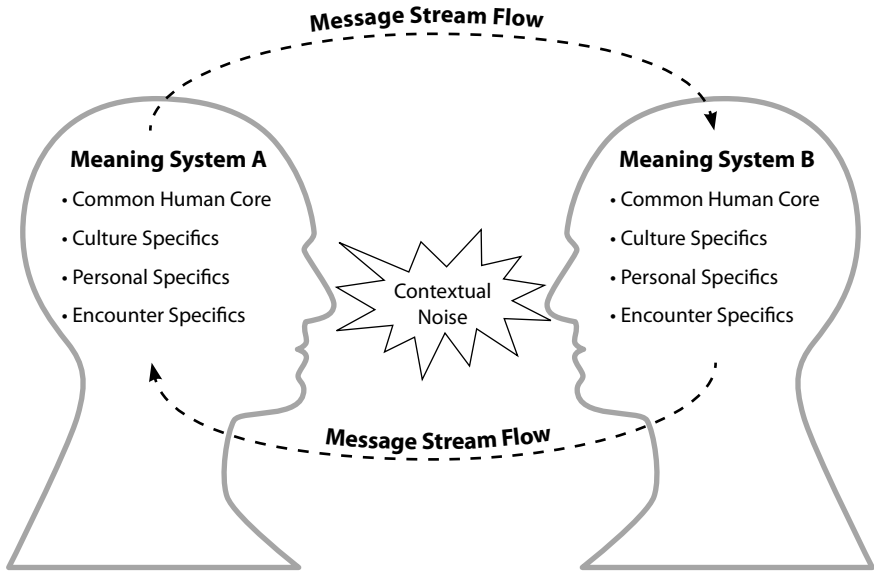
forms a reservoir of meaning in her. Past experiences and future expectations interact with the "now" to produce meanings. No two persons receive identical sensory impressions of a single event, nor do individuals respond in the same way that others respond. Each person develops a unique "meaning system" that is constantly changing. Each participant's meaning system is invisible to the other participant.

Four major components comprise the total meaning system within each participant: (1) the common human core; (2) the specific culture of the individual; (3) the specific idiosyncratic nature of the person; and (4) the specifics of this particular communication event. All four components are woven together and enable Megumi to choose how to convey her message in a way that she assumes Jabulani will understand. We briefly touch on each of these components in turn.

The Common Human Core

These are core aspects of our humanity that are common to all people. As noted by Scott Moreau:

> People of all races and ethnic identities share the fact and experiences of being human. Universals found in every culture include, among other things, language, thought, the process of enculturation, myth frameworks, authority structures,

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and the many institutions necessary for survival of human societies (e.g., kinship, economics, education, politics, recreation, various types of association, health, transportation, etc.). (1995, 122)

However, these core aspects include not only those things that anthropologists see but also things appropriately discerned from biblical revelation (following Moreau 1995): we are all made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–31); we have a purpose for our existence (Gen. 1:27; Isa. 43:7); we are all physical creatures with physical needs (food, water, shelter, etc.; Gen. 2:7); we are all thinking (psychological and cognitive) creatures (Gen. 2:16); we are social creatures who are not meant to stand alone (Gen. 2:18–25); we are all sinful creatures in need of redemption (Rom. 3:23; 6:23); we all have access to the general revelation about God (Rom. 1:20–21).

CULTURAL SPECIFICS

In addition to the core shared by all people, each participant also has cultural specifics that frame the way he or she sees and understands the world. This component of the meaning system includes such things as worldview, religion, values, social structures and roles, and decision-making rules. At this juncture we must point out that some discussions have focused on issues of language and power and how the labels we choose will be those that tend to maintain the status quo for those who are in positions of power (see, e.g., discussions of how we define the "other" in Fabian 1983; Mudimbe 1988).

PERSONAL SPECIFICS

Not all people operate in congruence with their culture. To think that because a person is from a collective culture (see chap. 11) she will always act as we expect a collective person to act is to commit what is called the ecological fallacy. Further, even in the most collective of subcultures, people are not identical. Ways in which they are not identical include such things as cognitive style, God-given communication skills, knowledge, personality, total history of relationship with other(s), and life history and experiences. Each person has her own gifts, tendencies, and stories, and each brings those into communication acts. They provide an important part of the framing of how Megumi will choose to encode the messages she wishes to send.

