

The Nexus between Intercultural Communication and Peaceful Co-Existence in a Multi-Cultural State

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Abstract:

Different societies and cultures have varying values and norms in interpersonal and intergroup interaction. Where the communication is intracultural, the norms hardly constitute any hindrances, but in intercultural communication, the varying values could pose serious challenges. Along with the rapid globalization of the era, the public is increasingly paying attention to intercultural communication as an important component of success, both in life and at work. It is general knowledge that human beings cannot live without communication and due to the influence of globalization; communication is no longer confined solely to a community and national level but also on an international scale. Thus, intercultural communication is now more important than it ever was in every facet of society. Yet the effective intercultural communication needed for the aforementioned success is difficult to achieve. The paper adopted the library research method used to interrogate literature by getting data from secondary sources which will provide valuable useful materials for the study. The paper also conceptually discusses intercultural communication, obstacles, and possible solutions to these challenges in a multi-cultural state. Finding from the study suggests that working intercultural communication skill cannot only assist in eliminating communication issues like conflicts and misunderstanding but also promote a mutually beneficial relationship with parties involved in the communication process.

Keywords:

intercultural; communication; multiculturalism; national unity

I. Introduction

Modern society is characterized by different types of tribes, cultures, norms, and traditions. Individuals are defined by the segment or category of the society in which they belong using classifications such as location, educational background, gender, and school of thought which play a vital role in the complex interplay defining language, identity, and intercultural competence. Lourdes (2008, p.66) affirms that “culture is a defining feature of a person’s identity that involves shared values, customs, and histories characteristic of a particular culture has a very strong influence on how a person behaves, thinks, and views the world.” Supporting this submission, Yoserizal & Ali (2020, p.184) espoused that a human language is an imperative tool for people to convey various inner news, thoughts and hopes to fellow humans. This implies that cultural identity then encompasses all that relates to self, belonging, systems of beliefs, and sentiments of self-worth. The identity of an individual is hinged on how they label themselves as members of a particular group. This refers to an individual’s self-esteem or self-image.

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is estimated to have over 400 different languages and over 300 distinct ethnic groups (Awogbade 2004). Before the coming of the British to Nigeria, different ethnic groups lived within their geographical territories. There was little contact among these groups. However, over the decades, Nigeria has experienced a rapid

influx into new, culturally different territories across the country. Communication covers all activities that transfer meaning, whether through the spoken word, non-verbal actions, or general body language. In transferring meaning, communicators must draw from such factors as their previous experience, cultural affiliations, and the present communication environment (Novinger 2008). The communicative behavior of individuals stems from what their culture has taught them. Novinger (2008) posits that people speak volumes through the behavior their culture has drilled into them. Culture dictates when individuals may speak and how they may speak.

Researchers have tried to define intercultural communication and its competence in various ways. A widely accepted definition as coined by Croucher and Sommier and Rahmani (2015, p.74) is “interaction that is perceived as effective in fulfilling certain rewarding objectives in a way that is also appropriate to the context in which the interaction occurs.” From Sercu’s definition of intercultural competence (Sercu, 2006, p.57), it is, understood that intercultural competence always implies communicative competence, and therefore always also has a linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse component. Byram (2000) asserts further that “intercultural competence is an essential skill for language teaching professionals.”

Today, intercultural communication is ubiquitous and commonplace (Piller 2011, p.8) largely due to technological advancements and the ever-increasing interconnectedness of our societies and businesses. Rather than being an occasional occurrence, intercultural communication has become a necessity for many organizations as their staff, clientele, and marketplace have become culturally diverse. Organizations find themselves in situations where the end-user of their products and services might not fit in their usual demographics, or the intended target group does not react as would be expected. These culturally diverse operating environments provide both opportunities and challenges for many organizations as they attempt to understand and foster the inherently intercultural aspects of their operations.

This paper set out to conceptually discuss the relationship that exists between intercultural communication and peaceful co-existence in a multi-cultural society. the paper, therefore, discusses the problems of intercultural communication and prefers solutions by reviewing related literature.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The challenges of intercultural communication usually come from problems in message transmission. In communication between people of the same culture, the person who receives the message interprets it based on values, beliefs, and expectations for behavior similar to those of the person who sent the message. When this happens, the way the message is interpreted by the receiver is likely to be fairly similar to what the speaker intended. However, when the receiver of the message is a person from a different culture, the receiver uses information from his or her culture to interpret the message. The message that the receiver interprets may be very different from what the speaker intended (Olugbenga and Ifeoma 2017, p.9). There is a connection between culture and intercultural communication but the degree and effect of that connection remain yet unclear. The study of intercultural communication needs to move beyond mere descriptions that focus on certain elements and are thus exclusive by nature and focus on the actual communication event instead.

