Is There an Essential Difference between Intercultural

and Intracultural Communication?

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Abstract

In this paper, I put into question the idea that there is an essential difference between intercultural communication and intracultural communication. After considering dominating assumptions and ideas leading to this dichotomy, I argue that communication should be explored in terms of particular instances of human action and reaction that are embedded in concrete life situation, and that culture should not be taken as a seamless whole which can be absolutely isolated from each other as abstract entities. Moreover, invoking Wittgenstein's notion of language-game, I show that the so-labeled intercultural communication and intracultural communication are not far from each other radically as is commonly assumed.

Almost all academic writings on the topic of intercultural communication have treated it as essentially different from intracultural communication. This assumption suggests not only that these are two different types of communication, but also that this difference is a qualitative one, as distinct from a difference of degree in terms of the pragmatic success of communicative interaction between persons. The presupposition of a qualitative difference between the two finds its expression in the fact that intercultural communication is presented in the relevant literature almost unanimously as *necessarily* more difficult than intracultural communication. This idea is far from being justified. In this paper, I consider dominating assumptions leading to the general outlook according to which intercultural communication is regarded as categorically different from intracultural communication. Then I demonstrate that the issue of interpersonal communication should be explored in terms of particular instances of human action and reaction that are embedded in concrete life situation, and that cultures are not seamless wholes which can be absolutely isolated from each other and abstract entities. Finally, by a thought experiment which extends Wittgenstein's language-game of the builders, I show that the so-labeled intercultural communication and intracultural communication are not far from each other radically as is commonly assumed.

Keywords: intercultural communication, intracultural communication, qualitative difference, language game.

Although the expression 'intercultural communication' frequently appears in a wide range of scholarly writings, its meaning remains either vacuous or inscrutable. Most statements which seem to be offering a definition of it amount to no more than circular explications. For example, in the foreword of *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication*, it is said, "Intercultural communication generally involves face-to-face *communication* between people from different national *cultures* (Gudykunst & Mody 2002:ix; my italics)." Here both the term 'communication' and 'culture' re-appear in the very sentence supposed to be an explanation of the expression 'intercultural communication'. Would it be possible to say anything substantial regarding the signification of intercultural communication without using the two key concepts of the term which themselves call for clarification? The authors of the first chapter of the afore-mentioned *Handbook* define intercultural communication as the study of "forms of culturally *heterophilous communication* (communication that takes place between unalike individuals) and thus deal with the difficulties that come with cross-border/culture communication (Rogers & Hart 2002:1; italics and bracketed illustration original)." The bracketed illustration aims to elucidate the term "(culturally) heterophilous", that is, the individuals involved in intercultural communication are "unalike", coming from supposedly different cultures. The implication is that individuals from different cultures are unalike simply because of the difference of culture. But this supposition does not have firm ground to stand upon. Whether people are alike or not depends on various judgments according to different contexts and criteria. Besides, such terms as alike/unalike are very vague and ambiguous: completely alike/unalike or only to a certain degree? Alike/unalike in all respects, in some unspecifiable respects, or in some relevant respects? Adding the latter expression (relevant respects) may seem to have resolved the vagueness, but in fact, this merely pushes the problem at stake a step further.

Underlying elucidation of intercultural communication by other authors is a particular model which can be called the 'code model' of communication and culture. For example, Richard E. Porter and Larry A. Samovar

explain: "Intercultural communication occurs whenever a message producer is a member of one culture and a message receiver is a member of another (Porter & Samovar, 1988:15)." This proposition, together with another one which says that "Culture and language are inseparably intertwined" has been regarded as the two fundamental propositions on which the field of intercultural communication has reached consensus (King 1988:220). The above quoted article by Porter and Samovar was published sixteen years ago. All the same, they continue to hold the same code model conception of communication. This can be found in one of their more recent publications in which even the diction they choose remains almost the same. It is said, "intercultural communication occurs when a member of one culture produces a message for consumption by a member of another culture (Samovar, Porter & Stefani 1998:.48)." In other more recent publications the wording becomes more sophisticated, but the same messenger-receiver model remains in the foreground. For example, intercultural communication is characterized as "a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures (Gudykunst 2001:165)." In another place, it is described as "involv[ing] the exchange of symbolic information between well-defined groups with significantly different cultures (Barnett & Lee 2002: 277)." Such characterizations attempt to delineate the conceptual contours of intercultural communication by employing a picture of communication as message production followed by message reception. Notwithstanding its widespread adherence in many disciplines, this is a highly questionable conception of human communication. I will first deal with this problematic picture of communication, and then come to the issue of culture, where we will see that the same code model still plays the crucial role.