ENCOUNTER SPECIFICS

Finally, in addition to these three components, elements of the encounter itself partially determine how messages are encoded. These include the emotional/physical state or mood of Megumi at the time of the communication act; her degree of empathy, trust, and authenticity; her defensiveness; her understanding of the use of public and private cues in context; her motivations

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and the way she strategizes to accomplish her goals in this setting; and her current attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about Jabulani.

It is easy to see why understanding even a single communication event is such a complex process. Currently it is beyond our ability to devise some type of calculus by which we may compute the entire system; perhaps—due to such things as human choice and abilities—we may never devise such a calculus, even if we reached a stage at which we could agree on all the "inputs" into the system. After all, the reality of human choice in and of itself seems beyond human calculations.

The Coding Process

In any event, once Megumi chooses the message she wants to convey, on the basis of her meaning system she encodes the message into various channels in order to communicate with Jabulani. As Hesselgrave notes, "The word *communication* comes from the Latin word *communis* (common). We must establish a 'commonness' with someone to have communication. That 'commonness' is to be found in mutually shared codes" (1978, 31).

As with the meaning system, we can identify a set of components that are part of the coding and transmission process, such as preverbal coding and the actual physical coding (Applbaum et al. 1973, 36–38).

Preverbal Coding

Megumi experiences a need to communicate that comes from her own meaning systems. Much of this stage of preverbal coding involves feelings for which words are not attached. The meaning is private and frequently is not verbally expressed. Feedback loops operate within Megumi as she processes the preverbal encoding process in preparation for the next stage. For example, she may choose to use a particular word, and then, after she thinks about it and how that word might impact Jabulani, she may select a different word that seems more appropriate. This process occurs before and during the actual physical coding.

Transmission of the Message through Physical Coding

At this point Megumi "transmits" her message through signals (verbal and extraverbal) based on her preverbal coding. The actual encoding used depends on her needs in the situation and her experience with communication.

Verbal codes refer to language, whether written or oral. Though words (especially nouns) have external referents, the actual words we use do not "contain meaning" in and of themselves. Their meaning is an agreed-upon one chosen by the group using that code. "Friend" could mean anything an English-speaking culture (or audience) wants it to mean, but the meaning in

common use today is a person who is on good terms with you. The meaning of "friend" is inherent not in the word but in the English-speaking world's agreement on its use.

Note that within the verbal codes, tonal stresses and emphases are also codes in the communication process. As with the words themselves, tonal emphases derive their meaning from the people who use them, not from an inherent quality.

Extraverbal codes come in a bewildering variety of forms. They include oral signals ("hmmmm"), hand gestures, posture, eye contact, smell, physical spacing (e.g., between source and respondent), position (placement of the head higher or lower than the head of the respondent), touch, leg position, and so on. Each form can carry many messages that intercultural communicators may miss or communicate improperly if they are not sensitive to their audience.

Media are the "vehicles" used in transmitting the message. The type of media chosen will have a definite impact on how the respondents will perceive the message. Each media channel has its own advantages and disadvantages, which should be understood if we are to communicate as effectively as possible.

Redundancy refers to how all messages have redundant elements, often simply because they are communicated along more than one channel simultaneously. Note this sentence:

SH PRFRS CRM ND SGR N HR T

The missing vowels are not even necessary for most people to understand the sentence. Today this is most easily seen in instant and text messaging, where a whole new code for commonly used terms has been developed. The extra letters (e.g., vowels in the above sentence) reinforce the message and help to ensure its clarity (that she prefers cream and sugar in her tea), but they are not necessary for the message to be understood.

Entropy refers to the reality that every message suffers from a certain degree of randomness or uncertainty. Whether this happens in transmission (due to deterioration in the encoding, the transmission itself, or in the decoding processes) or in distortion caused by noise and context, it affects all human communication to some extent. Note this string of letters from which you are asked to make a sentence:

GODISNOWHERE

We see the effects of entropy when a person has to decide whether to read "God is nowhere" or "God is now here."

