

MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION: THEORY AND APPLICATION

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The problems are obvious: Peoples from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds must find ways of understanding and agreeing with each other, and they must develop and respect their own identities. This article surveys some of the theories that are useful in developing a pedagogical approach to multicultural communication, concluding with a brief description of the state of affairs at Tatar-American Regional Institute (TARI) in Kazan. I will focus my discussion of multicultural communication theory on two areas: communication as a process, and intercultural or inter-ethnic issues.

COMMUNICATION AS A PROCESS

Researchers and educators can use communication theories to understand and improve multicultural communication. These theories are also relevant when designing lesson plans and structuring classroom discussions because a single classroom may be viewed as a culturally diverse community with differing modes of communication.

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Most theories look at communication as a process, and in recent decades this view has become its own field of research in a variety of disciplines. In our Russian science, these studies include philosophical, psychological, cultural, and pedagogical approaches to communication.

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION

According to Russian philosopher and culturologist V. S. Bibler, any product of modern culture (e.g. architecture, painting, literature, theatre, music, education) reflects a dialogue of cultures. The result is that members of the current or “grown-up” generation are carriers of their own culture and organize a “dialogue” between the future, growing generation and all past cultural traditions. More explicitly this model of communication predicts the development of historically-conditioned cultures that include ancient, medieval, modern, and present-day models.¹

This theory introduces an important question when studying communication through a philosophical approach. What impact does communication have on participating entities: individual-to-individual,

individual-to-society, or culture-to-culture, past-to-present? And what is the motivation for participating in that communication?

Russian philosopher N.A. Berdyayev sees communication as a process for developing a relationship between one individual and another through God. His notion of *communotarity* states that communication is personalized and spiritual; is based on freedom, sincere love, and brotherhood; and is mediated by God. According to Berdyayev, *communotarity* is connected to the sense of being that develops by overcoming loneliness and realizing one's personality by developing an affinity with a communicative social and cosmic life and by overcoming that isolation which entails death.²

For Berdyayev, the opposite of *communotarity* turns out to be "communication," manifestations of which appear in the collectivization of state, family, and social class, as well as church and monastery. A significant difference between this type of communication and Berdyayev's view is the motivation for communicating. For Berdyayev, *communotarity*-based communication means an immediate relationship of human-to-human-through-God; however, collectivism does not want to know the living relationship of human-to-human and is motivated by artificiality and the ability to coerce through communication of the "far" (larger social structure) and not the "near" (individual).

When analyzing communication, philosophers also consider its necessity in the situation, its localization, and the activity through which the communication occurs. These factors influence the intensity of the communication and focus particularly on the peculiarities of emotional responses between the participants as well as the respective degrees of satisfaction regarding the communication. From a philosophical perspective, the primary aims of communication are to promote one's self or to develop a sense of identity. However, the other participant must be satisfied through the communication as well.

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Based on these models, the complexities of multicultural communication become obvious. If the majority culture uses communication to promote the political or sociological agendas of that group, the outcome may result in conflict for the minority groups, particularly if they are approaching the communicative process as a means to develop self-identity.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION

The psychological disciplines have produced the largest body of research regarding the process of communication. Psychologists and social psychologists study the structure of communicative acts and analyze the mutual understanding and mutual influence in the communication process. In their study of communication's varied socio-psychological features, researchers view communication as a means of developing conscience

and self-consciousness. Successful studies have been completed by K. A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, A. A. Leontiev, C. L. Rubinstein, and others.³

Modern scientists see the essence of the communicative process in the following pattern: social communities or individuals contacting one another and starting communication; adding to one another; exchanging experience, ideas, products of labor, or information; gaining new knowledge, work habits, or techniques; learning the ability of self-organization; and harmonizing one's relations with the surrounding world.

A sociological approach focused on intercultural or inter-ethnic issues is typical of such researchers as L. P. Buyeva,⁴ M. S. Kagan,⁵ J. Habermas,⁶ and others. The sociological approach evaluates communication's influences on society as a whole and on educational theory and practice in particular. It explains communication's role in social life and development, pointing out its interconnections between different subsystems and social institutions. Communication's social aspect is revealed as a special type of relations, arising during a process of joint educational activities between peoples under certain historical conditions (e.g., one cultural group moving into a new area and associating with native cultures). It also appears in people's attitudes towards one another, their position in society, and the phenomena and processes of social life.