Philosophers in the twentieth century came to realize the great influence of an erroneous conception of communication and language. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes:

> [W]e are so much accustomed to communication through language, in conversation, that it looks to us as if the whole point of communication lay in this: someone else grasps the sense of my words – which is something mental: he as it were takes it into his own mind. (Wittgenstein 2001:§ 363)

As Wittgenstein points out, human communication has been pervasively conceived as a determinable process of meaning transference, wherein meanings are regarded as definite entities. This conception is adopted in a variety of elaborate theories of intercultural communication. S. Ting-Toomey describes intercultural communication as a process of "simultaneous encoding (i.e., the sender choosing the right words or nonverbal gestures to express his or her intentions) and decoding (i.e., the receiver translating the words or nonverbal cues into comprehensible meanings) of the exchanged messages (Ting-Toomey 1999:.21-22)." Porter and Samovar define the notion of communication as "a dynamic transactional behaviour-affecting process in which sources and receivers intentionally code their behavior to produce messages that they transmit through a channel in order to induce or elicit particular attitudes or behaviors (Porter & Samovar 1988:17)." In accordance with this definition, they lay out eight specific ingredients of communication: source, encoding, message, channel, receiver, decoding, receiver response, and feedback. The picture of communication seems to be the following: a person who wishes to share an internal state of being with another human being conducts an internal activity called encoding, in which verbal and nonverbal behaviour are selected and arranged according to the rules of grammar and syntax applicable to the verbal or non-verbal language being used to create a message. On the basis of this encoding activity, the 'source' person produces a message, that is, a set of verbal and/or nonverbal symbols that stand for a source's particular state of being. Another person, the receiver, decodes the message by conducting a similar internal activity of meaning attribution to the message and thus grasps the source's internal state of being.

The ideas dominating this mechanistic picture of communication are highly dubious. First of all, it is doubtful whether one's "internal state of being" is always clear and determinate before it is said to be transmitted in one way or another. It is not the case that one always already has a distinct awareness of one's feelings, ideas and thoughts which are not yet put into verbal or bodily expressions. Second, although the nonverbal aspect of communication is taken into account, both verbal and nonverbal acts are seen as consciously processed according to a determinate set of rules in order to convey a certain determinate inner state. These acts are assumed to constitute a message with a clear connotation which in turn is interpreted according to the same set of rules.

The picture of communication presented as a process of message encoding and decoding proves to be a far cry from the real everyday life of human beings. One laughs, before getting conscious of any determinate inner being of happiness which one then wishes to convey to another person. One groans, and tends where

one is hurt, before one conducts any fictitious process of encoding one's feeling painful into these activities. One speaks, before one, in some mysterious way, translates one's intentions and ideas into words, or has the whole sentence to be spoken present to the mind first.

Compared with non-verbal behaviour, verbal behaviour is more easily thought of as being connected with a mental process of encoding and decoding. This is because, linguistically speaking, language has grammar, syntax and semantics. But those are rules belonging to a field where language is taken as an object of study. It is not convincing to assume that one always has to bear grammatical rules in mind and making sentences accordingly in order to speak at all. In the daily life, nobody would speak in that way. In some special activity such as translating or recitation, there may be a certain correlating or transferring process, because of the conscious reflection (of *one* person) on various 'theoretical' stages to master the complexity of the process of going from one text to another. But one cannot generalize this picture and conclude that speaking is a means of conveying one's thought, which already exists in one's mind.

Consider the example of making a gesture. Is one who makes a gesture always clear about his inner state and then chooses a gesture to express it? The answer is in the negative. In most cases, it seems that the gesture just comes over one and only after the gesture has been made does one *sometimes* try to provide some explanations as to what is meant by the gesture. Thinking is not an incorporeal process which is hidden somewhere in the speaker's mind. What one thinks is always to be judged on the basis of what one says, one's tone of voice, and numerous other shades of nonverbal behaviour.