The linguistic/cultural landscape of Nigeria is multi-faceted. The need for cross-cultural interaction is important to present Nigeria. It is noteworthy that peace eludes Nigeria today because of its multicultural, multi-ethnic, and religious divide. Scholars such as Barigbon (2019), Victoria, Gabriel & Patrick (2021) attribute this to the inability to understand the structure in

place, the measures, and strategies to ensure effective intercultural communication in every sphere of the society.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to analyze intercultural communication, and its characteristics to ascertain the major issues associated with the concept in a working environment, or culture-bound society. Therefore, the question to be asked is: what is the importance of effective intercultural communication to a multi-lingual state as a case of reference and the measures employed to ensure initiate cultural competence? Thus, the objectives of the study are;

1. To identify and analyze the characteristics of intercultural communication;
2. To determine the implication of intercultural communication on the effective co-existence of individuals in a multi-cultural state.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Culture and Co-Culture

Culture according to Uyanne & Oti (2012, p.235), is the language, beliefs, traditions, and customs people share and learn. When an individual identifies his/or herself as a member of a culture, the individual doesn't not only share certain characteristics but also recognizes themselves and others as possessing those features and sees others who don't possess these characteristics as members of different categories. For example, skin color is a significant factor in distinguishing members of a culture. Cultural membership contributes to every person's social identity because it is part of the self-concept that is based on membership in groups.

A co-culture as defined by Uyanne & Oti (2012, p.236) is a group of people who are bonded through a system of values, beliefs, and behavior associated with a common group identity. It is membership in a group that is part of an encompassing culture. Membership in a co-culture can be a source of enrichment and pride, but when the group is stigmatized by others, being connected with a co-culture isn't so fulfilling. For instance, members of a co-culture may be disadvantaged in employment interviews where the rules are established by the dominant culture. In some cases, co-cultures voluntarily embrace the chance to distinguish themselves from society at large such as teens creating slang that is understood only by members of their in-groups, gays bonding together for solidarity, recognition, and acceptance. Gangs fit the definition of co-culture. They reflect their membership through clothing, tattoos, and hand signals. Many of the communication challenges that arise between members of different cultures also operate when people from different co-cultures communicate. Group membership is marked by language behavior

2.2 Intercultural Communication and Effective Communication

Intercultural communication often requires a proper understanding that different cultures have different customs, standards, social norms, and even patterns. Therefore, there is a need to recognize each other's differences for effective communication to work. The purpose of intercultural communication is to increase knowledge of culturally mediated communication. With this understanding, Zahana (2000) explains that intercultural communication can be explained in three distinct avenues: culture-specific, culture general, and intercultural interaction. Zaharna further explained these concepts that "culture-specific" focuses on identifying the communication behaviors of a specific culture; "culture general" seeks to identify commonalities

or universalities across cultures and the combination of both culture-specific and culture general begets intercultural interaction.

To communicate effectively, there are (5) five basic elements: sender, message, channel/medium, receiver, and feedback. In the process, 8 steps are starting from the idea of the sender and end with the feedback of the receiver. For the first step, the sender will develop an idea to be sent. This step is also known as the planning step, where the sender plans the topic for communication. The next step is encoding, which means converting the idea into a perceivable form, for example, report form, letter form, etc. After finishing encoding, the message can be presented in various ways, like oral, written, or nonverbal. Afterward, the sender will choose a medium or channel to transmit the message to the receiver. The following step is transmitting the message and the sender's duty also ends with this step. Next, the receiver will receive the message and start decoding it. At this level, for the communication to be effective, both sender and receiver need to have a common understanding or interest. And the final step is feedback. This step is essential for communication as it ensures that the receiver has understood the message correctly.

Communication includes both verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is the usage of words to create a message. In this case, words can be either written or spoken. Therefore, verbal communication includes both written language and spoken language. To communicate effectively, it is important to be able to use a language sufficiently, both in written and spoken form. Nowadays, the need for multicultural people in business is growing rapidly, as it is inevitable to encounter people from different countries with no common verbal communication (Linh Chi, 2016). So, the ability to use another language would increase the effectiveness of communication. However, to speak another language proficiently requires a lot of time and effort.

