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Intercultural Communication

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1. Introduction

1.1 Terminology

Intercultural communication or **communication** between people of different cultural backgrounds has always been and will probably remain an important precondition of human co-existence on earth. The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework of factors that are important in intercultural communication within a general model of human, primarily linguistic, communication. The term **intercultural** is chosen over the largely synonymous term **cross-cultural** because it is linked to language use such as "interdisciplinary", that is cooperation between people with different scientific backgrounds. Perhaps the term also has somewhat fewer connotations than **crosscultural**. It is not cultures that communicate, whatever that might imply, but people (and possibly social institutions) with different cultural backgrounds that do. In general, the term "cross-cultural" is probably best used for comparisons between cultures ("crosscultural comparison").

1.2 What is a culture?

Let us more closely analyze the concepts that can be found in the expression **intercultural communication**. One of them is culture which has been analyzed in several different ways by different researchers. See Kroeber and Kluckholm (1952) for an account of about 200 ways to define the concept. It will be used here in the following way. The term "culture" refers to all the characteristics common to a particular group of people that are learned and not given by nature. That the members of a group have two legs is thus not a cultural characteristic but a natural one, while a special but common way of walking would probably be cultural.

Analytically, we can differentiate between the following four primary cultural dimensions:

- (i) **Patterns of thought** – common ways of thinking, where thinking includes factual beliefs, values, norms, and emotional attitudes.
- (ii) **Patterns of behavior** – common ways of behaving, from ways of speaking to ways of conducting commerce and industry, where the behavior can be intentional/unintentional, aware/unaware or individual/interactive.
- (iii) **Patterns of artifacts** – common ways of manufacturing and using material things, from pens to houses (artifact = artificial object), where artifacts include dwellings, tools, machines or media. The artifactual dimension of culture is usually given special attention in museums.
- (iv) **Imprints in nature** – the longlasting imprints left by a group in the natural surroundings, where such imprints include agriculture, trash, roads or intact/ruined human habitations. In fact, "culture" in the sense of "growth" (i.e. a human

transformation of nature) gives us a basic understanding of what the concept of culture is all about.

All human activities involve the first two dimensions. Most activities involve the third dimension, and ecologically important activities also involve the fourth. When a particular activity lastingly combines several of these traits, one usually says that the activity has become institutionalized and that it is thus a **social institution**.

Similarly, one may speak of a **culture** or a **subculture** when one or more of the characteristics are lastingly connected with a certain group of people. In the context of intercultural communication, the groups are often associated with national states, and we may speak about Swedish culture, French culture, etc. However, a group does not necessarily have to be a national group. It may be any group at all that is distinguishable over a longer period of time. We can thus speak about teenage culture, male culture, working-class culture, bakers' culture or the culture of the city of Gothenburg. Cultural differences between groups of these types are often just as great or even greater than those that exist between national cultures.

1.3 The danger of stereotypical descriptions

Studies and teaching programs that deal with intercultural communication are often based on attempts to understand national cultures; therefore there is a great risk of neglecting the significant differences which exist between activities, groups and individuals on a non-national level. An orientation toward national cultures combined with efforts to find easily conveyed generalizations gives a further risk, namely that of taking over stereotypical notions of a "national character" that have arisen to serve what a certain group sees as its own or national interests. See Tingsten (1936). For example, Swedes may be characterized as envious, Scots as stingy, French as vain, Americans as superficial, etc.

The danger of misleading and biased generalizations is one of the greatest risks in research on intercultural communication, and that danger increases as soon as someone tries to describe the differences between groups from the perspective of a particular group's interests.

1.4 Social identity and ethnicity

Two important concepts in this discussion are ethnicity and social identity. I believe that these concepts can be related to culture and national states in the following way. A group is an **ethnic group** when certain of its cultural characteristics are used to socially and politically organize it and when this organization is allowed to continue for a relatively long period of time. The group's **ethnicity** is comprised of those traits which have a politically cohesive power. If the group comprises or strongly aspires to comprise its own politically independent nation, the characteristics are termed **nationally ethnic** and the desire to emphasize and/or spread them is called **nationalism**. Depending on the strength of this nationalism or the evaluation of it, it can further be characterized as chauvinism or patriotism.

Social identity can be related to culture in the following way. At a particular point in time, a culture provides a number of properties and relations around which individual persons can organize their lives. People construct their **social identity** by regarding a part of these properties and relations as decisive for who he/she is. In this way, it is possible for a person to identify him or herself with his/her age, sex, family position, profession, political ideology, religious belief, regional residence or national affiliation, etc. As social organizations are constructed around most of these characteristics, by identifying with them, one often simultaneously comes to belong to a group of people

who think alike. Most people have a potential for identifying themselves with several of these characteristics but come gradually to focus on a few as primarily creating his/her identity.

One possibility is that you strongly identify with characteristics that you consider important for your national or ethnic group. You mainly become a Swede, a Finn, a Basque or a Sami. Being a father or a teacher may become less important. For a person of this type, national or ethnic membership is what gives him/her their main identity. But as we have seen, identity can of course be constructed on the basis of other characteristics. Personal preferences and degree of social recognition are among the decisive factors in constructing one's identity. This probably means that people with high status jobs will be less prone than people with low status jobs to let ethnic membership be the characteristic they mainly identify with.

In studying what I here call intercultural communication, it is particularly important to be aware that there are no necessary relationships between identity on the one hand and ethnicity or nationalism on the other. A position taken without reflection can easily lead to hasty assumptions about stereotypical cultural differences.

1.5 Culture and activities

One way to escape the danger of stereotypes, at least to a certain extent, is to connect the concept of culture with the concept of activity. A culture, that is a way of thinking, behaving, etc., surfaces in the activities which the people in a certain group pursue. An activity here can be anything from arguing to hunting, fishing or farming. Most people participate in a number of activities and can often think and act in substantially different ways in different activities. There is a great difference between being a father, a pastor and a lover but, at least in Sweden, it is completely possible for one person to have each of these roles simultaneously.

By taking into consideration the variation in activities among a group of people, we can begin to get an understanding of the nature of intranational and international cultural similarities and differences. At the same time, the variation in activity must also be supplemented with differences that are e.g. biological or regional.

1.6 Intercultural communication

As for the other key concept in intercultural communication – **communication** - I largely follow the analysis presented in Allwood (1976). In this context, one can briefly characterize communication as the sharing of information between people on different levels of awareness and control. I want especially to emphasize the latter since, in an intercultural context, this can become a problem particularly with features in communication about which people have low degree of awareness and find difficult to control. Examples would include the ways in which we show and interpret feelings and attitudes.

If we use what is said above about "culture" and "communication" as a base, we would now be able to define **intercultural communication** as the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds, where different cultural backgrounds include both national cultural differences and differences which are connected with participation in the different activities that exist within a national unit.