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Noise is any sensory data that is part of the context of communication but is not part of the actual communication event itself. It may either enhance or detract from the communication process. Do not confuse "noise" here with mere sounds; it also includes nonauditory "noise." This may be a headache from an argument with a close friend just prior to the communication event. It may be something taken for granted such as the weather, the time of day, or the season. It may include distractions from the competing agendas of each person participating in the event, and so on (see Larson 1966; Wendland 1995).

Total Message Stream

The verbal codes, extraverbal codes (including redundant elements), media, redundancy, entropy, and noise all combine to produce what we can call the "total message stream," which refers to all the sensory information that reaches Respondent B in the communication event.

Communication Participant B (Respondent-Source)

In our example, Jabulani serves in mirror fashion to Megumi. Based in part on the total message stream, Jabulani determines what he understands the message to be. This means not that there is no message in an absolute sense but only that the recipient of the communication is the one who decides what he understands the message to be.

Reception of the Total Message Stream

All physical senses come into play in receiving the total data stream. Jabulani hears, sees, feels, (possibly) smells, and (possibly) tastes the data sent by Megumi, which is by now intermingled with the noise of the context and the entropy inherent in all messages.

As the message is received, Jabulani begins the process of decoding it so that he can understand what Megumi is communicating. He does so from within the context of his own meaning framework, not hers. If she wants to be understood, she has to take this into account in her encoding process. This is what it means to be receptor oriented in communication (Kraft 2005a; see sidebar 1.1).

To decode the total message stream, Jabulani must attend to the physical data that are part of the stream. Sound waves are turned into words, words are translated into the appropriate thoughts based on other things such as emphasis, tone of voice, hand or other bodily gestures, facial expression, the surrounding context, and what Jabulani knows of Megumi's communication patterns (e.g., she was taught to avoid saying no in a direct fashion).

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SIDEBAR 1.1
IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES RELATED TO RECEPTORS

Kraft (2005a, 156–59, emphasis in original)

1. *Receptors are parts of reference groups.* Receptors (like all humans) are never alone, even when they are "by themselves." Whether one lives in an individualistic society, [as] Americans do, or in a strongly group-oriented society, like those of the [Majority] World, we always consider the reactions of others when we make decisions.

2. *Receptors are committed to their group and to the values of that group.* When approaches are made to people to make changes in their attitudes and/or behavior, it cannot be assumed that they are not already committed to competing attitudes and/or behavior.

3. If Christian appeals are to be attractive they need to be addressed to the *felt needs* of the receptors. An important thing to recognize, though, is that humans never seem to be fully satisfied with their state in life. And no sociocultural system seems to adequately provide for every need felt by the people within that system.

4. *Receptors are always interpreting.* And everything about the communicational situation gets interpreted. . . . Interpretation is clearly one of the most important, though least conscious, of the activities of receptors.

5. These interpretations feed directly into the most important of the receptors' activities, that of *constructing the meanings* that result from the communicational interaction. . . . It is messages, not meanings, that are transmitted from person to person.

6. Receptors, then, either *grant or withhold permission* for any given message to enter what might be termed the receptor's "communicational space." Receptors may be pictured as encased in a kind of bubble which only they can give permission to enter. When someone wants to transact or negotiate some form of communication, then, he/she needs to gain permission for the interaction from the one who can control access to that bubble.

7. Closely related to the activity of giving permission is that of *evaluating the message.* In any communicational interaction the participants evaluate each component of that experience. . . . From this evaluation the participants construct an overall impression of the situation, an impression that has much to do with how they interpret what goes on in that situation.

8. Another closely related kind of activity in which receptors are engaged is the matter of *selectivity.* People are selective in the kinds of things they allow themselves to be exposed to. . . . People tend to perceive messages in such a way that they confirm already held positions, whether or not the communicator intended them that way.

9. Receiving communication is a risky business. Receptors are, therefore, continually *seeking to maintain their equilibrium* in the face of such actual

or imagined risk. Whenever people expose themselves to communication they are risking the possibility that they might have to change some aspect of their lives. People ordinarily seek at all costs to maintain their present equilibrium, to protect themselves from assimilating anything that is perceived to possibly upset their psychological balance.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What are several implications or applications for evangelism in a new cultural setting for any one of these principles?
2. Using the same principle, what are several implications or applications for church planting in a new cultural setting?

