The Relational Roots of Intercultural Communication

Milton J. Bennett

Abstract This article reflects on the criticism of intercultural communication as being more interactive than relational—a criticism justified, it argues, only for some of the conceptual diaspora of intercultural communication found in business schools and commercial intercultural training. In its original academic home of communication theory, intercultural communication reflects the largely relational focus of other human communication studies foci (interpersonal, group, and organizational). The underlying relational concepts include Pearce's *coordinated management of meaning*, Watzlawick's *axioms of human communication*, Barnlund's *transactional model of communication;* and contributions from anthropology such as Bateson's *cybernetics of cybernetics*, and from sociology such as Goffman's *dramaturgical model of communication.* Intercultural communication used these and related ideas in theorizing about Hall's original idea that engagement with other cultures was a kind of adaptation to different ways of coordinating meaning and action. The idea of cultural comparison per se, particularly of national cultures, was largely a wartime effort by anthropologists to understand combatants' "psychology"—an effort continued by business people, served by commercial trainers, to understand the world views of their global partners and competitors. These efforts tended to stress interaction rather than relationship, contrary to the original formulation of intercultural communication.

The purpose of this short article is to correct the misapprehension that intercultural communication is fundamentally "interactional, but not relational." I will argue that the assumptive base of intercultural communication—human communication theory—is already a relational explanation of how human beings coordinate themselves. Additions to communication theory from anthropology, linguistics, and cross-cultural psychology supported the existing relational base of the field and extended it into the original form of intercultural communication theory.

M. J. Bennett (✉)
Intercultural Development Research Institute Europa, Milan, Italy
e-mail: milton.bennett@idrinstitute.org

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However, as various ideas of "intercultural relations" or "intercultural competence" have percolated into academic and practitioner fields outside communication studies, the original assumptive base of intercultural communication has become distorted by the theoretical assumptions of host academic fields, or, in the case of practitioner fields, by marketing hype. This, in turn, has led to criticisms of intercultural communication that are unrelated to its original formulation. The purpose of the article is not to defend these excursions and simplifications, many of which can be justifiably criticized as "interactive, not relational." In fact, I will join in those criticisms later in the article. Rather, my purpose is to show that the original form of intercultural communication is itself a relational view of cultural complexity.

To that end, the article will initially outline the constructivist strain of communication theory that originally informed intercultural communication (Bennett, 2022), then identify some representative relational concepts that underpin early intercultural communication theory (Wiseman, 1995; Gudykunst, 2005; Kim & Gudykunst, 1998; Kim,2017; Littlejohn et al., 2021). Some of the migrations of intercultural theory out of academic communication studies programs (for instance, into business economics) will be examined for their contribution to eventual misunderstanding of the theory, including a look at criticisms that are actually about the practice of intercultural training rather than the theory of intercultural communication. I will conclude with a suggestion for avoiding such errant criticism in favor of addressing justified criticism of the theory and building new applications of intercultural communication on its already well-developed relational base.

1 The Relational Nature of Communication Theory

The term "communication" is used broadly to refer to the transmission of information and coordination of meaning. In general, the pluralization "communications" or its modification with "mediated" refers to how those processes operate through mass media (printed, broadcast, computer, etc.). The singular form "communication" or its modification with "human" refers to how processes of meaning-making operate in contexts where humans are directly relating with one another.

A major distinction between human communication (singular) and mediated communications (plural) is the difference in how feedback operates. Feedback is important in both forms, but in mediated contexts such as broadcasting or social media presentation, so-called feedforward is generally separated from feedback by time and method of perception. For instance, a news broadcast might present a narrative one evening and, through direct mechanisms such as email and social media commentary, public reaction can be observed subsequently. Additionally, indirect data such as viewership data and advertising revenue can be collected later to provide more feedback that could guide whether and how the narrative is incorporated into the following night's show. Of course, this mediated feedback process is

speeding up dramatically in interactive social media, but it retains its essentially linear character—the feedback effect still follows the causal stimulus. As such, the prevailing view of mediated communications is an outgrowth of Shannon & Weaver's SMCR (sender-message-channel-receiver) model of information transfer (McQuail & Deuze, 2020).

