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Communication in Cross-Cultural Perspective

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BACKGROUND

This handbook brings together research reports from around the world all of which examine communication as a culturally shaped practice; resulting is a view of communication in cross-cultural perspective. Readers will find here a global community of scholars who have produced studies that explore the diversity in ways communication is understood around the world, examine specific cultural traditions in the study of communication, and thus inform readers about the range of ways in which communication is understood around the world. The focus of the handbook is dual in that it brings into view communication as an academic discipline of study and as a culturally situated practice—with these treated as not mutually exclusive. By attending to communication in these ways, the handbook is focused on, and will be, according to Gerry Philipsen's Epilogue, an authoritative resource for understanding communication in cross-cultural perspective.

The handbook, however, does more. An additional objective is to demonstrate how the study of communication can embrace, rather than abstract from, cultural diversity in the conception and evaluation of communication practices. Designed at the nexus of various intellectual traditions such as the ethnography of communication, linguistic ethnography, cultural approaches to discourse, and kindred others, the handbook employs a general approach that, when used, understands communication in its particular cultural communities, that is, as it is conceived and evaluated by people in specific discursive practices and events. And so, while the concrete subject matter of the handbook is communication as particularly practiced by people in various cultural places, the investigative approach of the handbook provides a general way of discovering and studying what those particular cultural practices of communication indeed are. The handbook as a whole thus functions as a rich resource as it demonstrates perspectives that honor cultural variability in communication practices.

The ethnography of communication is one prominent member of the research traditions described above, has enjoyed an illustrious past few decades, and can be consulted to address the particular problematic suggested above. That is, how does the academic study of communication, language, or discourse, relate to the local communication system(s) in use? From its inception, this program of study has been attentive to this type of question by examining the social and cultural foundations of communication (see Hymes, 1962, 1972). As is evident in a

published bibliography (Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986), early studies in this tradition explored how various peoples around the world conceived of and evaluated their communication. Donald Brenneis (1978), for example, explored Fijian discourse. He discovered a kind of “parbachan” or “sweet talk” parading as a religious form of communication but through allusion and indefinite pronouns publicized the wrongdoings of another while seeking mediators to the conflict. Brenneis contrasted this discursive form with a Fijian type of “straight talk,” which uses threats and insults in verbal sparring between religious groups. When communicating in this way, Fijians claim the point is to “attack and shame your opponents,” to make members of the other group “so mad they cry” (1978, p. 162). The study yielded an understanding of Fijian communication along a cultural dimension of sweet and straight talk, each with its own cultural design, its own uses and interpretations. Around the same time, Michelle Rosaldo (1973) was studying Ilongot oratory in the Philippines. She discovered a style of “crooked language” that is generally similar to the Fijian style of sweet talk as a strategy of indirection. Both the Fijian “sweet talk” and the Ilongot “crooked language” use veiled references, allusive devices, and indefinite formulations as a way of structuring communication in a public situation. Both cultural forms convey meanings to participants that are known to be active in that type of talk, but which are unknown to those uninitiated in its use. Brenneis and Rosaldo found, as did Hymes earlier, that communication in local communities had its own shape, meaning, and use. And these of course need to be discovered, described, and interpreted to be understood.