2. Possible differences between communication patterns

2.1 Misunderstandings and differences in communicative behavior

When people of different cultural backgrounds meet, all differences between them can potentially lead to misunderstanding. A way of grasping the problems that can arise in intercultural communication is thus to investigate the ways in which communication patterns can vary between different linguistic and cultural communities. A way of doing this is to utilize a model in which one 1) takes into account different communication behaviors, 2) takes into account what can influence these types of behaviors and 3) tries to analyze differences between linguistic and cultural communities with regard to communication behavior and influencing factors. As for communicative behavior, a distinction can be made between behavior that is produced by a single individual and behavior that requires the interaction and/or cooperation of several individuals. I will call the first type of behavior “individual behavior” and the other type behavior, “interactive” behavior. That a behavior is individual does not mean that it is not affected by other people, such as by another person’s choice of words. It means only that the choice of words can be ascribed to an individual while the types of behavior that are interactive can not be ascribed only to an individual.

2.2 Individual level

On the individual level it may be convenient to view linguistic communication from the following four aspects:

1. Body Movements
2. Sound and Writing
3. Vocabulary and Phraseology
4. Grammar

2.2.1 Body Movements

When we speak, our speech is continuously accompanied by gestures, facial expressions and other body movements that add to what we are saying in different ways. There are great differences in how people from different cultures communicate with their bodies. The largest differences are probably concern the use of hands to convey different meanings. Gestures for such things as **money, great, come here** vary considerably between Sweden and the Mediterranean countries. Other differences are found for when and where a person is permitted to express something, perhaps particularly certain emotions. There can also be variations from culture to culture in how intensely people show different emotions. In certain cultures such as Mediterranean cultures, it is permitted to show strong feelings such as happiness, anger and grief in public. In others, such as Sweden or Japan, there are restrictions against this. See Barnlund 1975.

2.2.2 Sound and writing

Two very obvious differences between different languages are their sound and writing systems. The differences in sound can be seen from two main aspects:

1. Each language has its store of least meaning differentiating sound units or phonemes. These vary in the languages of the world between 16 in the Polynesian languages, and about 80 in Caucasian languages.
2. Together with phonemes there is also what is usually called “prosody”, “intonation” or “melody”; that is, sound characteristics whose range is longer than separate sounds. The primary functions of prosody are the following: 1) to indicate biological, social and regional identity, e.g. that the speaker is a middle-aged female

convenience store cash register operator in Gothenburg; 2) to indicate rhythm and tone; 3) to indicate what units belong together in meaning; 4) to indicate feelings and attitudes. Not least the latter function seems to show great differences related to culture. The way of expressing emotions using prosody is probably not the same in all languages and cultures. In a study of how prosody is interpreted, Abelin & Allwood (1985) got the following two main results:

1. There seem to be culturally given, relatively stable patterns for indicating emotions using prosody. The way of interpreting the emotional expression in the voice does not vary much from person to person.
2. Our way of interpreting expressions of emotion in the voice is dependent upon linguistic and cultural background. Groups with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds make their interpretations in different ways.

As prosodic patterns are for most people probably on a low level of awareness, this means that there is a great risk for incorrect interpretations about which one is not aware in communication with people from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The differences between different writing systems are often more obvious than differences in sound systems. A main division of the world's writing systems can be made between 1) **ideographic**, where each written unit in principle expresses a morpheme (smallest meaning bearing language unit), and 2) sound-based system that either can be **phonemic**, based on phonemes (the smallest meaning differentiating linguistic sound), or **syllabic**, based on syllables. The differences between writing systems can be less obvious, for instance when two languages use the same written letters but in different ways. Compare the pronunciation of (j) in English and in Swedish (like English "y").

2.2.3 Vocabulary and phraseology

The difference between different languages, which people who learn several different languages become aware of, is the difference between the vocabulary of different languages in terms of words and phrases.

In every culture, the words and phrases of everyday language mirror the needs, values and attitudes that have been common and strong and have thus been necessary to communicate about. People who live in a desert have in their everyday language a vocabulary that allows a differentiation between many different types of sand, while people who live in areas with a great deal of snow instead develop a vocabulary that allows a differentiation between many types of snow.

A difference in vocabulary that has been investigated the most has to do with differences between the words for color in different languages. The figure below shows the great differences that can exist in this area (Source: Berlin & Key 1969).
Jale Tiv Hannuoo Ibo Tzeltal Lowland-Tamil Nez Perce Swedish New Guinea Nigeria Phillipines Nigeria Mexico India North America European

Jale New Guinea	Tiv Nigeria	Hannuoo Phillipines	Ibo Nigeria	Tzeltal Mexico	Lowland-Tamil India	Nez perce North America	Swedish
						dark	dark
					dark	brown	brown
dark	dark	dark	dark	dark	blue	blue	gray
		red		red	red	red	blue
	red	green	red	green	green	green	purple
			yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	pink
light	light	light	light	light	light	light	green
							red
							orange
							yellow
							light

The languages range from Jale in New Guinea where there are only two words, one for all dark and one for all light nuances of colors to Swedish where there are at least nine distinct color words in ordinary use. For a discussion of the effects of differences in vocabulary such as these, see e.g. Berlin & Kay (1969) and Allwood (1983). However, it is clear that problems in understanding can arise in communication between people of different cultures as they have different expectations as to what distinctions and nuances they should be able to express using their vocabularies.

Another important area in uncovering differences that can be significant in intercultural communication is different types of standardized phrases and metaphors.

Among such expressions are what are usually called proverbs, that is, standardized phrases that directly or metaphorically express what, at least by certain people in the culture, is seen as wisdom about life. Swedish has for example the following phrases that can all begin with **one should** (man skall):

Swedish	English literal	English idiomatic
vara karl för sin hatt	be man for his hat	shoulder one's responsibility
göra rätt för sig	do right for yourself	do your duty
inte göra bort sig	not make away yourself	don't make a fool of yourself
inte ligga andra till last	not lie one other as a load	don't be a burden to others
sköta sig själv och skita i andra	take care of one's self and shit on others	mind one's own business
inte tro att man är något	not believe that one something	don't have a swelled head is

Phrases of this type, sometimes as here in the imperative form, reflect values that are shared by many people and thus give good insight into the values and attitudes that are common in a particular culture. The phrases thereby function both as guiding and legitimizing instrument: one should behave in such a way that is consistent with the proverbs but one can also use a proverb to justify one's actions or opinions.

2.2.4 Grammar

A fourth dimension that can be used to differentiate languages is grammar, e.g. the inflection, derivation, and syntactic patterns that exist in the language. For example, in Swedish, it is possible using forms of inflection to indicate whether a noun is plural or singular and has the definite form and e.g. **flick**[girl]-**or**[s]-**na**[the] (the girls), while this is not possible in Chinese, where it may either be understood implicitly or explicitly

through the use of independent words that express number or definiteness. Languages also exhibit great differences in basic word order patterns. A very well known way to classify language introduced by Joseph Greenberg, a California linguist (see Greenberg, 1966), is based on the basic word order in statements between subject (S), verb (V), and object (O).