In synchronous face-to-face or virtual contacts such as a conversation, feedforward and feedback happen more or less simultaneously. In beginning an utterance in a communication event, I am already anticipating your response—an action that you have probably already begun making in anticipation of what my utterance is likely to be. Then as we compare anticipation and actuality in real time, we both adjust our behavior towards negotiating relevant meaning and action. In communication theory, this process is well-known as the "coordinated management of meaning" (Pearce, 2005), and it is central to most other forms of human communication theory as well. In other words, communication is itself the relationship of two or more people engaged in the negotiation of meaning and action. Human communication as a social science usually refers to this kind of relationship building at three levels of analysis: interpersonal, group, and organizational (Craig, 1999; Littlejohn et al., 2021).

One scholar who brought a constructivist, relational perspective to all three levels of analysis was Dean Barnlund. In his seminal "transactional model of communication," Barnlund (1970) defined communication as a non-linear activity, where people could be both "sender" and "receiver" simultaneously. Barnlund saw clearly that communication was not mainly a process of exchanging messages, but rather a condition of relationship. He was using "communication" in its original (Latin) sense of sharing or communing. During my graduate work with Barnlund at San Francisco State University, I had ample opportunity to see him apply this idea to understanding interpersonal relations (1968), group relations (Jones et al., 1980), and intercultural relations (1975, 1989, 2013). The theme running through all these contexts was that people are actively engaged in the process of constructing relationships. People are not using communication to create relationship; communication is, by this definition, already the creating of a relationship.

The field of human communication itself is an interdisciplinary endeavor of applied linguistics, sociology, and psychology. Amongst those constituents, probably the primary driver of a relationship focus is symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1974; Mead, 1934). Building on Mead's seminal idea of "social self"—individual identity only exists in relation to other people—Goffman (1959) uses a "dramaturgical model" to portray how people interact with other actors "back-stage" to present impressions of self and team "front-stage." Through such interactions, people agree on a definition of the situation wherein they can maintain, save, or lose "face." The theory of coordinated management of meaning (Pearce, 2005) is an obvious extension of symbolic interactionism into communication, as is Ting-Toomey's (1988) idea of face-management as an approach to conflict and multicultural relations.

Psychology, and especially social psychology, is another major relational influence. *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (Watzlawick et al., 1967) introduces the use of systems

theory to model interpersonal communication. The five axioms in this seminal book all deal with the relational aspect of communication:

1. One cannot communicate—if I perceive you, everything I observe about you is potentially meaningful, including your silence.
2. The content of a communication is always contexted by the relationship of the communicators—if we are both members of the same group, a joke about that group means something different than if one of us is an outsider to the group.
3. All meaning depends on the punctuation of the sequence of events—I may think I am impatient with your bad mood, but you may think that your bad mood is a response to my impatience.
4. All communication is both digital (symbolic) and analogic (representational)—a watch that symbolizes time with digital numbers is like language, while a watch that represents time with two hands is like non-verbal behavior.
5. Communicators are always either more complementary or more symmetric—we are either specialized in different roles and thus complement one another (perhaps to the point of rigidity), or we have interchangeable roles and thus are symmetric with one another (perhaps to the point of competitiveness).

The application of these axioms yields an inherently relational understanding of communication. If I perceive you, it means that we already are in a relationship, albeit potentially one-way. If you perceive that I perceive you, and even more if I perceive that you do, our every action is potentially relevant to the mutual coordination of meaning; if you buy this book and don't comment on it, I may think that you found it uninteresting, while you may think that my privilege in having the opportunity to be published should not be further promoted. And we cannot avoid the context in which our coordination is occurring; the fact that I am an American White male of a certain age writing this article for a book published by a German university is likely to be attributed meaning, whether or not I or the publisher think it is relevant.