The main theoretical directions in which socio-psychological research is conducted are Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Role Theory, and Psychoanalysis. All these theories are useful in organizing a paradigm for teaching multicultural communication.

BEHAVIORISM

Communication habits develop through life experience, and these habits can be retained or changed with the help of some confirmation or observation.

Applying behaviorist theory to the study of interpersonal communications, we can draw on the theories of social teaching and social exchange. The behaviorist's notion of teaching relies on systematic behavior modification through repetition of the situation. Of key significance is the idea that communication habits develop through life experience, and these habits can be retained or changed with the help of some confirmation or observation.

Social Teaching. Responses to particular words and concepts may be conditioned through associative connections: as it is possible to teach a dog to salivate in response to a light or a bell, so is it possible, for example, to condition individuals and even groups to have an aversive reaction to words like "nazi" or "communist." The target behavior is consolidated with the help of maintenance or confirmation. People learn to act a certain way because the action is followed by something pleasant or because they want to avoid the potentially unpleasant response. Confirmation can also occur when people observe a particular action or point of view and society's responses to it.

A significant part of social teaching occurs through imitation and identification, principles found in role-playing activities. As the term “imitation” implies, a learner will mimic a response (a particular word, phrase, idea) and the trainer will confirm the correctness of the response. While imitation can take place without external confirmation, identification can help the learner screen acceptable responses. After a child imitates an idea or saying, audience response signifies approval or rejection. With this identification one model is established as more acceptable than another. This can cause conflict when a learner’s home confirms one set of acceptable responses and other social entities (e.g., school, politics, television) promote another.

For most people, their parents, brothers and sisters, other relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers, characters of novels, etc. can be used as objects of imitation and identification. However, role-playing—in a child’s play, in classrooms, etc.—can be used to simulate social situations that promote imitation and identification. Special situations are modeled, aiming at training certain habits of behavior. Most speech and communication courses use both living and symbolic models of teaching communicative habits. For example, students observe a friend making a speech, and then they discuss the speech, watch the video recordings of speakers, and assess them.

Social Exchange. The exchange theory of interpersonal communication is partially based on analyzing people’s interconnections as exchanges of certain resources. According to the main points of exchange theory: 1) human behavior is primarily motivated by receiving pleasure and avoiding suffering; 2) the actions of other people are the chief source of pleasure or suffering; 3) the actions of others can be emphasized/influenced to increase pleasure obtained from them; 4) people aim to receive maximum pleasure at minimal expenditure.

Exchange presupposes that resources can be transferred in the process of interpersonal interaction. Accepted resources include such things as love, status, services, goods, information, and money. Different resources obviously presuppose different rules of exchange. People may prefer one resource to another, and these desired resources are perceived as rewards that serve as positive confirmation and increase the probability of the behavior associated with the confirmation. To be sure, not all rewards are of equal value. The more of a resource a person has, the less valuable it becomes for him.

Contrasted with rewards are expenses. Losing a desired resource as well as failing to gain a resource are defined as expenses. There are three types of expenses: 1) invested expenses, such as time and effort spent by a person to acquire a resource (for example, a person can invest a considerable sum of money and time to acquire a diploma or knowledge); 2) direct

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expenses, or resources given according to the conditions of exchange (money in exchange for something else), or such kinds of expenses as boredom, disapproval by other people, lack of understanding on the part of others, and wasted time; 3) incidental (preliminary) expenses, which are investments of resources in anticipation of a possible reward in the future.

Some people aim at exchange with maximum profit for themselves at minimal expense, ignoring the interests of other people. Others aim for an honest exchange where they try to take into account the mutual interests of all parties.

COGNITIVISM

The cognitive theory also can also explain different models of interpersonal communications. The main premise of the cognitive approach is that behavior depends on how people perceive their social surroundings. No matter how chaotic or contradictory the situation may be, people bring a certain order into it. Cognitive schemes—organizing the perception and interpretation of the social world—influence the behavior of an individual. So at the center of the cognitivist approach are the processes of perception, interpretation, memorizing, the formation of images, and their subsequent influence on behavior. Under a given set of circumstances, behavior can be measured as a directed activity, with motivation (either internal or external) the source of the activity and direction of behavior.