SVO	SOV	VSO	VOS	OVS	OSV
Swedish	Japanese	Arabic	Malagasy (a Caribbean language)	Hixkaryana	no certain cases

An interesting similarity can also be noted by classifying the languages of the world in this way, namely that 99% belong to the first three categories, SVO, SOV or VSO. The subject comes before the object in all three types. However, no satisfying explanation has yet been offered for why this pattern is the most common. See further Comrie (1981).

2.3 Sender and receiver

The four aspects of linguistic behavior on the individual level mentioned above can be viewed from two main perspectives: the perspective of the sender and the perspective of the receiver.

The sender or speaker must produce a message that the receiver or listener can perceive and understand.

In order to be able to express his/her message, the sender must simultaneously plan, maintain control of and produce his/her message in all the four dimensions discussed above. He/she can not control everything with an equally high degree of awareness but must continuously rely on pre-existing "programmed, automatic subroutines". There is much to suggest that, among these automatic routines, we find routines for pronunciation, body movements and grammar, while our choice of words probably has a lesser degree of automaticity.

The automatization of certain linguistic behavior is probably one of the reasons why it is so difficult for adults to alter many grammatic patterns, pronunciation patterns (especially prosody) and body movement patterns when they attempt to learn a new language.

In the same way as the sender, the receiver's task implies control and integration of several different dimensions at the same time. The receiver probably also uses automatic routines, which he/she is not able to control with any higher degree of awareness. However, it would be a mistake to believe that the receiver is only passive – a sort of clay tablet on which the incoming message makes an imprint regardless of the receiver's reactions. In fact, the receiver's inner activity (perhaps even the part that can be controlled) is at least as great as the speaker's. At least the following must be included among the receiver's activities and reactions:

- A. Influence
- B. Perception (Apprehension)
- C. Understanding
- D. Other reactions

2.3.1 Influence

The first type of reaction is influence or the processing of information without a high

degree of awareness and control. In a series of experiments, Marcel (Marcel, 1979) showed that we can be influenced by a text without having consciously perceived it. Other studies show that we can be influenced by the size of pupils of other people without being aware that this is that which is influencing us (Argyle, 1975).

2.3.2 Perception (Apprehension)

The second type of reaction is the perception or apprehension of information, i.e. that information is also consciously registered by the receiver through his/her five senses. This type of reaction is necessary for such specialized activities as reading.

2.3.3 Understanding

Some of the information that is perceived is also understood. Whether understanding can be said to take place depends on if the receiver is able to put the information he/she perceives into a meaningful context, i.e. a context that is based on understood logical relations or understanding about cause and effect. The difference between perception and understanding can be illustrated by considering a person not well versed in mathematics who attends a lecture on topology. He/she probably perceives in some sense what is being said but probably does not understand. To be able to put perceived information into a meaningful context, a person must have already stored a certain amount of information. One must already understand. This relationship is often formulated as “**understanding requires pre-understanding**”. If you already understand a great deal, then not so much needs to be said to make you to understand more.

This relationship is continuously used in everyday conversations in which we normally succeed in sharing more information than we literally express. By building upon the information that we assume we share with other people, we can take a great deal for granted and be satisfied with hints. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that half of the information we are sharing in ordinary conversations is implicitly understood and is based on the receiver, through his/her process of interpretation and understanding, successfully reconstructing the message the sender intends.

The consequences of these considerations that have to do with linguistic communication in general are relatively important if we wish to understand the difficulties that can exist in intercultural communication. In some cases of intercultural communication, the persons who communicate lack a relevant common cultural background, that is, they lack common beliefs, values and norms. They have no shared pre-understandings on which to build.

The strategy I recommend is to try to clarify, through the use of language, what is normally taken for granted, by making explicit as many requirements as possible for what is said. This is the strategy used in certain legal traditions (see e.g. Gunnarsson, 1982) when you want to be sure that the law is being applied in the same way in all places without opportunity for differing interpretations by any individual reader. The process requires a great deal of thought and consideration and is probably more easily applied in written language, where passages can be changed and added to in retrospect.

In an intercultural communication situation, the solution indicated by legislative texts is normally closed. One is most often limited to spoken language and, furthermore, to a spoken language which is not common and therefore perhaps poorly used/understood by at least one of the parties.

The starting point for reaching mutual understanding in intercultural communication is thus a difficult one and can be improved only by carefully observing and noting what

types of pre-understanding are necessary in different contexts, in other words by, first of all, building a sensitivity towards the points at which misunderstanding between people with different cultural backgrounds can occur and, secondly, by penetrating and learning about other people's cultures.

2.3.4 Other reactions

Parallel to factual **understanding**, emotional and attitudinal reactions are integrated with the process of understanding. Factual understanding is concurrently combined with emotional and attitudinal reactions. We become interested, bored, upset, sad, angry, happy or irritated over what we hear and we direct these reactions toward the contents of what we are hearing and toward the person who is speaking. Reactions of this type exist among all people in all communication situations and can only, by training and analytical abstraction, be differentiated from the more factual understanding. For example, most people have a very difficult time differentiating between a topic and a person. They are not aware of the fallacy of ad-hominem argumentation. If I do not respect X, then what X is saying can not be true, or the reverse, if I respect X then what X is saying must be true. Factual understanding and emotional reactions always function in an interplay with one another.

Emotional and attitudinal reactions often have a relatively low degree of awareness and are difficult to control. However, this does not stop them from showing a systematic pattern. They are results of the norms and values that a certain individual has accepted on the basis of his/her biological nature and his/her upbringing in a particular environment. In this way, it is possible for certain emotional and attitudinal reactions to become dominant in a particular culture and we can say things like the following, "Most Swedes do not like to speak loudly and shrilly in public situations when they are sober".

Our emotional and attitudinal reactions are thus one more factor that must be considered in intercultural communication. The situation, so to speak, is open to misunderstandings connected with hasty emotional reactions on a relatively low level of awareness. These reactions, in turn, can further be connected to other reactions that have to do with desires and dispositions toward behavior. To the extent that the reactions are positive, the complex nature of the receiver's reactions can lead to a quicker establishment of good contact between the parties. To the extent that they are negative, however, we can on the basis of small misunderstandings get reactions that involve prejudice, suspicion, dislike and discrimination.

2.4 Communication behavior on an interactive level

Above we discussed the communication behavior that can be produced and interpreted by individual speakers and listeners. We will now look more closely at a number of characteristics of communication behavior that require a consideration of the interaction between sender and receiver. Although the aspects we will discuss probably make up the most important characteristics on the interactive level, they do not represent an exhaustive list of all the interesting aspects of interaction in intercultural communication. The aspects I will discuss here are: 1) interaction sequences, 2) turn taking, 3) feedback and 4) spatial configurations.

2.4.1 Interaction sequences

The concept of interaction sequence is derived from the fact that a specific type of communication can often be said to go through a number of distinct stages. For example, you begin, continue and complete a communicative interaction in a particular way. The initial sequences include greetings, introductions and routines for opening channels between the sender and the receiver, such as the initial use of the word **hello** in a telephone conversation.