An extension of interactive systems theory is cybernetics. The anthropologists Gregory Bateson (1972) and Margaret Mead (1968) pioneered the idea that communication was a kind of coordination of elements that enabled systems to self-organize. Essentially, this meant that communication was the essential ingredient of life itself—the process whereby living systems maintained their functional integrity. Like Barnlund and Watzlawick, Bateson took a distinctly non-linear approach to communication. Messages were not things that could be exchanged; they were simply articulations of various conditions of relationship. In the current language of quantum epistemology, messages are "manifestations of the relationship of observers" (Rovelli, 2014). And insofar as the messages act as interpretations or explanations of the relationship of the observer, the messages themselves become observations (Maturana, 1988):

> The praxis of living, the experience of the observer as such, just happens…. Because of this, explanations are essentially superfluous; we as observers do not need them to happen; but when it happens to us that we explain, it turns out that between language and bodyhood the praxis of living of the observer changes as he or she generates explanations of his or her

> praxis of living. This is why everything that we say or think has consequences in the way we live. (p. 46)

The failure to recognize messages as manifestations of relationship is a form of "reification," in Whitehead's (1925) sense of the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness.* This occurs when abstractions (which necessarily includes all messages) are treated as if they have objective existence. For instance, if the idea that Harry Potter can cause physical events to occur with magical incantations were to be taken seriously, it would be a case of misplaced concreteness. The General Semantics movement originated by Alfred Korzibski (1933/1994) and continued by S. I. Hayakawa (1964) popularized this idea of reification with the phrase "the map is not the territory." Instead, they argued, the map is an abstraction of the territory, and as such, it is actually a kind of commentary on (or message about) the territory. If we add the more modern idea that the "territory" itself is a relationship of events, then reification occurs whenever we forget our own authorship of those events (Berger & Luckmann, 1967):

> Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms… Reification implies that men (*human beings*) are capable of forgetting their own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness… Man, the producer of a world, is apprehended as its product, and human activity as an epiphenomenon of non-human processes… That is, man is capable paradoxically of producing a reality that denies him. (p. 89, italics added)

2 The Origins of Intercultural Communication as an Academic Specialty

The conceptualization of relations between people from different societies as "intercultural communication" is generally attributed to Edward T. Hall, even though he was not the first to have used the term (Kulich et al., 2020). But Hall and his colleague George Trager were largely responsible for locating intercultural relations in a relational communication context (Hall, 1959). By defining "culture" as communication, they formalized the idea that cultural members were actively engaged in coordinating meaning and action amongst themselves, and further, that participating in another culture demanded that visitors master some aspects of the host culture's coordinating process. Other approaches to intercultural relations at the time were the more ethnographic ones favored by anthropologists preparing for fieldwork, or they were the various renditions of area studies still used in international relations programs (Hall, 1996). The participants in training programs conducted by Hall and Trager at the Foreign Service Institute were largely practical business and diplomat people, and they wanted training that would help them do their jobs more effectively in different cultural contexts. Hall and Trager responded to this by focusing only on those aspects of culture and cultural differences that made an immediate difference to communication. In other words, they focused on relationships rather than on content.

The cross-over from anthropology to communication theory began in the 1960s as intercultural relations became both more popular and more necessary in a globalizing world. Intercultural training was recognized as useful for the increasing number of foreign students arriving at US universities, and a robust body of literature in that area began to accumulate (Bennett, 2010). That literature gave the specialty more academic credibility, and courses in the subject started appearing in applied linguistics programs. One of the first of these was started in the early 1970s by LaRay Barna, a professor in the Communication Studies program at Portland State University, for their TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language). Concurrently, Fred Casmir (1976) and Edward Stewart (1972) were supporting the inclusion of intercultural and international communication into the major Communication Studies academic society of the time. Dean Barnlund, the professor of transactional communication at San Francisco State University, used a sabbatical year in Japan with his student John Condon (Condon & Yousef, 1975) to organize an international conference of academics on the subject of intercultural communication. One outcome of that 1972 conference was the first Ph.D. program in intercultural communication, initiated at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis by William Howell, a participant in the conference and a full professor in the Minnesota department of communication studies. The author is a graduate of that program, and subsequently joined LaRay Barna at Portland State University to create a Master of Intercultural Communication program there.