2.3 Culture and Communication

Culture manifests itself in several ways: symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. Symbols consist of language, gestures, images, or objects carrying a specific meaning, which are recognized by people from the same cultural background. Dress code, slang words, flags, etc. also belongs to this category. New symbols can be developed easily every year.

Heroes can be real or imaginary persons, who are highly respected in culture, therefore can serve as a standard for social behaviors, for example, President Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam. Rituals are activities, which are considered to be essential in society, such as greetings, paying respects to others, or religious activities. As these activities are necessary, therefore, they are carried out of their free will. All three elements are labeled as practices. The core of 'culture' is formed by values. They reflect the deepest level of culture. Values are preferences or tendencies of people's feelings toward certain matters. Values are among the first things people learn at an early age. As they are acquired early, people are not always aware of them. Therefore, they cannot be discussed or observed. They can only be deduced by the way people act under certain circumstances. According to Rothlauf (2014), values represent "widespread emotions, of which one is often not aware".

2.4 Barriers to Intercultural Communication

Every culture has its set of rules and standards about behaviors. So, no one can learn a culture perfectly. All actions are bound to be wrong in some cultures or offending in someone's view. Communication between cultures is likely to be less effective because of the violation of cultural norms. People would never know if they are expected to follow another culture's norms

or behave normally according to their culture. There are many barriers to communication across cultures, which are preventing effective communication. These barriers include the following:

Misunderstanding: is the foremost barrier to communication in a multicultural environment. This is common among people of different cultural backgrounds whose values and beliefs vary. The variation in the different cultures results in a high level of anxiety and uncertainty and ends up in misunderstanding. The misunderstanding which has been raised due to anxiety and uncertainty continues throughout their entire tenure. This is why Robinson, Abdul & Sahat (2020) believes that the better the interpersonal relationships, the more open the expression of feelings, the more likely to examine feelings in-depth, and the more likely to listen attentively.

Norms and Roles: Norms are culturally defined rules for determining acceptable and appropriate behavior. Individuals themselves frame rules for themselves and also expect others to do so. Every culture has its norms and they have its own acceptable and appropriate behavior. People working in a multicultural environment often fail to understand the norms of the other culture and act accordingly. Roles are set-off norms applicable to specific groups. In particular cultures, different roles are assigned to men and women, children and parents/guardians, husbands and wives. These roles vary from culture to culture and in a multicultural team, one can find several violations of the roles. This further leads to anxiety and the communication process is interrupted.

Beliefs and values: Beliefs and values are different from person to person. In a globalized working community, every person's beliefs and values depend on his culture. The cross-cultural belief and values prevailing should be known to the person to communicate efficiently.

Stereotyping: Value judgments about people. Inadequate information about the people leads to unintelligent choices in cross-cultural communication. Cultural stereotypes exaggerate or overgeneralize what we perceive about people, and lead to increase anxiety. Every individual enacts one stereotype on other individuals or groups of people. Generally, stereotypes are born out of fear of the group we stereotype or a lack of knowledge of the group (Jennifer and Raman, 2015, p.333). These stereotypes are the major reasons for the difference of opinions about the opposite culture and lead to miscommunication

Ethnocentrism: Thinking about our own culture, our group behavior as the standard against all the other groups. One's own cultural experience unintentionally makes us feel that our culture is distinctive. This ethnocentrism increases the level of anxiety. In workplaces, ethnocentrism is directly proportional to anxiety levels. Multicultural team members face a lot of issues due to ethnocentrism. Butressing this point further, Sapar and Abulsaac (2017, p.212). In many cases, expatriates state that their Malaysian counterparts expect them to know their cultural norms, and social hierarchy and to imitate the way they communicate and deal with things.

2.5 Intercultural Competence

Despite decades of theorizing and research on cross-cultural competence, there is still considerable debate about its main components. One of the earliest attempts to define and describe the concept was undertaken by in their study of Chiu, Matsumoto, and Ward (2013, p.2013) in their study of "intercultural effectiveness." The researchers began by asking North American sojourners to identify a range of competencies required for successful living abroad.

Later work by Chen and Starosta (2000, p.10) suggested that intercultural competence incorporates three related dimensions: sensitivity, awareness, and skills. Sensitivity refers to an individual's capacity to comprehend and appreciate cultural differences. Awareness is linked to the ability to understand how culture affects thinking, behavior, and interactions. Skills are reflected in effective communication and intercultural interactions. Chen and Starosta's program of research centered largely on the sensitivity dimension and included the construction of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen and Starosta, 2000).