Different cultures and linguistic areas vary considerably in terms of how much body contact is permitted in the greeting and introduction routines of different situations. In a relatively neutral contact, this can be completely lacking, as in classical China, or a handshake may suffice, as is most common in Sweden presently, or one may use hand contact together with an embrace and a varying number of kisses, as is currently the practice in France. The same types of differences and preferences can also be observed in closing sequences such as in leave-taking. For a more exhaustive review of differences of this type, see Allwood (1982). It is important at this point to again warn for simple generalizations. In each culture, there are a large number of ways to e.g. greet people and take leave from people that are dependent on the situation and the activity. Influencing factors for what should be done are the purpose of the activity and the person with whom you are speaking. I greet my children in a different way than I greet my colleagues, and what I say and do in parting is different when I will be taking a long trip and when I will be meeting the person with whom I am speaking again in a few hours. Influencing factors of these types probably regulate the variation in communication patterns in all cultures but do so in different ways in each culture.

The interaction sequences that take place are actually, when all is said and done, dependent upon the activity that the communication serves. The different purposes of the activity influence an organization of linguistic and other behavior that, in many cases, result in a sequence of subactivities which is typical for a particular activity. In a conversation in which advice and counsel are given, e.g. in a meeting with someone who works at an employment agency, social welfare office or in psychological consultations, one or more of the following activities would probably be included (at least in a Swedish cultural setting).

1. Greetings
2. Introductions
3. Identification of problems/desires
4. Gathering of relevant background information
(This point can probably be given a very large number of subdivisions depending on how much of the individual's life is relevant.)
5. Suggestions
6. Discussion
7. Conclusions/agreements
8. Summary
9. Leave-taking

The number of activities included and the order in which they come can vary depending upon specific characteristics of the counselor and the person seeking advice as well as the relation between them. However, it is probable that a relatively frequent pattern is developed for a particular type of counseling activity in a particular culture, not least when this can be regulated by establishing rules for general practice.

The patterns by no means need to be the same from one culture to another. It is actually highly probable that activities such as "getting to know someone", "keeping informal company", "teaching", "being in meetings together" and "counseling" exhibit differences from culture to culture.

As it is often exactly within the framework of such activities that intercultural communication takes place, such things as differences in expectations as to what sequences should exist and in which way they should be carried out is one of the factors that can cause difficulties in intercultural communication.

2.4.2 Turn-taking

Since the middle of the 20TH century, the concept of “turn taking” has been used more and more to characterize a basic set of principles for conversational interaction, see Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974). The principles have to do with how the right to speak is distributed - who speaks with whom, for how long, about what, when and in which way.

A question that arises out of the above five questions is that of how many speakers may speak at the same time in different situations. In northwestern Europe, it seems in most cases that the rule is “one speaker at a time”. Interrupting other speakers is generally avoided, even in informal contexts and debates. This pattern is strongest in the Scandinavian countries and somewhat weaker in Germany and England. Compare, for example, a Swedish, a German and an English political debate. While Mediterranean countries to some extent show the same pattern, overlap and interruptions are more frequent. The tolerance for interruptions and simultaneous speaking is there much greater in lively discussions and debates. Interruption and overlap are normal expressions of involvement and participation.

Other questions having to do with turn taking concern speed of talk and tolerance of silence, i.e. such questions as how rapid speaker change should be and whether you can allow yourself, now and again, to say nothing. There seem to be great differences both between and within different cultures in these respects. A relatively general pattern seems to be that urban cultures have a higher speech rate and less silence than rural cultures. However, there seem also to be national ethnic differences, see Saville-Troike 1982. The greatest appreciation of silence in certain types of interaction has been reported for the Apache Indians of North America, see Basso, 1979. There are also many reports of silence being appreciated from northern Sweden and Finland, see Lehtonen and Saijavaara (1982), Hakulinen and Karlsson (1977). Speech rate seems to be correlated with silence such that a lower speech rate is associated with a greater occurrence of silence.

A third area in which there seem to be differences between cultures has to do with rights and obligations in different situations concerning turn taking. Very generally, it can be said that rights and obligations concerning turn taking are determined to a great extent by a person's social role. Persons who have roles that imply social prominence, e.g. because they are considered to be associated with knowledge or power, such as bosses, ministers and professors, seem in most cultures to have greater freedom with respect to turn taking than do other people. They can speak about what they like, for as long as they like and in the way in which they like. They can permit themselves to interrupt other speakers, even in cultures in which the “one speaker at a time” rule is relatively strong, see also Allwood (1980). However, there are also differences between the rights and obligations that are connected with a particular role, differences that are associated with the type of tradition and authority that is found in a certain culture. A teacher, for example, has a somewhat different role in Sweden and in Turkey.

Certain roles are very strongly associated with rights and obligations in turn taking. One such is the role of chairman at a meeting. The task of a chairman is to maintain order in turn taking. What will we talk about? Who will be allowed to speak? In what way will we be allowed to speak?

Although meetings as an activity exist in most European cultures, a chairman's rights can vary. In England and the USA, for example, a chairman has somewhat greater rights than in Sweden. He can choose to ignore persons whom he does not believe will add

anything positive to the discussion. This behavior would hardly be tolerated in Sweden, where tradition states that every person who wishes to say something has the right to do so if the item has not been concluded or stricken from the discussion.

2.4.3 Feedback

The third interactive aspect I wish to explore is feedback. Feedback here means the processes through which the speaker receives information from the listener about the way in which the listener has perceived, understood and reacted to what the speaker has said. A major division of feedback behaviors is: 1) feedback elicitation and 2) feedback giving.

All languages seem to have both verbal and nonverbal (body movement) ways to develop and give feedback. Some Swedish feedback elicitors are: **inte sant** (isn't that true?) and **eller hur, eller, vad** (or how? or? what?). Similar expressions are used in many languages. They often contain words for disjunction, negation, truth or correctness, e.g. **n'est ce pas** ("is this not so?" in French), **ne pravda li** ("not true?" in Russian), **nicht wahr** ("not true?" in German), **no es cierto** ("isn't that certain?" in Spanish). In English, feedback elicitation has been grammaticized through the so called tag-questions: **you smoke, don't you?, you don't smoke, do you?** Feedback elicitation takes place nonverbally in Swedish (and probably several other cultures) by e.g. moving the head forward and raising the eyebrows.

As regards feedback giving, there are several hundred expressions in Swedish for giving feedback. Some of these are unusual from an intercultural perspective. This applies to the Swedish practice of using the act of breathing in for saying **ja** or **nej** (yes or no), which is often interpreted by persons of other cultural backgrounds as a lung problem or as holding back an emotion. This is also true for the following series of triplets of feedback givers: **Ja - jaha - ha, jo - johö - ho, nä - nää - hä, m - mhm - hm, a(h) - aha - ha**, that is, the first word's vowel (or continuant) is repeated and preceded by the addition of an <h>.

Although most cultural and language communities seem to have means for eliciting and giving feedback, there are important differences between them. One has to do with whether the feedback takes place for the most part verbally and audibly or whether it takes place with body movements and is received visually. The feedback patterns are dependent here e.g. on the culture's patterns for eye contact. In the Japanese culture, for example, where direct eye contact can be interpreted as a lack of respect or as aggression, we thus find much auditive feedback, while, according to the studies we have carried out, there seems to be less auditive feedback and more nonverbal, visual feedback between Latin American Spanish speakers. See also Hirsch (1985).