The purpose of this short history is to show the early marriage of intercultural relations as it was originally conceived in communication terms and the already established relational roots of communication theory. New intercultural communication theory that emerged from those early programs reflected that marriage. As I observed it at the time, the new theories had three major themes: group identity, adaptation, and face negotiation (e.g., Kim, 1988; Ting-Toomey, 1988); the construction of "third culture" (e.g., Casmir, 1976; Prosser, 1978); and perceptual constructivism and intercultural empathy (e.g., Bennett, 1979; Singer, 1975; Delia et al., 1982). Many of these theories and others were summarized by Gudykunst (2005) in *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication*, where he explicitly suggests that intercultural relations and communication theory are combined in at least two major ways: (1) understanding "culture" in communication terms; (2) understanding how processes of communication vary among cultures. Subsequent theorizing in intercultural communication continued those themes, exploring how culture and communication interact in the construction of human relationships. Contemporary examples include a strong emphasis on intersectionality and power relationships in intercultural contexts (e.g., Martin & Nakayama, 2018); the embodiment of culture and neuroscience of intercultural relations (e.g., Castiglioni, 2013; Mai, 2017), and constructivist approaches to otherness (Bennett, 2013; Evanoff, 2016).

3 The Migration and Commercialization of Intercultural Communication

Academic departments of human communication studies are mostly a US American phenomenon. Outside the USA, and increasingly, inside the USA as well, intercultural communication theory and research have migrated into other disciplines. Part of the reason for the shift inside the USA may be the change in emphasis in communication studies from a constructivist "coordination of meaning" to a more critical postmodern approach. Critical studies are typically more rooted in a relativist rather than a constructivist paradigm (Bennett, 2013), and as such they tend to emphasize deconstructing the cultural contexts of meaning rather than constructing meta-coordination of meaning among different contexts. In the USA, anyway, deconstruction of cultural context is usually associated with an emphasis on personal prejudice and/or structural bias (Martin & Nakayama, 2000).

To address the growing interest in diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, many interculturalists are attempting to incorporate a critical cultural studies perspective into their work, despite the fact that intercultural communication already included applications to relations among groups defined in terms of race, class, gender, and other forms of "diversity." In neglecting or rejecting this history of application to equity issues, critical interculturalism modifies or abandons the original constructivist foundation of intercultural communication in favor of a relativist approach that is actually less relational (Bennett, 2018).

Another refuge for intercultural work has been cross-cultural psychology. While most work in that field emphasizes quantitative studies of cultural influences on individuals, there is a strong subset of studies on cross-cultural contact (e.g., Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Berry, 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000) and some application to competence in intercultural relations (e.g., Brislin et al., 1986). Because the mainstream of cross-cultural psychology research is dedicated to establishing statistical causality, the prevailing paradigm is positivist (Bennett, 2020). That epistemological foundation drives a search for the underlying cause of particular behavior in personality traits or other personal characteristics. Thus, the majority of instruments that purport to assess intercultural competence are measuring various compendia of traits that have been shown (or that simply are assumed) to correlate with effective behavior in cross-cultural contexts. In other words, cross-cultural psychology research tends to focus on the individual as the unit of analysis. In contrast, and based on a more constructivist paradigm, intercultural communication has traditionally taken "relationship" as the unit of analysis (Bennett, 2020).

In Europe, intercultural communication is an academic orphan. With no history of communication studies departments, universities have tended to incorporate intercultural relations into more traditional departments. So, in addition to cross-cultural psychology, intercultural foci inhabit the sociology of cultural processes, human geography, and applied anthropology, among other foster homes. Of course, each academic field can make a legitimate claim for applying its perspective to the general human phenomenon of cross-cultural contact. But in so doing, each application takes

on the academic perspective of its host. Just as cross-cultural psychology tends to shift focus from relationships to individual traits, so sociology may shift the focus to demographic patterns, human geography may stress development in certain physical circumstances, and applied anthropology may examine the ethnographic roots of otherness. These are all interesting perspectives on culture and cross-cultural contact, but they do not represent a specialized focus on communicative relationships.