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An important cognitivist approach to communication includes the theory of structural balance and congruency in communicative acts. The main idea may be generally formulated in the following way: an individual's cognitive structure is considered balanced if it obeys the everyday rules: "we like what our friends like," and "we do not like what our enemies like."

In the opinion of F. Hider, a proponent of the structural balance theory, these rules express a naive psychology about aspirations for a balanced cognitive structure. Research situations prove to be cases of interpersonal interaction since they always comprise three elements—the two discussants and the object of their expression. The researcher must determine the type of relation among these three elements and whether it presents a balanced structure or causes discomfort. Negotiating disagreement is necessary to bring the situation into balance.

Under the theory of communicative acts, similar attitudes between the discussants will create an attachment between them; whereas difference in attitudes will result in enmity. For a homogenous culture, the likelihood of similar attitudes is greater; whereas a multi-culture population would more likely negotiate understanding to restore/create balance. This model

has found practical application in processes of mass communication. For example, in order for a speech to a large audience to be effective, the speaker will allude to and use examples with which the audience identifies. Because the audience identifies with the attitude presented, the audience develops an attachment for (e.g., accepts/believes) the speaker. If the audience or segments with the audience and the speaker have differing attitudes—perhaps reflecting their differing cultures—no attachment forms; and the speech would be considered ineffective.

ROLE THEORY

Role theory has its roots in sociology. If behaviorism and cognitivism use an individual's psychological characteristics and abilities as the starting point of analysis, role paradigm accentuates relations among people, definitions of rules and roles, and their connections with social behavior. The key determinant of behavior is the role assigned to a person by social circumstances and social position.⁷

According to the theory of symbolic interaction, society should be understood not as an objective structure but as a constant interaction among acting individuals who meet within various situations. The way in which people address one another and react to others depends on how they interpret the social situation. Thus, perception of the situation becomes an important factor in social interaction.

When coming together for a luncheon party, people must work out an agreement on how to proceed (e.g., what is the appropriate attire, subject for conversation, seating arrangements, etc.). The party's outcome results from the understanding by all present of what is taking place. If the event comes off successfully, then mutual understanding was achieved—meaning that the daily versions of social structures in the minds of the participants have coincided. The success of this activity thus forms the basis for further joint activities. This divided understanding is essential for social life. Its process becomes the main research problem of interactionists. Based on this principle, J. Meed examined an individual's ability for role-playing in the imagination or in superficial environments. This is the basis for role-playing as a teaching method.

In contrast, E. Hoffman suggests that real behavior in real situations, not imagined situations, should also be regarded as role-playing activities. His starting point is that actions as well as personalities are determined by the situation, which he defines as a social game conducted with other people. Thus an individual is playing a role based on the perceived expectations established by the situation. Returning to the luncheon party example, if a person is gregarious at the party, this person might not be showing his or her true personality but is gregarious because the situation may call for this role. This principle is directed against the

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psychology of personality, wherein the personal characteristics determine the outcome of his communication with others. According to E. Hoffman, our perception of ourselves within the situation determines our actions and reactions toward “the other,” not our character, the inner motivational profile, or other personal traits.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

According to psychoanalysts, human behavior is primarily determined through unrealized desires and revealed through subconscious inclinations. In psychoanalysis, key factors in personality formation are the family relationship as well as the relationship between the therapist and client (the problem of transfer). These factors can be applied to the theory of interpersonal communication. Every person can picture his or her prior relationships as themes of an interpersonal life and all successive relationships as repetitions of the previous ones.

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In one formulation the above idea sounds like this: People are inseparable from their surroundings; a personality is only formed within the framework of interpersonal communications; personality and character are not within the individual but are revealed in relationships with other people—particularly through associations with different people in different ways. Thus, personality is a comparatively firm stereotype of repeated interpersonal life situations, which are the peculiarities of one’s life. Personality is formed and influenced by the initial specificity of its place in interpersonal communication (above all communication with parents), so any serious examination of a patient must take into account the specific features of his interpersonal contacts.