2.4.4 Spatial configurations

Another area in which clear culturally dependent ethnic differences seem to exist concerns the closeness and physical contact between persons in a conversation. In cultures in northwestern Europe adult men generally avoid touching one another during conversations and maintain a greater distance from one another than do e.g. adult men from Mediterranean cultures. The latter also show a greater frequency of physical contact during neutral conversations. See Hall (1959) and Argyle (1975).

Most likely, similar but small differences also exist for women between northwestern Europe and the Mediterranean countries. This is in spite of the fact that they, in comparison with men from Northwestern Europe, show less distance and more physical contact. For conversations between a man and a woman, the pattern is less clear but, at least in public contexts, the distance can be greater in Mediterranean cultures than in

northwestern European cultures.

Distance and contact are also clearly dependent on other factors than the sex of the speakers. Physical space is a basic consideration. Even Swedish men stand close to each other on crowded buses. Another factor has to do with the type of situation. In situations of arrival or leave-taking, we find more physical contact and closeness than in other situations in most cultures. The same applies in most cultures in situations characterized by love or aggression, although the differences can be considerable. In classical Chinese culture, man and wife were not allowed to show physical contact in public and public kissing among young couples in love is still now viewed with skepticism.

2.5 Influencing factors

It has been pointed out several times above that generalizations about differences in communication patterns can not always be associated in a simple way with differences between ethnic groups. A French person does not greet another person in the same way in all situations.

However, the variation within an ethnic or national group is not entirely random. There seem to exist certain factors that are decisive for the variation. Two overall factors seem to be the **individuals** that participate in the communication and the **activity** of which the communication is a part.

2.5.1 Individuals

As regards individuals, their biological status, e.g. their sex, age and possible disabilities, play an important role. However, a perhaps even more important factor is what we can call their focus of identity. What socially “focusable” characteristics have they made into the primary components of their identity? Is it their occupation, their interests, their family role, their ideology, their gender role, age role, their regional affiliation or something else that they have chosen to guide them in their ways of being? What they have chosen to identify themselves with will determine to a great extent their attitudes, norms and values and will thus also color their behavior in different activities. A third factor that is often related to the choice of identity focus is information about the surrounding world. People act and speak in different ways depending on how much information they have come to possess.

2.5.2 Activity

To form a more complete picture of the intra-ethnic variation, information is needed beyond biological status and desired or ascribed identity about the activity in which a particular individual is engaged. To be able to make a not altogether too poor prediction about how someone carries out a greeting, we must know more than that he is e.g. a 25-year-old male socialistic automobile industry worker and father with a family in Paris. It is easier if we know in what situation or, if you will, in what activity context he will be giving the greeting. Will he greet his boss or an old childhood friend?

The following factors have been shown to be able to predict many of the communication characteristics that exist in different activities: 1) purpose, 2) roles, 3) artifacts and 4) physical circumstances.

2.5.3 Purpose

The purpose of an activity is the goal the activity is meant to achieve. There are many words for activities in everyday language which, if consideration is given to their meaning, show the purpose of the activity and thereby often also the types of interaction and communication that usually characterize the activity. Such words are e.g. **negotiation, meeting, fight, flirt, lecture, interview and counseling**. Other words for

activities, such as **hunting, fishing** or **business purchase**, have less clear consequences for communication. However, even in these cases, it is possible to gain an understanding of certain of the communicative characteristics that are required by the activity.

A purpose can be more or less specific. Compare, for example, the purpose of “negotiation” with “diplomatic negotiation between Russians and Americans concerning disarmament”. The more specific the purpose is, the more it will influence the activity.

A difficulty in intercultural communication is that not precisely the same meaning is put into activity words that are otherwise normally considered to be the correct translation of each other. Do, for example, the English words **debate** and **job interview** have the same meaning as the Swedish words **debatt** and **anställningsintervju**? Despite the very similar meaning of the words, there are differences with respect to e.g. expectations about argumentation style in a debate and type of questions in a job interview. In certain situations, even such relatively small differences can lead to difficulties in cooperation between a Swede and e.g. an Englishman.

2.5.4 Roles

Closely associated with the purpose of an activity are the different roles that are ordinarily associated with the participants in the activity. Compare, for example, lecturers and audience at a lecture, salesperson and customer at a purchase made in a store, chairman, rapporteur and participants at a meeting. To each role belong certain rights and obligations that normally have a strong impact on what a person with a certain role will say and do during the activity. Rights and obligations often correspond to one another so that what are the one party's rights determine what are the other party's obligations. The right of a Swedish customer to information about the price and quality of goods thus corresponds to the obligations of a Swedish salesperson to give this information (and probably similarly in many other cultures).

We have already seen above that the rights and obligations that are tied to a certain role do not need to be the same in different ethnic groups. A chairman often has greater rights at a meeting in England and in the U.S. than in Sweden.

2.5.5 Artifacts

A third factor that can determine a part of what is said and done in an activity is the artificial objects or artifacts that are used in the activity.

As regards communication, the artifacts usually called communication aids and media (e.g. pen, megaphone, telephone, telegraph, radio etc.) are particularly important. Special conventions are formed in different linguistic and cultural communities for how these aids are to be used. The convention can be valid for how to talk on the telephone, write different kinds of letters or speak on the radio.

2.5.6 Physical circumstances

The last factor I will discuss here is the physical circumstances of the activity and the communication, that is, how phenomena such as noise level, light level, space, temperature, furniture, distance between sender and receiver and number of senders and receivers affect what is said and done.

Activity and communication are always adapted in different ways in different cultural areas to physical factors of this type. We discussed above how Swedish men who normally like to keep a fairly large distance between themselves and other men will accept standing very close to one another on a crowded bus.

3. Understanding, values and attitudes

As we have seen above, both participating in and studying intercultural communication require taking into consideration the differences in understanding, values and attitudes that people with different cultural backgrounds can have. These factors are important in determining both how to communicate and how to interpret and react to messages that are received.

3.1 Types of pre-understanding

What types of understanding, values and attitudes can represent relevant differences in pre-understanding? Unfortunately, the general answer to this question is probably that whatever represents a difference between two people's understanding in any particular context can be relevant to their interpretation and understanding. Maintaining a general level, however, the following areas can be mentioned:

1. **Realia:** geography, history, religion, political and economic systems, industrial and commercial branches, food, clothes and housing traditions.
2. **Esthetic culture:** music, art and fiction.
3. **Expert knowledge:** activities with special subject areas, roles and tools.
4. **Attitudes and values:** a particularly important part of a person's preunderstanding is his/her attitudes and values. These unite his/her factual understanding with his/her emotions, desires and actions. Although attitudes and values can differ among a group of people, to a certain extent they are also given by their common cultural environment.