The migration of intercultural communication into the academic area of applied linguistics and into commercial language acquisition programs was a promising but ultimately disappointing development. On the surface, this is an obvious marriage, since applied linguistics usually includes an emphasis on interaction or discourse analysis, often in cultural terms, such as the American Deborah Tannen's work on conversational style (2005) and gender relations (1990). And many of the original applications of intercultural communication occurred as part of foreign student and international study abroad orientation programs (Bennett, 2010). There was some initial interest among both applied linguists and interculturalists about the possibility that the acquisition of intercultural communication competence might parallel other language acquisition processes (e.g., Lange & Paige, 2003). However, that parallel proved elusive, and since most applied linguistic theory is more descriptive or comparative than relational, intercultural communication became a kind of behavioral adjunct to language acquisition.

The diaspora of intercultural communication is particularly notable in business schools. As mentioned earlier, the origins of the field were in business and diplomacy applications, so it is not surprising that business schools might continue the specialization. What is more surprising is that schools of diplomacy, including most international relations programs, do not usually include the topic. Intercultural communication programs in business schools reflect the prevailing organizational theory, which these days is usually systems theory based in a relativist paradigm (Bennett, 2013). This is not a bad match for much of applied intercultural communication, which is at least partially located in cultural relativity. However, the relational aspects of intercultural communication are easily lost in that comparativeness.

Following the original forms of cultural relativity found in the work of Boas (1896), Mead (1928), Benedict (1934), and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), the current representation of cultural relativity in business contexts is heavily influenced by the work of Geert Hofstede and, more recently, by his son Gert (2005). Geert Hofstede did not have a background in communication theory, and in fact, he was initially interested in finding correlations between national culture and economic performance (Hofstede, 2010). The comparative cultural categories of "power distance" and other dimensions that are now used to make intercultural comparisons were originally derived from a study of assimilation to corporate culture at IBM. While the Hofstede dimensions continue to be useful in alerting business people and others to important cultural differences, they do not in themselves provide a template for bridging or meta-coordinating those differences. Here, rather than communicative relationship, the unit of analysis is "culture"—specifically, national cultures as they are ranked along the dimensions.

Intercultural training that derives from the Hofstede categories or other taxonomies of culture and cultural difference tends to focus on the "gaps" between national cultures in terms of the measured dimensions. Promoters of this view contend that encountering these gaps while sailing the cross-border seas of global business is fraught, since within them lie the dangerous shoals of intercultural misunderstanding. And as a tactical exercise in avoiding the worst of miscommunication, this kind of cross-cultural awareness is necessary. But insofar as business schools want to teach their students how to manage a multicultural workforce or to coordinate a cross-border operation, this approach is woefully inadequate.

The main practical application of intercultural communication theory continues to be intercultural training in various forms, including coaching. Although it began as and still is claimed to be "theory into practice," intercultural training has become increasingly divorced from its theoretical roots. Emblematic of that shift is the evolution of the curriculum at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication (SIIC), the largest and longest-lived professional development program for intercultural trainers in the world.[1] From 1976 (during its first ten years as the Stanford Institute for Intercultural Communication) and then through 2018 under the auspices of the Intercultural Communication Institute (ICI) in Portland, Oregon, SIIC produced thousands of intercultural trainers. During its initial incarnation at Stanford University, SIIC offered just a few week-long workshops on various global and domestic intercultural topics, each conducted by faculty with doctorates or other professional credentials in the field. The courses appealed to other professionals in education, business, and government who wanted to add an intercultural focus to their work. This goal was maintained by ICI for the next few years, with the additional stipulation that participants without prior experience in intercultural communication were required to complete a three-day introductory course on the topic before they could enroll in intercultural training design and methodology courses.

The popularity of intercultural training as an "industry" put increasing pressure on ICI to offer more and more specialized workshops that equipped trainers with simplified concepts and activities that would appeal to a broad public. The profile of many SIIC participants changed from practicing professionals to that of aspiring neophytes looking for an entrée into the industry. Catering to that profile, ICI dropped the introductory course requirement and added "practical" courses taught by practitioners without a formal background in the academic specialty. While many substantive courses, responsibly professional faculty and sophisticated participants remained connected to SIIC, a very large number of underprepared and overconfident trainers also emerged from the program. This cadre of practitioners largely lacking in any theoretical foundation was joined by the many graduates of other minimal "train the trainer" programs and, notably, by graduates of the plethora of certification seminars associated with proprietary measurement instruments. The measuring instrument