According to psychoanalysts, from early childhood we establish templates, or patterns of behavior, to which we adapt all our future relations, or at least all the successive important relationships.⁸ If a child had warm relations with his or her father, as he or she ages, the child will generally consider most authoritative men in a favorable light. If, on the contrary, the father was too strict, the youth will possibly view authoritative men as threatening and treat them accordingly. If a child struggled with brothers and sisters for parental attention, then the child will most likely consider equals to be rivals in the struggle for limited resources, and so on. In psychoanalytical therapy, forced repetition requires an individual to rehearse the situations and relationships that were particularly difficult or problematic in the early years of life, thereby learning to better cope with the emotions derived from these relationships.

Occasionally, a client will project old patterns onto the therapist, a situation Freud termed as transference that applies not only to clients and therapists but also to all types of relationships. Wherever we are, we continuously repeat aspects of our early lives, in relationships with

power, love affairs, friendships, and business relations. And we transfer past emotions/experiences onto present and future experiences.

Of great importance in developing a psychoanalytical theory of interpersonal communications is transactional analysis. In every person exists three behavioral conditions of the *I* (person's role in the conversation), called Parent, Adult, and Child. Transactional analysis focuses on determining which condition of the *I* is responsible for the transactional stimulus and then the transactional reaction, which thus defines the nature of the relationship. According to transactional analysis, the first rule of communication dictates that as long as transactions are complementary (e.g., the stimulus elicits a relevant, expected, and natural reaction), the process of communication will proceed smoothly and will last as long as desired.

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The opposite rule works this way: The process of communication is interrupted, and an intersecting transaction takes place if the stimulus causes inadequate reaction. Whether a reaction is inadequate is determined by the role played by both participants. Take, for example, a stimulus/response to the question "Do you know where my cuff links are?" Perhaps, in an Adult-to-Adult communication, the interlocutor may suddenly flare up, "You always put the blame on me!" This response is not adequate for an Adult-to-Adult communication, and the process is interrupted. This response corresponds more to Child-Parent model, whereas the reply, "Why do you never know yourself where your things are? You are not a child, I presume!" corresponds to the model of Parent-Child. Under such circumstances, the actual problem's solution (location of the cuff links) will be postponed until the communication vectors are corrected. The participants must awaken to appropriate recognitions of the condition of *I* before the relationship can proceed.

This model can be used to evaluate cross-cultural communication patterns. Often, two cultures may be responding to communication based on contradictory relationship roles. For example, one culture, perhaps the predominant ethnicity in a location, may adopt a Parent-Child relationship with a minority culture, while the minority culture may be responding in an Adult-Adult pattern.

COMMUNICATION THEORY AS AN APPROACH TO THE SOVIET MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY

Inter-cultural communication theory also studies inter-cultural and inter-ethnic problems within a community. Intensive studies of the ethnic problems within the Soviet multi-ethnic society began in the 1920s and 30s. Until the end of the 1930s, scientific publications and theses served to popularize the Stalinist concept of nations and national policies, an

approach similar to the social teaching theory and collectivist approach to communication outlined previously.

In the early 1950s the number of publications considerably increased, with many scientific schools and intellectual trends exploring national identity and national relationships, ethno-sociology and ethno-psychology, as well as problems of patriotism, internationalism, and international upbringing. However, in spite of the high number of publications available, the same ideas were presented—an extensive promotion of the uniform Soviet identity. The paradigm for exploring developing relationships between nations was significantly influenced by socialism. Issues such as the development of nations; the resolution of the nationalism question within the USSR; the monolithic unity of Soviet society; the public life as undoubtedly positive; the priority of international before national; patriotism and internationalism as inalienable features of the socialist way of life and public consciousness; international upbringing as a means of perfection of national relations; and so on—all complemented Soviet objectives.