3.2 Attitudes and values

A way of identifying attitudes and values is to make a list of phenomena that play an important part in most people's lives and then investigate whether there is any pattern in the attitudes of a particular group towards these phenomena. This list might include the following: family, child rearing, the opposite sex, socializing with friends, work - money, authorities (e.g. the state, teachers), aging, goals of life - career, death, time and space, metaphysics.

To investigate what attitudes people in a certain culture have toward these phenomena, one can consider at least two approaches that complement each other. The one is to try in some way to empirically list via direct observation, interviews or questionnaires what attitudes people have. The second approach is more indirect but may allow for a deeper understanding of the attitudes that exist in a particular culture.

This latter approach is based on a historical analysis of the different influences that may have formed people's attitudes in a certain culture. The analysis should take into consideration the following types of influences: 1) nature and climate, 2) resources, 3) technology, 4) population density, 5) types of activities, 6) types of behavior and 7) ideological influences.

In an intricate interplay, these factors, and perhaps others, form the values and norms that are typical for a particular culture. By studying not only the norms and values themselves but their background as well, one has a greater chance of understanding why certain patterns are more common than others, why changes in the patterns have taken place in certain cases and at what points changes will eventually take place.

Among the ideological influences, religion has often been the most important in creating norms and values, see Sander (1985). In most cultures, religion has traditionally offered an explanatory and legitimizing framework for human behavior. Religious theses have

been used to motivate and maintain such things as approach to child rearing, family, work, the opposite sex and authorities. These approaches have then lived on in the culture and come to be shared by people who no longer believe in the religious theses that originally motivated the approaches.

A development of ideological influences on Swedish culture must cover at least the following: the belief in the Nordic Pantheon that possibly lives on in the celebration of Christmas and Midsummer; Catholicism, which introduced Christian values, e.g. the teaching of the equal value of all people in the eyes of God and the teaching of individual salvation; Lutheranism, which to some extent gave Christianity another meaning than what existed under Catholicism. During the 1800s, Calvinism was often introduced together with liberal political ideology. Different forms of socialism also turned up, some were atheist and others were combined with different forms of religion, especially Lutheranism. The latest ideological influence in Sweden has perhaps been the so called "green wave", that is, a strong emphasis on certain ideas and attitudes concerning man's interplay with nature. Other doctrines also exist but are somewhat less widespread than those listed above.

The most important influence is probably Lutheranism. Luther's doctrines have been preached in churches, religious house examinations, morning assemblies and many other places for over 450 years. In many ways, Luther's doctrines have affected attitudes toward e.g. work, obligation, authorities, child rearing, the opposite sex, the difference between private and public, the value of man and goals in life that are common in Swedish culture.

4. Problems and consequences related to intercultural communication

Let us now look more closely at the different types of problems that can arise in situations of intercultural communication. As in all communication, a fundamental problem has to do with understanding.

Let us further assume that two persons with different cultural backgrounds start to communicate because at least one of them has a need to do so. As they have different cultural backgrounds, they probably have less common pre-understanding than two persons with the same cultural background. If the lack of common pre-understanding is relevant to their joint activity and communication, this may lead to several consequences which will be treated below.

4.1 Lack of understanding

Lack of understanding is a failure to interpret parts of or all of what the other person is saying or doing. The lack of understanding may be conscious or unconscious, that is, you may or may not notice that you have not understood. The lack can, if it is a conscious, lead to an attempt to do something about it, such as to say that you have not understood or to ask for an explanation. The lack of understanding can also be allowed to pass, in spite of the fact that you are aware of it, perhaps because, owing to a lack of time or to an inferior status, you do not consider yourself in a position to ask for help or to admit that you have not understood.

4.2 Misunderstanding

The assumed difference in relevant pre-understanding can also lead to misunderstanding, i.e. one actually makes an interpretation but this interpretation is inadequate or incorrect. The risk that poor understanding will lead to misunderstanding is dependent on factors like:

- (i) strong expectations concerning communicative contents
- (ii) insufficient awareness of your own lack of understanding of the other's cultural background
- (iii) strong motivation, or perhaps an absolute need, to try to understand
- (iv) mastery of the language used for the communication
- (v) the occurrence of something that gives strong evidence against the interpretation about to be made.

Consider the following example of misunderstanding from Allwood & Abelar (1984) in an interview concerning living conditions:

Interviewer: du har två bord **intill** sängen
 (you have two tables **near** the bed)
 Interviewee: jag har sängen jag kan inte sova på golvet
 (i have the bed, I can't sleep on the floor)

The interviewee, who at the time in question was attempting to learn Swedish, later reported that she had interpreted **intill** (near) as **inte** (not). The example shows a combination of some of the factors named above. The interviewee did not have a great enough mastery of the Swedish language and thus did not notice the sound differences between **near** and **not** (in Swedish, the sound difference between the words **inte** and **intill**). She also had a suspicion that the interviewer believed that the standard of her living quarters was primitive. These two factors, in combination with a desire to understand and to demonstrate a mastery of the Swedish language, leads her, rather than simply noticing that she does not understand (lack of understanding), to make an incorrect interpretation (misunderstanding).

The example is typical of how misunderstandings take place. Misunderstandings are nearly always the product of a combination of some or all of the factors mentioned above.

4.3 Emotional reactions and actions

Integrated with the process of understanding are different factors that have to do with emotions and attitudes. These factors are also present in the cases of a lack of understanding and of misunderstanding. In spite of a lack of understanding perhaps being experienced as a challenge and as an incentive toward increasing the mutual understanding, it is probable that a lack of understanding more generally, and particularly if it leads to misunderstanding, is connected with negative emotional reactions. As emotional reactions are usually associated with desire and dispositions toward behavior, the consequence can be that both verbal and other actions are taken that are built upon misunderstanding and hasty negative reactions.

The further consequences that such actions bring about depend in turn upon how great the misunderstanding is, how great the communication need is of each of the parties, the occurrence of conflicts of interest between the parties and, not least, the power relation between the parties.

If the misunderstanding is great, the need of communication little, the conflict of interest large and the power difference small, there is a great probability that the misunderstanding will lead to some sort of conflict.

Such a conflict can in turn have several different consequences, on the one hand, on an individual level for the individuals that are communicating, and on the other, on a group

level, which sometimes occurs; one individual's reaction pattern can become the general one for a larger group of people.

4.4 Individual level

4.4.1 Interruption and breakdown

A reaction to a lack of understanding and to misunderstanding is that the communication is interrupted or breaks down and that one or both of the communicating individuals then refuses to communicate. Another although less common consequence of a breakdown is that the individuals are stimulated to try to improve their possibilities for communicating with one another. Among the factors that determine whether the reaction becomes a refusal or a motivation for new attempts are e.g. the power relation between the parties. If A has equal power to B, it is easier for A to refuse to communicate with B than if A is dependent upon B. In the same way, if A's need for communicating with B is not very great, it is also easier for A to refuse to communicate than if A truly needed to communicate with B. Furthermore, A's and B's ability to communicate in the language they have chosen is also relevant. If the distance is too great between A's ability and what is demanded of A for communication with B to be possible, the probability that A will not make further attempts at communication also increases.