Wittgenstein has devoted many sections in his *Philosophical Investigations* to this sort of confusion which assumes that there is already thought existing before it finds expression.

> What happens when we make an effort – say in writing a letter – to find the right expression for our thoughts? – This phrase compares the process to one of translating or describing: the thoughts are already there (perhaps were there in advance) and we merely look for their expression. This picture is more or less appropriate in different cases. – But mayn't all sorts of things happen here? – I surrender to a mood and the expression *comes*. Or a picture occurs to me and I try to describe it. Or an English expression occurs to me and I try to hit on the corresponding German one. Or I make a gesture, and ask myself: What words correspond to this gesture? And so on.
>
> Now if it were asked: "Do you have the thought before finding the expression?" what would one have to reply? And what, to the question: "What did the thought consist in, as it existed before its expression?
>
> This case is similar to the one in which someone imagines that one could not think a sentence with the remarkable word order of German or Latin just as it stands. One first has to think it, and then one arranges the words in that queer order. (Wittgenstein 2001: §335, §336)

It is true that such cases as trying to remember a sentence in its exact order, translating a piece of work from one language to another language, or describing an object in view, may give one the intriguing impression that meaning or intention already exists in one way or another, which is then transposed to an outward expression. But it is wrong to conveniently generalize this picture and apply it to all sorts of communication process.

In respect to understanding, it is equally incredible that human beings should understand either verbal or nonverbal behaviour by a mental process of decoding according to a set of definite rules, as if one always has to sort out from what one hears or sees some authentic and determinate meaning for which the 'outward' sensory elements merely serve as a crust. Again this assumption results from generalizing across the board such special activities as translation, where the model *might* apply in *some* cases.

The identification of understanding with a decoding process is far from convincing. When one is learning a language, illustrations concerning grammar and syntax can be an aid in getting a grasp of the language. But when one already has a mastery of a language, in the daily social interaction, one does not comprehend what others say by means of a quasi-translation process in which sentences are dissected in terms of grammar and syntax. There is a kind of immediacy, smoothness, or naturalness to discursive human interaction, which has a certain kinship with the way in which one understands a musical theme. Wittgenstein quite often compares understanding a sentence with understanding a musical theme:

> Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme. Why is just *this* the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? One would like to say "Because I know what it's all about." But what is it all about? I should not be able to say. In order to 'explain' I could only compare it with something else which has the same rhythm (I mean the same pattern). (One says "Don't you see, this is as if a conclusion were being drawn" or "This is as it were a parenthesis", etc. How does one justify such comparisons? – There are very different kinds of justifications here.) (Wittgenstein 2001:§527)

Just as one simply recognizes the melody in its variation of loudness and tempo without having to analyze it in detail, one simply picks up or makes out the other person's intention and react accordingly without any reliance on a certain mental process of decoding.

Human communication is not a mechanistic way of thought processing, according to which communication is conducted on the basis of a determinate set of codes. When culture is understood in analogy with such a set of codes, one can conveniently infer that the agents involved in communication would be employing sets of codes different from each other for expressing and understanding, and so would assign quite different, or even conflicting interpretations to the same linguistic or nonlinguistic expressions. On this line of reasoning, the conclusion may be easily drawn that intercultural communication is necessarily more difficult. Hence it is intrinsically different from intracultural communication.

Porter and Samovar offer the following characterization of culture: " *[C]ulture* is the deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, timing, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving." They consider that culture plays the dictating role in human communication. It acts as the code according to which people encode and decode the messages. The founding role of culture is even compared with the functioning program of electronic computers. As they put it, "As we program computers to do what they do, our culture to a great extent programs us to do what we do and to be what we are (Porter & Samovar 1988: 20)."