Whether cross-cultural competence resides within the person or is manifest within the context of intercultural interactions is an important conceptual issue with major consequences for measurement. Indeed, Ruben (2014) not only questioned whether cross-cultural competence is best understood as an attitude, body of knowledge, or behavioral display, but he also queried how it should be distinguished from related constructs such as adaptation and adjustment. Taking together, this collection of articles significantly expands current conceptualizations of cross-cultural competence by centering on individuals' propensity for more proactive, creative, and reflexive use of cultural knowledge in competent cross-cultural behaviors.

2.6 Empirical Review

Victoria, Gabriel & Patrick (2012, p.225) explored the sources of intercultural tensions between Blacks and Latinos in the United States; they examined the contentions between the co-cultures from historical, cultural, and political perspectives and argues that neither group has a good understanding of the other. The findings revealed that a lack of awareness and understanding of the duo culture and contrasting communication styles employed by both parties tend to create problems and unpleasant relationships among the parties studied. Victoria, et. al concluded with a call for greater understanding and cooperation between the co-cultures and the need to value efforts that give greater representation for everyone not based on ethnic struggle, but on human rights.

In a similar study titled *Intercultural Communication in a Globalized World*, Saint-Jacques (2012, p. 45) espoused that intercultural communication and culture are strongly connected. Saint-Jacques submits that this interconnectedness determines what is communicated and how, and that it is through communication that people learn and share culture. Reciprocally it is through the influence of a culture that people acquire their communication skills (Porter & Samovar 2003, p.213). Intercultural communication is traditionally seen as problem-oriented (Dougherty, Satcheen, and Siobhan, 2010, p.164) meaning that communication between people from different cultural backgrounds is more challenging than communication between people from similar backgrounds. Saint-Jacques concluded that if communication and culture are as strongly interconnected as would appear then the focus should be on the actual communication event instead.

Lulia & Danut (2019) examined intercultural communication and its challenges within the international virtual project team. The scholars observed that in the international sphere, technology reduces the distance between individuals from different cultures and societies, allowing connections to be established in just a few seconds. The primary effect of technology is the decentralized role in disseminating information across local, regional, national, and international boundaries. Although technological advancement facilitates the initiation and maintenance of transcultural relations, history shows that the hostility of a group of people towards another group that is different from a cultural, religious, ethnic, or linguistic point of view is one of the most important human predispositions. Xenophobia represents fear or disdain for what is foreign or unknown, especially to strangers or perceived as strangers, and is

considered to be a biological innate response to intergroup competition. Using survey techniques to elicit data from respondents, the result showed that members of different cultures meet different native languages. It was concluded that it is necessary to use a common communication language in the project to avoid or minimize misunderstandings

Kim & Gudykunst (1988, p.12) view intercultural communication as “direct face-to-face communication encounters between or among individuals with different cultural backgrounds”. Though limited in its scope of what is regarded as a communication encounter, this definition can be seen as containing both the micro and macro level of intercultural communication. It incorporates both the individual and group-related cultural features that are, assumably, distinguishable and unique. According to Griffin (2012, p.398), these group features can have a major effect on our communication. He views that as we simultaneously belong to several social groups our group identities are present, though perhaps inactive, in our everyday dealings with other people. In other words, communication is intercultural if our social identities are activated. (Griffin 2012, p. 398–401.) The aforementioned definitions and descriptions highlight many important aspects of intercultural communication. They are however simplified and condensed descriptions that represent only particular segments of intercultural communication whilst excluding the rest. Part of the challenge of understanding the phenomenon might lie in its connection with culture.

Communication between people from different cultural backgrounds tends to be problematic, what then is required for communication to be successful? Knowledge of culture and a heightened awareness of cultural context according to Saint-Jacques (2012, 45). There is a connection between culture and intercultural communication but the degree and effect of that connection remain yet unclear. The study of intercultural communication needs to move beyond mere descriptions that focus on certain elements and are thus exclusive by nature and focus on the actual communication event instead. Expanding the frontiers of this discussion, Olugbenga & Ifeoma (2017) in a study of a cross-cultural analysis of communication patterns between two cultures in southwest Nigeria, highlight two major patterns of culture: the ideal and real culture. Olugbenga & Ifeoma explains that the ideal illustrates the behavioral pattern that culture creates and expects of the people. It is how a culture expects individuals to react in given situations. However, ideal patterns may not always be what is acted out in society, hence the place of real culture. The real pattern refers to the actual behavior that members of a culture display in real-life situations. For instance, the expected code of conduct in a particular culture may be to vacate a seat for an older person. However, a person may choose to retain a seat in the presence of an elder who is perhaps a stranger. The individual is aware of the expected behavior in that setting but does not comply with it appropriately. The ideal culture may be in the head, but the real culture is that which is acted out. People’s reaction to issues is not always established by cultural guideline, because humans are flexible and can adapt to different situations.