4.4.2 Communication on the conditions of only one party

Another development that is also often related to a power difference between parties is that one of the parties gives up and begins to communicate completely on the conditions of the other party. This pattern is typical for persons from ethnic groups who live in countries in which they are not in the majority and do not belong to the ruling class.

4.4.3 Communication via a third party

If the need of communication between two parties is great and they are not able to speak each other's language or do not wish to be brought into a position of inferiority towards the other party, they can choose to communicate via a third party. One of the possibilities is then to use an interpreter. If the parties are very mistrustful of one another, as at international political negotiations, two interpreters can be used, one for each party. The interpreter's task is generally difficult as he/she must constantly compromise between being faithful to what has been said and adapting himself/herself to what he/she knows about the level of pre-understanding of the receiver. His/her social position is also insecure because he/she can often be suspected by both parties of having exploited the potential power he/she has in his/her role as a connecting link.

If the communication takes place in written form, one can choose instead a translator as a third party. The translator's problem is often different from that of the interpreter because he/she does not have immediate access to neither the sender nor the receiver. He/she must trust his/her general cultural and linguistic competence, and his/her audience is a less determined one than the interpreter's. As Schenck (1985) points out, however, the translator's role as a transmitter of culture can hardly be overestimated. A further possibility occurs if the communicating parties have knowledge of a language that is not the first language of either of the parties. If the need of communication is great enough and the power differences not too large, they can then choose to use this language. In certain small countries such as Sweden, this has become something of a national strategy, as most people believe they can communicate in English in most contexts.

4.4.4 Communication on the conditions of both parties

A fourth conceivable communication situation between two parties with different language and cultural backgrounds is what may be called communication on the conditions of both parties. This can be designed in at least two ways. The first is that an

exchange takes place in the languages of both parties. A's language is spoken for a while and then B's language is spoken for a while. This type of communication most often occurs between persons who are relatively equal in terms of power and who also have a relatively good competence in the other party's language. This is thereby a special case of what linguists have called code switching – see Blom & Gumperz 1972 – i.e. that there is a switching from one language to another in one and the same conversation.

The term “switching” could also be used for the form of communication mentioned above that occurs e.g. in diplomatic negotiations between equally powerful parties. Each of the parties speaks his/her own language which, in turn, is translated by an interpreter into the other language.

Another form of communication on the conditions of both parties is what could be called “mixture”. In this case, the boundaries between the two languages in question are not maintained; the parties begin to use forms from each other's language and a sort of mixed language is created. The probability that this form of communication will arise is greater if the parties are equal with respect to power, do not have good knowledge of each other's language (over and above what they can pick up on-line) and have a relatively great need to communicate.

4.5 Collective level

The effects on the individual level that I discussed above can also occur on a larger scale on what could be called a collective level, see Nelhans 1983.

4.5.1 Expulsion and segregation

On a collective level, expulsion and segregation correspond to the individual level phenomena interruption and refusal to communicate. Expulsion, which in its most extreme form becomes extermination, is the process by which a powerful group of people choose, often with violence, to remove a less powerful group of people from their territory. Expulsion has most often been associated with extreme manifestations of ethnic and national identity in the powerful group as well as with far-reaching interruptions in communication between the two groups.

Interruptions in communication also characterize what is usually called segregation, that is, that one group of people, instead of being removed, is isolated and extremely limited in their contacts and communication with surrounding groups of people. The groups that are segregated most frequently have less power than those who do the segregating, e.g. Black people in South Africa or so called ghettos in many large cities. However, it occasionally happens that the segregated group has more power. It is and has been common for the powerful elite in many countries to live in great isolation from the people it tries to control.

In cases in which the segregated group has less power, the motivation for the segregation is often, although not always, ethnic - national identity. Social segregation occurs somewhat less frequently but is also relatively common (parias in India, gypsies and vagabonds, drifters and tramps in Sweden or buraki in Japan). Even if a segregated group has less power, the reason for its segregation is not always that it is directly forced into that state by a powerful group. Segregation also often seems to be a socio-political protection mechanism for avoiding being dominated by a stronger group. This is especially the case if the segregation is related to ethnic identity.

4.5.2 Assimilation

On a collective level, assimilation corresponds to an individual giving up and communicating on the other party's conditions. A dominant group's pressure on a group

with less power does not need to be expressed in expulsion and/or segregation. It can also be expressed in attempts toward assimilation, i.e. an attempt to get the group to disappear by disbanding it such that it becomes dispersed within the dominant group. This has been the primary political direction in Anglo-Saxon dominated countries of immigration. It has also been a strong political tendency in both Russia and the Soviet Union.

One of the important steps in assimilation policy is directly oriented toward linguistic communication. The group to be assimilated is forbidden to use its own language or attempts are made in some other way to ensure that the group can not do this. Compare previous prohibition against the Finnish language in Swedish schools in Tornedalen or previous prohibition against Scottish-Gaelic in Scotland.

4.5.3 Dominance by a third party

We saw on the individual level that one solution to the problem of understanding in intercultural communication is to use a third power, either a language that is foreign to both the communicating parties or a third person - an interpreter or a translator who conveys the contact.

Both these ways of handling problems of understanding can be found on a collective level. In fact, the first way probably represents the most common type of intercultural communication in the world today. The communicating parties must use a language that neither of them has mastered sufficiently, such as English. Through the difficulty of attempting to master a third culture's way of thinking and speaking that is foreign to them both, they are forced to add to the difficulties in understanding that might already exist between them because of differences between their respective background cultures. That which is said must now be interpreted not only with consideration to the background of the speaker but also with consideration to the values and norms of the third, imported culture.

In addition to the relatively obvious negative consequences of using a third language, that is, the greater risks of misunderstanding, there are probably also positive effects such as an equalization of power. Both parties have difficulties and may thereby be gotten to take a flexible position where certain of the opposing party's mistakes are excused and where there is greater awareness of the risk of misunderstanding and therefore greater caution in reacting and acting on the basis of what you have understood. These effects are probably cancelled if representatives of the culture whose language is being used participate as equal discussion partners and may well be replaced by the increased risks of misunderstanding that were named before. The reason for this is that effects that equalize power such as being able to excuse and being flexible are then likely replaced by a greater normative focus on the culture whose language is used, which results partly in a greater fear of saying the wrong things (prestige and losing power) and partly in pressure to take consideration to a greater number of factors. If this analysis is correct, it should then be simpler for Japanese people and Swedish people to carry on bilateral negotiations in English than to carry on trilateral negotiations with participants who have English as their first language. This consequence is probably most clear when there exist conflicts of interest between all three parties and might disappear completely if the English speaking party altruistically put their language abilities at the disposal of the others.