In the light of the model of communication put forward by Porter and Samovar, when it comes to intercultural communication, a message is encoded by one individual according to his own cultural code; while another individual from another culture is facing the difficult task of having to decode the message with the possession of a different cultural code. Consequently, the message can easily be lost, misinterpreted or distorted. As Porter and Samovar remark, "[w]hen a message reaches the culture where it is to be decoded, it undergoes a transformation in which the influence of the decoding culture becomes a part of the message meaning. The meaning content of the original message becomes modified during the decoding phase on intercultural communication because the culturally different repertory of communicative behaviour and meanings possessed by the decoder does not contain the same cultural meanings possessed by the encoder (Porter & Samovar 1988:21)." When culture is regarded as a consistent and seamless system on the basis of which communication is conducted, the conclusion can be easily drawn that human communicative practices are necessarily difficult when the individuals come from different cultures.

The analogy with the computer program highlights the sense of mechanisticity of the picture of human intercourse as delineated by Porter and Samovar. I argue to the contrary that human communication is not such a machinelike process of encoding and decoding of messages. There is not a cultural code lying hidden in one's mind ready to program feelings, intentions and ideas into messages with clear and distinct meanings. Besides, it is confusing to conceptualize culture as a certain entity with a determinate content and a clear boundary.

People who grow up in different political, geographical and social environment, use different languages, and adhere to different living habits are often said to have different cultures. These cultures tend to be conceived as homogeneous and static totalities enclosed on their own and isolated from each other. Consequently, an individual is seen as more or less determined in terms of ways of cognition, values, verbal and nonverbal behaviour, and so on, by the cultural community he is said to belong. These characterizations, however, are highly idealistic. It is true that languages, customs, and habits can be very different, but there will always be a degree of similarity or analogy between them. Both differences and similarities are not absolute, but occur or should be seen in terms of concrete manifestations of certain aspects. Moreover, these difference and

similarities are always open to more concrete determinations or substantial revisions. Therefore, it is misleading to think of them in terms of differences and similarities between hypostatized "cultures". In his article "Can We Understand Ourselves", Peter Winch has pointed out clearly the nonsense of the surmise that cultures can be distinguished from each other.

> It is in any case misleading to distinguish in a wholesale way between 'our own' and 'alien' cultures; parts of 'our' culture may be quite alien to one of 'us'; indeed some parts of it may be more alien than cultural manifestations which are geographically or historically remote. (Winch 1997:198)

It is true that human beings grow up in a particular society, but it is not the case that they are mere puppets programmed in conformity with a certain cultural code, of which they have no control. Individuals are exposed in a huge variety of ways to different aspects of what is supposed to be 'the same culture'. And they respond to occasions of communication in very different ways. Fundamentally, communication is a matter of face-to-face meeting of humans with flesh and blood, with actions, reactions and judgments of various sorts. It is not a meeting of effigies or incarnations of 'different' cultures.

The false presupposition that cultures are *essentially* differentiated from one another finds one of its strongest support in the idea that language is constitutive of culture. That is to say that language shapes and informs the thought, worldview, or conceptual scheme of the people using the very language. This is what is called linguistic idealism in the field of philosophy, or, in the area of linguistic anthropology, closely associated with the Sapir-Whorf thesis. However, this is at bottom a very deterministic view of language. One consequence of this view is the widely prevailing idea that there is a *principled* difference between speaking a native language and speaking a non-native language.

In his critique directed at the Augustinian picture of language in the opening passages of his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein points out that Augustine overlooks the role of training in language acquisition. Augustine presupposes the existence of a language of thought whereby the child is already able to think before being able to speak. However, in the early stages of a child's acquiring a language what plays the prominent role is training. At that time there is not yet room for guessing the meaning of an utterance (See Wittgenstein 2001:§5, §27). This kind of 'guessing' sometimes is typically seen in learning a second language. But here lies an important source of confusion. Although presupposing a language of thought makes learning and using a second language more similar to learning and using a native language (since the language of thought is the only 'native' language), it does not follow that in the absence of a language of thought there is a fundamental difference between learning or using a second language and learning or using a native language. In the first place, one can hardly make a clear-cut distinction between the learning processes of a native and a non-native language. It is not the case that all usages of a native language are taught single-handedly by training, or by taking part in the forms of life, so to speak, while in contrast all usages of a second-language are acquired by 'theoretically motivated' guessing. It is quite obvious that one learns different aspects of a native language in a variety of ways: ostensive teaching, guessing, composing, and so on. On the other hand, a second-language is frequently taught by means of ostensive teaching, initiating one into a life-form. This is the feature typical of native language teaching. In the second place, it is far from convincing to assume an essential difference between the relation of a speaker towards his native language and that of a speaker towards a second language. Wittgenstein detects this kind of problem in the following passage:

> Just as Germanisms creep into the speech of a German who speaks English well although he does not first construct the German expression and then translate it into English; just as this makes him speak English *as if he were translating* 'unconsciously' from the German – so we often think as if our thinking were founded on a thought-schema: as if we were translating from a more primitive mode of thought into ours. (Wittgenstein 2001:597; italics original)

When a German who has a good command of English speaks the second language, sometimes there might be features of his own native language reflected in his speaking: pronunciation, the order of words, etc.. This gives the illusion that he was unconsciously translating German sentences into English one. Granted that sometimes a German expression occurs to him first and then he tries to find out the English correlate, which might well happen when he is unsure about the English, it would be totally wrong to attribute a special

translating process to him, as a second language. There is no such fictional mental process, just as one does not simply translates one's thought into one's native language.

A further supposition regarding the special status of a native language is that the native speaker has a unique feeling of attachment towards his language. This might well be the case for some people, but this feeling, if there is one, is always attributed on account of concrete manifestations. Besides, it is *not* necessarily one's native language towards which people may show attachment. Such examples as the way in which one cares for one's diction, the way in which one treats a piece of calligraphy hanging on the wall, manifest one's attitudes towards *a* language. Empirically speaking, it is not unusual to see people having special feeling towards a non-native language. Theoretically speaking, there is no reason to reify such feelings and then use this reified entity as a man-made obstacle to distance intercultural communication from intracultural communication.

I will try to illustrate the above points concerning the alleged intrinsic differences between native and non-native language by using Wittgenstein's notion of language-game. Using language, according to Wittgenstein, simply belongs with our human forms of life. Language may or may not be used in all sorts of activities. Such language-involved activities as commanding, questioning, storytelling and chatting, for Wittgenstein, "are as much a part of our natural history" as such nonlinguistic activities as walking, eating, drinking and playing (Wittgenstein 2001:§27). Language-game [*Sprachspiel*] is a device Wittgenstein employs to help us obtain a perspicuous overview of language and communication. It is a technical term used to refer to countless activities in which language is used, such as "giving orders, and obeying them", "describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements", "reporting an event", "play-acting", etc. (Wittgenstein 2001:§23). The language-game with the builders is perhaps the most well known one Wittgenstein puts forward. He asks us to imagine such a primitive language:

> The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out; -- B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. (Wittgenstein 2001:§2)

In this language-game, which is first and foremost an activity of building, there is no such things as meaning or signification as an object or a mental image referred to. The expression "This word signifies (means) this", as Wittgenstein argues, is used as a way to describe the uses of the words (Wittgenstein 2001:§10). Understanding simply rests on acting in "such-and-such" a way upon hearing a call. For example, to fetch a slab on hearing the call "Slab!". By introducing the concept of language-game, Wittgenstein aims to show that communication is not a matter of mental act of meaning transference. Instead, we always have to examine it in relation to the actual activity conducted against a particular background. Furthermore, for Wittgenstein, language is not an enclosed entity with a clear boundary. It always keeps developing and transforming. Wittgenstein compares it to an ancient city, with "a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses (Wittgenstein 2001:§18)."

Now consider an extended version of Wittgenstein's language-game of builders. Suppose a foreigner joins the builders and learns what they are doing. He brings a block at the order of "Block!", a "pillar" at the order "Pillar!", and so on. He also learns to give orders by uttering "Block!", "Pillar!", etc.. Probably in the beginning he might pronounces the words oddly, and so his helper has to ask him to say that again. But anyway, the building activity goes on. Is there any substantial reason to say that the language-game in which there is no foreigner participating is essentially different from the one which involves a foreigner? Both cases require a certain training, and hence mutual interaction, including attunement as well as contestation. From the fact that the foreigner has a different native language, or comes from a different culture, it does not follow that communication becomes qualitatively different. Both cases are activities in which human beings participate and cooperate with each other using a certain language. We can well take a further step and imagine that the foreigner brings some part of the vocabulary of his native language into the building activity. Hence, instead of "block", "pillar", "slab" and "beam", the language takes up the form "block", "*zhushi*", "slab" and "*tiaoshi*". In this case, would the builders be speaking the same language or speaking different languages?

