

LECTURE: Religion in Intercultural Communication

1. Introduction

Religion is one of the most powerful cultural systems shaping how individuals interpret the world and communicate within it. In intercultural communication, religion influences values, identity, ethics, and social behavior. Scholars argue that culture and communication are inseparable, and religion functions as a deep structure within culture that guides meaning-making (Hall, 1976; Samovar et al., 2017). Understanding religious diversity is therefore essential for effective dialogue across cultures, particularly in globalized educational and professional environments.

2. Religion as a Cultural Framework

Religion shapes perceptions of authority, morality, gender roles, time, and community. In many societies, religious teachings influence everyday communication styles, such as politeness norms, emotional expression, and attitudes toward hierarchy (Hofstede et al., 2010). Intercultural misunderstandings often arise when individuals are unaware of how deeply religion structures social interaction. Gudykunst and Kim (2017) emphasize that cultural frameworks, including religion, affect how people encode and decode messages.

3. Religion and Identity

Religion is closely tied to personal and collective identity. For many people, religious affiliation provides a sense of belonging and meaning. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019) explain that identity is negotiated in communication, and religious identity can become especially salient in intercultural contexts. People may feel misunderstood or marginalized when their beliefs are ignored or misrepresented, which can lead to defensive or withdrawn communication behavior.

4. Religion in Globalized and Multicultural Contexts

Globalization has increased contact between people of different religious backgrounds. This diversity can enrich societies but also create tension. Media representations of religion often reinforce stereotypes and oversimplifications (Samovar et al., 2017). Hence,

Intercultural competence requires critical awareness of such portrayals and the ability to distinguish between religion as doctrine and religion as lived experience.

5. Religion and Communication Styles

Religious traditions influence communication patterns. For example, some cultures value indirectness and modesty, while others prioritize openness and debate. Silence, gestures, and non-verbal cues may carry different meanings depending on religious context (Hall, 1976). Understanding these differences helps communicators avoid misinterpretation.

6. Religion in Education and the Workplace

In multicultural classrooms and professional settings, religious sensitivity is crucial. Teachers and managers must be aware of religious holidays, dress codes, dietary laws, and prayer practices. Inclusive environments promote respect and dialogue rather than exclusion (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019).

7. Conclusion: Religion, Conflict, and Dialogue

Many intercultural conflicts involve religious differences, but dialogue can transform conflict into understanding. Interfaith communication encourages empathy, active listening, and ethical engagement (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017). Religion is often associated with some of the most sensitive and emotionally charged conflicts in intercultural settings, not because belief systems themselves are inherently violent, but because they are deeply tied to identity, history, power, and belonging. When religious identities intersect with political, economic, or ethnic tensions, communication can easily become polarized and defensive. Misunderstandings arise when individuals interpret others' beliefs through stereotypes or when one group's worldview is presented as superior to another's. In such contexts, communication shifts from dialogue to confrontation, and differences are framed as threats rather than opportunities for learning. However, intercultural scholars emphasize that conflict rooted in religious difference can be transformed through dialogue that is grounded in empathy, active listening, and ethical engagement (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019). Interfaith and intercultural dialogue do not aim to erase differences but to create spaces where people can express their beliefs without fear of ridicule or exclusion. Through respectful questioning, narrative sharing, and critical reflection, individuals learn to recognize the human experiences behind religious positions. Gudykunst and Kim (2017) argue that effective intercultural dialogue requires managing anxiety and uncertainty, particularly when confronting unfamiliar belief systems. When communicators approach religious difference with curiosity rather

than judgment, dialogue becomes a powerful tool for reducing prejudice, building trust, and promoting peaceful coexistence. In educational contexts, this means teaching students not only about religions, but also how to communicate across religious boundaries in ways that are ethical, reflective, and socially responsible.

WORKS CITED

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Answer the following questions

- 1.How does religion shape communication styles in different cultures? Give examples.
- 2.In what ways can religious identity affect intercultural misunderstandings?
- 3.How should teachers and managers respond to religious diversity in classrooms and workplaces?
- 4.Can media representations of religion influence intercultural dialogue? How?
- 5.How can intercultural communication promote peaceful interfaith relations?