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Although a number of Soviet researchers foresaw ethnic contradictions and conflicts, their opinions were not taken into consideration in ethnic policy as it was carried out. However, between the 1960s and 1980s, these researchers continued to develop instruments and methods based on the theories defined in the previous section as well as to conduct ethno-sociological research works that can be used in comparative research works.⁹

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: SOVIET TIMES

Through the application of these communication theories, many scientists (R. G. Abdulatipov,¹⁰ Y. V. Bromley,¹¹ D. O. Boronoyev¹² and others) have pointed out the contradictory character of internationalization and integration—the fallacy in disregarding ethnicity in the life of a multi-ethnic society. Publications in the 80s impartially reflected the real contradictions in the USSR’s state structure and in the use of official and nonofficial ethnic languages.¹³

In Soviet literature of the 60s and 70s, a thorough analysis of people’s and states’ tendencies toward sovereignty was presented. Beginning from the 60s to the present, the theories presented in section one of this article have been used to develop additional theories and hypotheses for studying problems with cultural diversity:

- The primordialist approach, in which “ethnic sense” supposedly exists in every individual, engendering ethnically significant symbols in an individual, which in turn can activate ethnic self-consciousness and influence the nature of interaction among ethnic groups.

- Classical theories, including the communicative approach, in which nationalism is an indicator of social mobilization of society; and instrumentalism, in which ethnic problems are most often used as a tool for achieving other goals.
- The theory of cultural conflict, which states that cultural differences lead to the realization of ethnic boundaries and conflicts.
- The theory of social mobilization, affirming the interactive character of the appearance of ethnic community.
- The Marxist theory of nations and national relations.
- The constructivist approach, in which ethnic self-consciousness is a product of deliberate human activity. Also in this approach ethnic groups or nationalities do not arise independently (innate “givenness”) but are considered to be intellectual constructs created by the political and intellectual elite on the basis of cultural differences and a sense of national belonging.

BILINGUALISM AND BEYOND

In the studies of inter-cultural and inter-ethnic problems, exploring bilingualism in a poly-cultural society is of particular importance. The term “bilingualism” became common in the 50s and 60s to indicate an individual’s ability to use two (or more) languages. However, the term has become key for a great number of works describing different educational programs for ethnically and culturally diverse societies. Modern concepts of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and cross-cultural education, cultural pluralism, and anti-racist education presuppose the setting for and solution to the problem of linguistic variety.

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In our country, research dealing with the problems of bilingualism is characterized by a large divergence of aims and objectives. Some objectives study the origin and development of National-Russian bilingualism (e.g., Yakut-Russian bilingualism), where others seek to identify the development of National-Russian bilingualism and the factors of its spreading (e.g., the case of the Republic of Bashkortostan). In Kazan these issues center on the planning for Tatar-Russian and Russian-Tatar bilingualism for students of pedagogical colleges (normal schools) of the Republic of Tatarstan; whereas other areas address the ecological aspect of languages and cultures, factors influencing linguistic processes (as in Ukraine), and questions of poly-cultural and multi-national education.¹⁴

MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION AT TARI

Intercultural communication is accomplished through a dialogue, and this dialogic paradigm may form a basis of educational philosophy at any institution. This idea underlies the pedagogy and instruction at

Tatar-American Regional Institute (TARI), which provides an integrated and multilevel educational program responsive to the demands of the Republic of Tatarstan. Our institute provides continuing education for citizens of all ages; and its educational system consists of all levels, starting from vocational education and ending with the master's degree.

TARI graduates specialize in World Economy, Linguistics and Cross-cultural Communication, Psychology, Management, Law, Accounting, and Information Technology. TARI represents a model of intercultural cooperation. Our students represent different nationalities and religions.

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In addition to our native multi-ethnic population, students from Turkey and the USA visit Kazan under an exchange program at TARI. Lectures are delivered in Russian, Tatar, English, German, and Arabic. We have welcomed experts from Yemen, Jordan, Sudan, USA, Great Britain, and New Zealand.

Our scholars and students participate in international conferences, workshops, and round table sessions. We also participate in international cultural projects. Every year we organize Days of Russian, Tatar, American, and Arabic Culture. Scholars from the USA have been training students in English at camps since 1999. American and Arabic Culture Centers work regularly through TARI.

Understanding is always a skirmish between differing legal and value systems, traditions, thinking patterns, and mentalities. Communication is frequently a struggle “between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event.”¹⁵ However, dialogue between different cultures is an important means to attaining peace in a multinational country. Intercultural communication promotes a person's socialization as a native speaker with his or her own ethnic peculiarities. In this respect the person is a tool of intercultural study because he or she studies other cultures and becomes educated to his or her own. ∞

NOTES:

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