Many other ethnographers and cultural analysts were exploring communication similarly through the analytical framework developed by Hymes (1972). Tamar Katriel (1986) examined an Israeli form of “straight” speech, “dugri,” interpreting its meanings as a direct and forthright way of speaking the truth. The cultural gravity of this style of communication was strong as an effort to ensure one’s voice would be heard against pressures to be silenced. Carbaugh (1989) reviewed works of this kind, examining fifty terms for communication across seventeen societies—and the events they made relevant. Through this comparative study of cultural terms for communication, and their related practices, he induced an investigative framework for the study of communication in cross-cultural perspective. Since its publication, several research reports have used, among other investigative tools, this investigative framework (e.g., Baxter, 1993; Baxter & Goldsmith, 1990; Bloch, 2003; Boromisza-Habashi, 2007, 2013; Carbaugh, 1999; Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi, & Ge, 2006; Carbaugh, Nuciforo, Saito & Shin-shin, 2011; Carbaugh, Nurmikari, & Berry, 2006; Fitch, 1998; Garrett, 1993; Hall & Noguchi, 1995; Hall & Valde, 1995; Hastings, 2000a, 2000b; Ho, 2006, 2015; Ho & Bylund, 2008; Katriel, 2004; Philipsen, 1992; Sawyer, 2004; Townsend, 2009; Wilkins, 2005, 2009; Witteborn, Milburn, & Ho, 2013). This program of work has now explored more than one hundred such practices in several different languages including American Sign Language, Chinese, Danish, English, Finnish, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Based upon this comparative work, as others (e.g., Braithwaite, 1990; Goldsmith, 1989/1990; Scollo, 2004), a generative framework has been developed for such study, and for the comparative study of cultural models of communication as these are active in social scenes around the world today. While the handbook includes studies beyond this tradition of work, this body of research illustrates how communication has been studied at two levels, that is, (1) by careful attention to local conceptions and practices of communication, (2) through a general theoretical framework of communication. In this way, the academic study of communication can, as Hymes called for earlier, encompass and embrace, rather than abstract from discursive diversity.

The studies in the handbook as a result demonstrate the diversity of communication as something culturally shaped, linguistically coded, and interactionally employed. On a theoretical level, the use of this general, shared investigative framework invites comparative analyses of the

deeper meanings communication has in relation to sociality (social identities, roles, institutions) and personhood (what a person indeed is and should be). On a methodological level, the reports focus on local language(s) as it is used naturally in social contexts, as well as the ways it identifies beliefs about communication, its value and efficacy. On the substantive level, the handbook gives attention to the study of communication as formative of particular social interactions, and as constructive of sociality and personhood.

FOCUS

Every communication system includes terms, phrases, symbols, and/or gestures within it that are used to comment upon that system. These have been variously understood as a meta-discourse (Craig, 1999a, 1999b; Taylor, 1992, 1997), as a meta-language (Lucy, 1992; Jaworski, Coup-land, & Galasinski, 2004), as language action verbs or meta-pragmatic terms (Verschuere, 1985), and as key cultural terms (Wierzbicka, 1997, 2003). One subset of these meta-communicative phenomena can be understood as **cultural terms for communicative action**, that is, as terms and phrases that are used prominently and routinely by people to characterize communication practices that are significant and important to them. This sub-set of meta-pragmatic terms is not just any such terms about language or communication, such as all language action verbs, but specific ones participants use to characterize communication as significant and important to participants. For example, Mary Garrett (1993) has analyzed a complex form of talk in ancient China that is identified, in its English translation, as “pure talk.” This form was used to characterize prominent debates, disputations, and verbal contests, which targeted the truth through rigorous and witty events of speaking. Leslie Baxter (1993) has identified two principal, yet differently valued, channels for communication in an academic institution. These are discussed by participants as “talking things through” and “putting it in writing.” Each—but not the other—was crucially important, and valued to some segment of a college community, as the administrators wanted “things in writing” while faculty preferred “talking things through.” Models for interacting socially, being a professional participant in the college’s life, and creating institutional records were all being constructed, albeit differently, through these aptly named cultural channels. Similarly, Hall and Noguchi (1995) identified “kenson” as a Japanese expressive form for the prominent, cultural communication of common sense. More recently, Katriel (2004) has powerfully explored “soul talk, talking straight, and talk radio” as three forms of cultural communication that gave, incrementally, developmental shape and meaning to 20th-century Israeli society. Boromisza-Habashi (2013) has explored the charged nature of “hate speech” in Hungary including its conflicted commentary concerning morality, social action, political identities, and public debate.