The total data stream contains far more information than is needed for the communication event to take place. It is apparent that if Jabulani were to consciously attend to every detail of the total message stream, it would overwhelm him. Therefore, Jabulani both consciously and unconsciously filters out or ignores what he perceives to be irrelevant data (e.g., traffic outside the room, the hum of machinery, the smell of food from next door, the coolness of air blowing on skin, words that are verbal fillers). The selection of "relevancy" is determined by a variety of factors included in Jabulani's meaning system, which has been developed over the course of his life as he learned from parents, peers, and other people important to him how to decode messages that come to him. Hopefully his decoding system is the same as Megumi's coding system, or else they will misunderstand each other, possibly with severe consequences.

Interpreting the Decoded and Filtered Message Stream into a "Message"

Once the message, at least on the literal, denotative level, is understood, it is interpreted on the connotative level. For example, if Jabulani believes that Megumi cannot be trusted, even when properly understood, he may not believe her no matter how sincere she is. Again, the interpretation stems from the totality of factors in Jabulani's meaning system.

Responding to the Perceived Message through Feedback

As Megumi is communicating her message, Jabulani is giving her feedback. This may come through eye contact, gestures, touch, proximity, and/or paraverbal or verbal channels. In effect, they are both now operating simultaneously as sender and receiver, negotiating what they want to communicate and what they think was communicated in a type of dance in which conscious and unconscious signals are sent and received.

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Once Jabulani has interpreted Megumi's message (whether rightly or wrongly), he decides how he will respond and follows roughly the same process that Megumi followed in trying to communicate with him.

The net effect is that Jabulani determines his understanding of the message Megumi sought to convey. Thus, her (and our) focus in intercultural communication must be on Jabulani (the audience) as much as on the message. Not only must we be sure we have perceived the message clearly; we must also seek to make that message clear to the audience in their terms. Moreover, Jabulani, as the receptor, makes the decision whether to grant, withhold, or even withdraw permission for Megumi to enter his "communicational space" (Kraft 1995, 97–105).

Conclusion

With the foundation set, you now have the background not only to understand the discussion that follows but also to see how it fits into the larger discipline. Before we can move in that direction, however, we need to integrate Christian insights into communication and consider the story lines of intercultural communication in light of the church's actions throughout history and the recent development of Christian thinking about the discipline. As you read through the case study at the end of this chapter, consider the type of advice you might give Muhia, bearing in mind that direct confrontation of Mark is something he would find exceedingly difficult to do.

Case Study:
Putting Things into Practice

A. Scott Moreau

Muhia was dismayed as he listened to his friend Mark give a training seminar to an African group on how to communicate Christ. Mark had studied anthropology and had even written a brilliant paper under a local missionary's supervision on issues related to communication from an anthropological perspective. *If Mark could only see how they applied to what he was teaching*, thought Muhia, *Mark would make a great cross-cultural trainer!*

Muhia's frustration started during the seminar when Mark began to talk about eye contact. Mark noted that children who do not look you in the eye are hiding something, so he stressed the need to ensure that when you share your faith you look the person you are sharing with in the eyes and be sure that the person is looking directly at you. Otherwise, Mark related, you could not be certain that the person was really listening and you could not trust his or her response.

Muhia cringed as he listened to this part of the talk. He vividly remembered learning from his parents to never look an

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adult in the eye. For them (and for Muhia), direct eye contact from a younger person to an older or more respected person was an expression of rebellion, not of paying attention! He could never forget the day a classmate of his in grade 12 was caned by a teacher for looking that teacher in the eye. It was not that you could *never* look into the eyes of an older person; it was *holding* the eye contact that was bad.

Muhia knew that Mark meant well, and that Mark had put a lot of time into preparing for his training sessions. He also knew that Mark would feel humiliated if Muhia pointed out what he had done wrong, since Mark prided himself on his cultural sensitivity. Even worse, the very idea of telling someone to his face that he had just made such a big mistake completely violated Muhia's rules of being a good host, and Mark was, after all, a guest in Muhia's country.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What could Muhia do that would honor his own rules against direct confrontation but help Mark be a better trainer in the future?
2. What might you say to Mark to help him better understand the cultural values in his setting?