Oringally language is *just used* in human communicative actions. And it is a long time after a language has been in use that the process of standardization sets in. Grammars are established, dictionaries compiled, ways of learning the written language made into stereotypes. All these standardizations give one the misleading idea that languages are countable things clearly distinguished from each other, and that language and culture are isomorphic. This is far from being the case. One cannot afford to ignore the fact that people who use what is supposed to be the same language have quite different social customs and habits, and that people who speak different languages are quite similar in many respects.

In a word, it is wrong to take language, culture (and thought) as reified entities and thus accordingly draw a demarcation between intracultural and intercultural communication. As a matter of fact, the term intracultural communication is parasitic on the term intercultural communication to be used as its oppositional correlate. If one regards communication as concrete activities in which humans interact with and respond to each other, would something "essential" be left out that has to added in order to say something about intercultural communication in addition to intracultural communication?! Consider the language-game of the builders with different language background, to what extent will this extended language-game diverge from the "original" one?

The language-game of the builders might be considered as a kind of thought experiment of how people, either from the same culture or from different cultures communicate with each other. Real life encounters might be far more complicated. How complicated they are, is always subject to a particular empirical, concrete situation. But no matter how the complications of speaking very different languages or having grown up in very different environments may cause *particular* hurdles to intercultural communication, a basic example such as the intercultural builders' language-game proves that there is no *principled* difference between intracultural and intercultural communication. On the other hand, speaking the same language is undeniably no guarantee for getting oneself freed from coming across particular hurdles of "intracultural communication", which can be equally fraught with misunderstanding and even conflict.

Whatever the case might be in terms of complexity of concrete situations, successful communication involves a certain sense of empathy. Empathy is not just a matter of projecting one's own state of mind into the other person, or being capable of feeling what he other person feels. It centers upon a readiness to *accept* the other person as one's fellow being, to *participate* in the feelings and volitions of the other human being. Not merely in the sense of 'to feel with' or 'to feel like', empathy should be taken in the sense of 'to live with'. This sense of empathy is well conveyed in the following remark by Wittgenstein: "My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul (Wittgenstein 2001:p.152; italics original)." On this remark, P. Winch has an illuminating comment:

> The situation is not that I first recognize my common humanity with others and that this recognition then provides the intellectual justification for my response to certain modalities in my dealings with them. On the contrary it is a recognition which is itself a function of those responses. (Winch 1987:165)

For human communication to happen, there is a primordial rapport between one another as fellow human beings. This rapport is not an abstract mental behaviour of judgment whereby one consciously recognizes the other's person's humanity. To the contrary, the rapport, or empathy, is a kind of comportment towards each other in engaging in a certain activity. Only on the basis of these communal activities do human beings obtain a higher level of judgement concerning one another's character, intentions, habits, and preferences. But the empathetic rapport always underlies the very initial seeing or hearing of one another.

In conclusion, communication is always a matter of interpersonal action and reaction, not mechanistic encoding and decoding of mental states. To draw an unsurpassable boundary line between intercultural and intracultural communication in terms of difference of language being spoken and difference of culture conceived as enclosed from within proves to be a betrayal of what actually happens in human daily interactions. It is groundless to speak of an essential difference between communication which involves the same language, and communication which concerns people who have lived geographically far apart and hence might *prima facie* have different customs and habits. Both intercultural and intracultural communication happen at a certain location where there is an encounter of humans in a particular environment. Both involve clusters of language-games and aspects of culture with varying degrees of similarity and difference. Both depend on mutual attunements, contestations and negotiations. It is not the

case either theoretically or empirically that intracultural communication is necessarily more opaque than intercultural communication. To assume an essential difference between the two is to set up fictional barriers between groups of people. This practice will bring along harmful consequences, both in the theoretical field and in the reality of mundane interpersonal encounters.

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