In each of these studies, the author has explored indigenous practices of communication by identifying cultural terms for them; observed routine enactments of the practices so identified; and investigated the various meanings, premises, and rules for these practices. Bringing together studies of this kind, and similar others, should prove invaluable to understanding communication, cultural variability, and ways of studying communication as such. Each explores meta-communicative vocabularies that actively create a view of communication in a specific locale in the world today. The studies explore cultural terms for communication of various kinds, including varieties of Arabic (Suleiman), being “irreverent” in Australian English (Goddard and Cramer), or Belarusian and US English varieties of “mediation” (Vasilyeva). Each brings into view acts or styles of situated practice, and ways a community of people think it is or should be done. The focus on important cultural terms and normative matters is important today. These are often deeply active when cultural communication is getting done, as when different vocabularies for “dialogue” are

co-active in many languages around the world (e.g., Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi, & Ge, 2006; Carbaugh, Nuciforo, Saito, & Shin-shin, 2011; Wierzbicka, 2006).

DESIGN OF CHAPTERS

Each chapter in the volume has the following features: (1) each chapter will include a focus on communication as it is conceived and studied in a particular region of the world. The regions covered are broad geographically and include, albeit unevenly, a variety in languages: Akan, Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, English, German, Hungarian, Indonesian, Ojibwa (Anishinaabemowin), Russian, Spanish, and Taiwanese/Chinese (Hoklo). Varieties within languages are explored such as Australian and British Englishes (Chapters 8, 9, 11), as is the combination of languages as in styles of speaking as with the Taiwanese Hakka (Chapter 10); (2) each chapter reports, and subsequently analyzes a selection of prominent cultural terms about communication in the local language(s) used in the region of concern. This analysis gives some attention to the ways the local language is used to construct a local view of communication; (3) each chapter, following the terms for communication analyzed, describes related routine communication events, acts, or social styles in which these valued (and perhaps by contrast non-valued) practices of communication are active. The idea, then, is not only to examine the meanings about communication within a local language—varieties included—but also to identify how those meanings are active in particular practices and places within the region of concern. (4) Authors also comment, if possible, on the way the study of communication is structured in academic units, or university curricula within the region of concern. This type of comment, when it occurs, provides bases for understanding not just local communication practices, but ways it is studied academically. (5) Authors at times also critically reflect upon the relation between communication as it is conceived through a local set of terms, and communication as it is studied in the region's colleges and/or universities. Each chapter, then, to the extent possible, comparatively analyzes the local language about communication and its related practices, with that prevalent in the (mostly but not exclusively western) field of communication. Authors were invited to comment on the relation between the local language and the vocabulary for communication study most active in the field of communication generally including reference to academic terms like Communication (as an unmarked term), Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Communication, Mass Media, Rhetoric, Speech, or the like.

The editor admits that these features undoubtedly appear in an uneven way across chapters. Some authors give more emphasis and detailed treatment to linguistic analysis, others to cultural analysis, while others may focus on the structure of academic units, with some unable to do so, and so on. This is seen not as a disadvantage as much as a necessity for the work the handbook sets for itself. The intellectual virtue is in having reports or chapters that share most of the above common features, to some degree, and thus provide some bases for comparatively studying communication in cross-cultural perspective.

ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

The organization of the handbook is into eight imperfect units. The units illustrate some of the key features of communication that are addressed in the volume. The units reflect spheres of concern when examining communication and culture in a comparative perspective. Questions arise such as how communication, and effective communication is conceived and evaluated;

what prominent styles of communication are active in a place; how, if at all, is this style associated with an identity; is this based in national, ethnic, gendered, political, institutional, religious and/or other concerns; what role do channels and mediated instruments play? By raising and addressing questions as these, the authors place their understanding of communication in cultural contexts specifically.

The handbook, so designed and executed, demonstrates communication in cross-cultural perspective. Here is how it is organized: Part II discusses the general approach of the handbook and then adds cultural ideas about communication from Russia (Russian) and Egypt (Arabic). The next three parts explore indigenous practices that are active in a variety of ways including in culturally based critical commentaries (Part III), in specific cultural styles (Part IV), and via electronic as well as written media (Part V). The remaining four parts take as their focal concerns interpersonal, organizational, political, and religious practices of communication, respectively. Each part includes aspects of studies that address areas of concern to the others, so the placement of a chapter into a part does not preclude its potential contribution to others. This is to be expected as cultural practices of communication, when examined in some depth, carry commentary broadly. In other words, when reading the chapters you will find that religious communication can easily reverberate into political concerns (as Part IX makes clear), just as political communication can reverberate into the religious (see Part VIII); as is evident in Parts III, IV, and VI, interpersonal communication easily activates cultural criticism as well as cultural styles, and so on. This is the fruitful cross-fertilization the handbook makes possible as authors research in each of these areas. Let's look at each part in a little more detail.