[1] The author was a member of the Stanford Institute for Intercultural Communication faculty and was co-founder of the Intercultural Communication Institute in Portland, Oregon, where he designed curriculum and taught until 2013.

cadre can be exemplified by the "qualifying seminars" of the Intercultural Development Inventory™ (IDI).[2] Like SIIC, the IDI qualifying seminar aspired to be an addition to the repertoire of practicing intercultural professionals. In actuality, like SIIC, the seminars became in many cases the entrée into intercultural communication training for aspirants without any background at all in intercultural communication theory. In sum, the commercialization of intercultural training has allowed underqualified practitioners to represent the field of intercultural communication in ways that do not include or reflect its complex relational roots.

4 Criticisms of Migrated Intercultural Communication Concepts

While there are some critiques of intercultural communication in its constructivist, relational form that deserve discussion, that is not the focus of this paper. This section will suggest that most of the criticism of intercultural communication is not about its original theoretical form, but rather about its various mutations that have occurred as it has been transplanted and commercialized.

For instance, the criticism that intercultural communication is unduly concerned with national culture is not about the original theory. As described earlier, the original form of intercultural communication theory was about the coordination of meaning within and across cultural boundaries. Those boundaries are not exclusively or even primarily related to national context; equally or more importantly, the boundaries define contexts of ethnicity, race, gender, class, and other forms of group identity. The primary focus on national culture is an artifact of the form that intercultural communication has taken in business schools and in the hands of theoretically unsophisticated trainers—a form that is heavily influenced by Hofstede's national culture dimensions and other nationality-based taxonomies. The criticism of too much focus on national cultural contexts is justified. But it is a criticism of business uses of intercultural communication, not of intercultural communication itself.

A parallel situation exists in regard to the criticism that intercultural communication stereotypes cultures and individuals in cultural terms. Unfortunately, this criticism is often justified, but it is a criticism of unsophisticated training and not of errant intercultural theory. In fact, intercultural theory suggests that generalizations be stated in probabilistic terms and be restricted to describing behavior in groups, not individuals. However, in the hands of trainers who may unknowingly conflate those levels of analysis, the group-level generalizations are applied at an individual level, yielding stereotypes.

The major criticism of intercultural communication of concern in this paper is that it is interactional, not relational. This is, in fact, a very good criticism of cultural relativity. When cultural contexts are treated as alternative constructions of reality, it

[2] The author co-developed the IDI based on his theoretical work and designed its qualifying seminar, but he is no longer officially associated with the instrument or the seminars.

raises the question of how people who are identified by those contexts communicate with one another. And the answer in the same relativist paradigm is, they "interact." They interact through the behavior and perspectives of their own cultures—something that can be described through interaction analysis, allowing the identification of misunderstandings attributable to cultural differences. Identifying those cultural differences that make a difference to communication is indeed one of the primary activities of applied intercultural communication. However, it is only one of three central activities of theoretically driven intercultural work. Intercultural trainers who are operating without theoretical sophistication in communication theory may not realize or incorporate the other aspects and, as a result, they restrict themselves to an interactional, not relational, framework.

Adding in the other two aspects of applied intercultural communication theory changes the focus into a more relational one (Castiglioni & Bennett, 2018). The first aspect is that of active *cultural identify formation.* In a constructivist rather than relativist paradigm, identity is not defined by membership in a context, but by the action of associating boundary conditions. For instance, people might hold self-boundaries that individuate them in one group context but that allows more collective experience in another group context. And they may define the groups they associate themself within more or less inclusive or exclusive ways; for instance, a person might define themself as participative in a national culture, but restricted to some regional group, while at the same time feeling identified with a larger regional grouping like "Asian" or "European." The exercise of agency in defining cultural identity means that one relates rather than interacts with other cultural contexts, since those contexts do not have a priori existence—they are themselves the epiphenomena of relational association.