The language used as the third language in intercultural communication is largely dependent upon political and economic relations of dominance. The groups that have the most money and guns usually succeed in getting others to use their language. The important world languages – Latin, French, Russian and English – have all initially been

based on economic and political dominance. Despite the weakening of the economic and political bases of the Romans and the French, Latin and French have managed to have a more lasting dominance owing to their use in international organizations such as the Catholic church (Latin), the postal services and the diplomatic corps (French). Unfortunately, none of the artificial natural (as opposed to artificial non-natural languages such as computer languages) languages with a more idealistic basis, such as Esperanto, Neo or Ido, have become sufficiently wide spread to actually offer an alternative on an international level. This would probably require a connection based in political power. A first step toward this might be achieved if international organizations such as the U.N. started to use one of these languages. The advantages of a non-national state based third language for intercultural communication would be significant. There would probably be a considerable effect toward equalizing power with pertinent possibilities for better flexibility, caution and patience in interpretation, at least initially, and, if suitable measures were taken, this situation might even become more permanent. A further problem is that probably none of the present artificial natural languages would be optimal as a global auxiliary language. In order to serve this purpose, the language, in terms of availability, should be neutral in relation to the main language groups in the world. This requirement would not be met by Esperanto, which is completely based on Indo-European languages. In the same way, the language should be neutral in the question of what demands are placed on cultural pre-understanding in order to use the language. None of the presently existing languages meet this requirement.

The practice of using a third party through the use of interpreters can also be found on a collective level. Certain groups of people have relatively often during the course of history created a role for themselves to their own advantage as negotiators of contacts between other groups of people, such as the Phoenicians, Jews, the Hanseatic League or the Venetians. These groups have, exactly as some interpreters, sometimes been able to wield a considerable amount of power by their central role in contact and communication.

4.5.4 Pluralism and integration

Pluralism and integration correlate on a collective level to the individual level communication phenomena of code switching and mixing.

“Pluralism” usually calls to mind a pattern in which different groups are given the possibility, and perhaps a certain support, to maintain their distinctive characters without the coercive and defense mechanisms usually associated with segregation. On a group level, pluralism can be multilateral, that is, it may behoove a number of different groups equally as much. However, in many states, it is more what may perhaps be called “centripetal bilateral” (centripetal force = force pressing from the periphery toward the center). This occurs when there is one majority group in a country and a number of minority groups and the members of the minority groups receive a certain support for being able to have bilateral freedom of choice between his/her own group and the majority group. However, they do not receive support for having freedom of choice between their own and other minority groups, and the members of the majority group do not receive support for being able to have freedom of choice between the majority culture and one or a number of the minority cultures. Swedish immigration policy of today, just as traditional US immigration policy, can be said to aim at just this kind of centripetal bilateral pluralism. There is hardly any corresponding centrifugal (centrifugal force = force from the center toward the periphery) bilateral pluralism in Sweden, as the members of the majority group neither receive support for nor try on their own to penetrate into the cultures of any of the minority groups to any great extent.

International organization today regularly follows multilateral pluralism, at least in the

case of five to ten strong nations. That is, representatives of these nations speak their own languages and have interpreters translate what others are saying into their own languages. Under the condition that an acceptable ideally based artificial natural language could be developed and accepted as the language of these organizations, it would probably be desirable to complement this multilateral pluralistic system with a centripetal, bilateral pluralistic system based on this language. If this were so, it would be possible to utilize the advantages that direct communication in combination with the equalization of power give.

“Integration” here means the case in which the different groups’ distinctive natures start to dissolve and a new group develops that in its culture, together with new features, unites features of the old groups. Integration processes of this type are internationally unusual because they require equality between the integrating parties. The more unequal the situation, the more integration will resemble assimilation. We can imagine a scale on which the one extreme is the assimilation of one group into another with a total loss of their culture – total assimilation – and the other extreme is the entering of both groups into a new unit in which the resulting culture contains features of both the previous cultures – integration.

5. Can any of the problems of intercultural communication be avoided?

To investigate whether it is possible to avoid any of the problems of intercultural communication, it is suitable to start with the communication situation itself and analyze why misunderstanding and conflict arise.

If you do this, you find that it should be possible to put in preventative measures related to a number of the factors which according to the analysis given above lie behind the problems that can arise. As most of these actions are found to require education, they will be goals for education in intercultural communication. I will discuss some of these goals below.

5.1 Awareness and insight about differences between cultures and communication patterns

Since the basic difficulty in intercultural communication is the differences that exist between the sender’s and receiver’s cultural backgrounds and way of communicating, a first action to reduce the risks of misunderstanding would be to gather good insight into the differences and similarities that exist. Although differences between cultural and communication patterns are in focus, similarities should not be ignored as they can form a general human base that can be used to solve some of the difficulties in intercultural communication.

As the road to insight for many people goes through education, a first goal for education in intercultural communication is to give insight about:

1. Overall information about the ways in which cultural patterns can be similar and different. This type of information is meant to give a general preparation for what can happen in intercultural communication and should include as many as possible of the points named above.
2. Specific information about the characteristics of a particular culture. This type of information is necessary as a complement to the first type for a person who will have contact with people from the culture in question.

5.2 Flexible attitudes toward differences in culture and communication patterns

As emotion and will are so closely connected with the process of understanding, no education in intercultural communication should ignore these factors. If there is not a certain empathy and desire to adapt to the other party, better insight about the differences between cultural patterns will not necessarily lead to better understanding. There are actually several studies that show that more information does not always positively influence negative attitudes and biases. See e.g. Diskrimineringsutredningen SOU, 1984:55 (report from a parliamentary committee on discrimination). In some way, feeling and desire must also be influenced.

This requires experience that leads to greater empathy for other cultural patterns and for the difficulties experienced by those who are trying to come closer to one's own cultural patterns. For this to happen through education, the studies would thus need to include methods that are able to appeal to emotion, desire and action. One such method is role play. It would be very valuable to try to develop role play as an aid in teaching intercultural communication. Another type of education that seems to increase empathy and understanding is the teaching of co-existence found in international children's camps and international work camps. A third type of experience which points in this direction are international exchange programs for students e.g. AFS, Rotary, Lions, ERASMUS, SOCRATES, People to People and Nord Plus.

One feature of the ability to adapt to other people's cultural patterns is the ability to form a common social identity with the person with whom one is speaking. We are both fathers, teachers, businessmen or interested in stamps. Keeping in mind that there are many more possible foci of identity than national or ethnic identity will very likely facilitate mutual adaptation and understanding. This is probably not the case if the focus is kept on the potential differences that can surface when the emphasis is on national or ethnic identity.

5.3 Ability and skill

The most far-reaching goal of intercultural education is to give people the ability and skill to live in other cultures and to exercise other communication patterns. For this type of education, training in the language of the new culture is clearly of the greatest importance. Education in foreign language is education in intercultural communication. After all, we will be speaking the language we learn with people from another cultural background than our own.

To serve as an effective instrument for the purpose of intercultural communication, language instruction must place greater importance on the way in which a language is tied to a cultural pattern. Beyond traditional written language instruction, much greater consideration must be given to the conditions for understanding, i.e. what sort of preunderstanding is normally required among large groups of people in a culture. Greater consideration should also be given to factors that are decisive in the spoken language, such as body communication, intonation, feedback and turn-taking.

Language instruction that contains more of these components would have the possibility much more so than is the case today to be a support for the individual who gradually with the help of the learned language will begin some type of intercultural communication.

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