Part II serves as an introduction to general ideas and ideals concerning communication practice and its study. The first chapter in this part introduces elements of the general approach, which are evident across chapters of the handbook. The focus is on explicating a general framework for theorizing communication through its cultural terms while summarizing the key elements in this general theory. To reiterate, the approach is not simply on ethnotheories of communication, but on a framework for the design and execution of such studies. The chapter serves, therefore, as a preview of key features and concepts in such a framework. A second chapter by Igor Klyukanov and Olga Leontovich introduces a rich set of key Russian terms as well as Russian cultural traditions in the study of communication. The third chapter in this part by Camelia Suleiman introduces the Arab "Nahda" debate, which equates one nation and one language. At stake is Arabic language ideology(ies) by exploring Egypt as a case study.

Part III of the handbook explores an important arena of the public sphere, cultural criticism as it is named and enacted in various regions of the world (see Carbaugh, 1990). The first chapter by Nadezhda Sotirova examines a prominent form of self-criticism in Bulgaria known locally as *oplakvane* (complaining). This prominent form of sociability gives voice by Bulgarians and shape to Bulgaria as a cultural scene that is sub-optimal in almost every way with little hope for remedy. The communication practice also serves largely, among other ends, to take effective agency for social change away from its participants. Chapter 6 by Michaela R. Winchitz examines a prominent form of communication in Germany, *jammern*, or whining, and ways it is tied into criticisms of German life today. Chapter 7 by Shi-xu explores critically ways in which communication study can privilege Western modes of thought, and ways, according to the author, Chinese discourse studies can serve its own ends. He puts forward an approach based upon Chinese moral principles such as 平天下, peace of humanity under the heaven.

Part IV contains five chapters that explore cultural styles of communication, each giving special attention to issues of identity. Two of these chapters, by Cliff Goddard and Rahel Cramer, and by Michael Haugh, are devoted to the study of Australian uses of English and the ways "non-seriousness," "mockery," and "irreverence" get woven into specific communication acts.

These distinctly Australian attitudes and their attendant style is noted by native users as a badge of identity and has become at times a source of misunderstanding when confronting culturally different others, especially those who use other varieties of English. The next chapter by Todd Sandel, Hsin-I Yueh, and Peih-ying Lu explores both shared and divergent Taiwanese styles of communication. The authors give special attention to regional and dialectal variations, especially those based in Chinese Mandarin in the north and in Taiwanese-Chinese (“Hoklo”) in the south. Next, Richard Wilkins considers what he calls following his earlier works, *optimal forms* at play among people in places. He explores comparatively ways the British “stiff upper lip” and the Finnish matter-of-fact [“Asia-”] styles reveal central cultural features that are active within each. The final chapter in the part by Saskia Witteborn and Qian Huang explores a critically important Chinese style of “diaosi” or giving voice to “the underdog” as it is active in contemporary Chinese. This form activates critical commentary based in prominent social values that at the same time enacts social relations of inclusion and exclusion.

Part V of the handbook examines written, electronic, and mobile technologies of communication. The first chapter by Haiyong Liu and Mary Garrett explores a classic problem of translation studies, how to capture cultural meanings from a first language and place them into a second. Their case study is of the communication genre of the written novel *Wolf Totem*, which they use to artfully explore movement of meanings between “being wolf-like” in Chinese and English. They are particularly forceful in revealing how deep cultural meanings about self, emotion, and sociality in the one language easily hide from the other. The next chapter by Saila Poutiainen addresses cell phone technology in a rich and revealing way. This study explores Finnish terms for the phone and its communicative acts by juxtaposing “idle talk” and “Asia-, matter-of-fact speaking,” thereby examining tensions in Finnish communication. Cultural similarities and differences are abundantly evident throughout her exposition. The final chapter in this part is a wide-ranging exploration of oral and mobile phone technology in Africa. Kwesi Yankah uses Ghana as his main case study and Akan terms as ways of examining not only technologies of communication but an orally based African view of communication throughout recent history.