Abdallah-Pretceille’s (2006, p.480) holistic approach to intercultural communication represents the more inclusive and comprehensive descriptions on the definition spectrum and captures the essence and scope of intercultural communication most accurately. Her approach to intercultural communication emphasizes viewing communication events from a situational and context-based approach, rather than assuming all intercultural communication encounters are inherently similar by nature (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006, p.480). This line of thought takes into consideration the individual characteristics of a particular communication event and the contextual environment in which it occurs. Furthermore, it acknowledges the role of culture in intercultural communication as well as proposes the consequences situational and contextual elements can have on interaction. This contemporary view approaches intercultural

communication as a whole and addresses many, rather than few, dimensions of the phenomenon.

III. Research Method

The library research method was used to interrogate literature on the potency of intercultural communication in building peaceful relationships among people of different cultural backgrounds. Data for the study came from secondary sources which provided valuable useful materials for the study.

IV. Result and Discussion

The study is hinged on Communication Accommodation Theory

The theory posits that communication is influenced not only by features of the immediate situation and participant's initial orientations to it but also by the socio-historical context in which the interaction is embedded. The reason behind this behavior is explained as to control the social differences between the interactants. Communication accommodation theory elaborates on the human tendency to adjust their behavior while interacting. Communication is influenced not only by features of the immediate situation and participant's initial orientations to it but also by the socio-historical context in which the interaction is embedded. Furthermore, Interactants use specific communication strategies (in particular, convergence and divergence) to signal their attitudes towards each other and their respective social groups. According to Zhang & Giles (2018, p. 99), convergence is a process where people tend to adopt the other person's communication characteristics to reduce the social differences while divergence is the process that contradicts the method of adaptation, and in this context, the individual emphasis is on the social difference and nonverbal differences between the interactants.

In this way, social interaction is a subtle balance between needs for social inclusiveness on the one hand, and differentiation on the other. Communication is however often taken for granted though its complexity exceeds most cultural phenomena (Williamson 2007, p.331).

Communication accommodation theory has attracted, arguably, the most cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural attention for explaining the different ways in which communicators accommodate each other's language and styles of communication, their motivations for doing so, and the communicative, relational, and social consequences. This theory is relevant in establishing a relationship in a multicultural environment. Intercultural communication is patterned after such exchange that may result in both economic and social outcomes when critically considered beneficial to both parties involved.

IV. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is deduced that communication has long been an inevitable and essential part of a working society. In the modern era where international migration and social media seem to be the new kid on the block, intercultural communication has become a necessity that cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the need for effective, working intercultural communication skills can not only assist in eliminating communication issues like conflicts and misunderstandings but also promote a mutually beneficial relationship with parties involved in the communication process.

Studies reviewed in this paper affirm that intercultural communicative competence and its effectiveness in multi-cultural states involve four dimensions: motivation and attitude, tolerance for ambiguity, open-mindedness, and knowledge and skill. Whereas motivation, attitude, tolerance, and open-mindedness are culture-general, knowledge and skill are usually culture-specific, requiring the active acquisition of information and training to reduce uncertainty about another culture. It is therefore concluded that intercultural communication is a credible tool in the interpersonal relationship among people from different cultural origins as it provides an enabling environment for mutual understanding, cooperation, and peaceful co-existence. The following recommendations are made based on the outcome of the study:

1. There is a need for exposure of individuals to different beliefs, and practices, together with critical reflection on their attitudes and intercultural behaviors. This can propel them to high levels of intercultural competence.
2. Professional communicators through various media outlets should feature programs on intercultural sensitivity which is necessary for success in business, career, and life generally.
3. Non-governmental agencies and stakeholders on community welfare and development should utilize the agency of intercultural communication in their approach to proffer solutions to human needs and a peaceful environment.

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