The third aspect of applied intercultural theory (after cultural identity formation and interaction analysis) is intercultural development. All forms of personal development are necessarily constructivist, since they are built on the assumption that the reality of self is mutable. In the case of developing intercultural competence, the claim is that people can change their relation to otherness as a result of changing the complexity of their perception of cultural differences. The goal of intercultural competence development is inherently relational, but the means to that end may be "paradigmatically confused" (Bennett, 2013, p. 23). In terms of the topics discussed so far in this paper, paradigmatic confusion occurs when purely relativist and interactional approaches to intercultural relations such as those common in business contexts are pursued with the goal of making people more capable of relating to otherness. The end goal is constructivist, but the means to that end are only relativist. That condition of paradigmatic confusion makes the development effort at least less effective, and often it makes it worthless—a hoop to be jumped through by managers of multicultural teams or global sojourners, but nothing that actually helps them do the job better.

5 Directions for Action and Questions for Reflection

Below are five ways that development of intercultural competence could be approached more effectively, followed by questions about implementation (Questions to ponder).

1. Pay more attention to the epistemology of intercultural concepts and techniques. Intercultural communication employs a mix of relativist and constructivist paradigmatic assumptions that need to be understood and integrated properly. If the epistemological assumptions are neglected, they can easily begin interfering with each other in cases of "paradigmatic confusion."
2. Approach intercultural communication competence in a developmental rather than transformative way. The latter approach tends to focus on acquiring knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable a transformative shift in intercultural relations competence. A developmental approach, on the other hand, focuses on the elaboration of perceptual categories necessary to create a more complex experience of something—in this case, "otherness."
3. Focus on relationship as both the end and the means of intercultural communication. If we think that the desired end of intercultural development is an improved ability to relate to otherness, then the means to that end need to focus on relationship, not knowledge acquisition, attitude change, or skills development. Building relationships is primarily a matter of mutual respect and adaptation, typically accompanied by empathy. The traditional knowledge, attitude, and skill (KAS) categories of education are, at best, only secondarily connected to empathic ability.
4. Treat cultural differences not as knowledge per se, but as windows and doorways into alternative experiences of the world. The relational goal is to perceive alternative experiences and eventually to be able to enter it without surrendering one's own world view—in other words, to empathize.
5. Always remain conscious of the larger goal of intercultural communication, which is to develop our nascent potential for relating to cultural otherness. The tactical benefits of improved intercultural communication, while useful, should not obscure the more important strategic benefits of learning how to survive and thrive in multicultural societies and organizations.

Questions to ponder

Chapter "The Relational Roots of Intercultural Communication", by Milton J. Bennett

- Are you aware of the epistemological paradigm(s) you are using as you approach intercultural issues? Are they matched with the goals you have in engaging with those issues?

- Do you believe that, with enough information, people will change in important ways, such as becoming less prejudiced? If so, how might your assuming a transformative rather than developmental approach be affecting your work?
- How can you maintain a more laser-like focus on relationship in your approach to intercultural issues? Do you find yourself retreating to KAS whenever you think of any practical application?
- Do you think that if you only know enough about another culture, you will therefore be able to experience it more fully? If so, how could you move more towards using empathy—the construction of an "as if" experience—to achieve your goal?
- How are you applying your concern with intercultural relations to the larger issue of developing the consciousness necessary for multicultural cooperation?

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Milton J. Bennett founded and directs the Intercultural Development Research Institute located in Washington State, USA and Milano, Italy (http://www.idrinstitute.org). He previously founded and co-directed the Intercultural Communication Institute and the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in Portland, Oregon. He was an associate professor of communication studies at Portland State University, and now he is an adjunct professor of sociology at the University of Milano Bicocca. During his long career, Dr. Bennett has consulted on intercultural topics with hundreds of corporations, universities, and exchange organizations in Europe, Asia, and the US. Milton studied physics, cognitive psychology, and creative writing as part of his BA degree from Stanford University, has an MA in psycholinguistics from San Francisco State University and holds one of the first Ph.D.'s in intercultural communication (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis). His current text is *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Paradigms, Principles, and Practices* (Intercultural Press), which is translated into Italian (Franco Angeli Press) and Chinese (Peking University Press). He is best known for originating the *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* and its measurements, the *Intercultural Development Inventory*™ and the *Intercultural Viability Indicator*™.