The handbook continues with Part VI, which examines interpersonal communication including gender identity, respectful as well as sociable interaction. The first chapter by Benjamin Bailey examines Spanish communication identified as “piropos” or amorous flattery. What is and is not flattering is at stake in this cultural form that is attentive, publicly, to sexual attraction and gender roles. Treatment of cultural and feminist views adds richly to this cross-cultural analysis. A second chapter by Patricia Covarrubias explores the Mexican communication of “respeto” or respect (as well as disrespect). As detailed in the chapter, this cultural and discursive terrain is marked by social tension and contrasting themes. The following chapter by Wenshan Jia and Dexin Tian offers a rich and varied exploration into Chinese by exploring a wide range of Chinese characterizations of communication. The final chapter in this part by Elena Nuciforo examines the Russian term, “posidet” (or sitting) as it identifies a key cultural situation for communication and what is culturally presumed about personhood and social relations within it.

Part VII of the handbook explores organizational communication. The first chapter in the part explores how “the wolf” is conceived and evaluated in the upper Midwest of the United States not only through uses of English, but also through uses of the Native American Ojibwe (Anishinaabemowin) language. The precipitating event of this discussion is the delisting of the wolf as an endangered species with attention to the ways Ojibwe and government agencies discursively frame the animal and resulting issues. The second chapter by Leah Sprain examines Nicaraguan Spanish, especially varieties in what is “a meeting” and “dialogue” as these operate in public meetings. Of special concern in her analyses are cooperative meetings among union members as these relate to fair trade. The third chapter by Alena Vasilyeva treats institutions of

“mediation” as culturally shaped phenomena. Her study explores roots of institutions of “mediation” in US discourse and ways these compare and contrast with those found in Belarus.

The handbook’s Part VIII is focused on political communication. The first chapter by David Boromisza-Habashi and Gábor Pál explores the public discourse about dictatorship in Hungary. This chapter looks at communication identified as “hate speech” within this discourse and demonstrates how that sort of speech holds potential for challenging and negotiating social order. The second chapter by Gonen Dori-Hacohen explores “tokbek” [talk-back] as a uniquely Israeli form of political speech. With it, he argues, a public sphere is being negotiated about the degree of political deliberation possible, with this negotiation shaping the political sphere of such speech in Israel today. Zohar Kampf and Tamar Katriel explore a distinctive form of communication, “political condemnation,” as this form motivates shaming of alleged wrong-doers. The focal substance of concern to their analyses is the mistreatment of Palestinians by the Israeli state.

The handbook’s final section, Part IX, examines religious communication. The first chapter by Abedrabu Abu Alyan unveils a Muslim code as practiced during the Friday evening “khutbah,” a religious “service” including the “sermons” of a mosque. The analyses reveal deep symbolic meanings about religious identity and actions. Abu Alyan finds that preaching includes a role for inter-faith communication, structuring messages of tolerance and harmony. Next, Sunny Lie explores the complex intersecting of identities through the religious communication of Chinese-Indonesian reformed evangelical Christians. Her special concern is what believers espouse as “best evangelical practices” as these are understood and performed in this speech community. Finally, Elizabeth Molina-Markham examines a feature of Quaker religious practice identified by them as “drawing back to a sense of the whole.” This type of communication practice plays a special role in Quaker meetings and in the administration of the faith during business meetings.

As is evident, each chapter brings into view locally identified forms of communication practice, their meanings and use, and ways each shapes sociality and personhood. Together, the chapters and parts place communication in cross-cultural communication.

Two special features of the handbook are the Preface as offered by Robert Craig, and the Epilogue as essayed by Gerry Philipsen. Both write in broad and favorable strokes about the handbook, its offerings, and its role in current and future scholarship.

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