Intercultural Dialogue

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Intercultural dialogue (ICD) stands at the nexus of language and social interaction (LSI) and intercultural communication (ICC). Unlike other forms of interaction, ICD assumes participants come from different cultural (ethnic, linguistic, religious) contexts, implying that they will have divergent assumptions about, and rules for, interaction. ICD has been used as a technical term having several quite different meanings. First, ICD may refer to any interaction in which participants have different cultural backgrounds. Encompassing virtually all of ICC, this use may be discarded as too broad and thus not especially helpful. Second, ICD may refer to specific types of intercultural interactions, those in which dialogue serves as a specific goal. That narrower use will be taken as the focus here. Unlike other intercultural interactions, which may include nonverbal and unconscious elements, in this usage ICD typically requires both language and intent, being a deliberate verbal exchange of views. ICDs are designed to achieve understanding of cultural others as an immediate goal, taking the more advanced steps of achieving agreement and cooperation as potential later goals. Given existing cultural diversity, not only within political alliances (such as the European Union) but even within individual countries, today ICD typically is granted considerable value as a practical tool used to prevent or reduce conflict between cultural groups, instead fostering respect and tolerance. Thus it is treated as a potential technique for building or maintaining peace.

The Council of Europe has proposed the most widely cited definition of ICD, which is sufficiently influential that it is quoted here:

> Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural backgrounds or world views. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes. (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 10)

The fact that this formal definition comes from a political body rather than an individual scholar is telling. The term ICD has been widely used since the 1980s but less often directly studied than its significance warrants, thus, it is a concept that is not only available but that calls out for further research. One of those who proposed a more academic definition is Baraldi (2006), although even when his focus is on ICD, his definition covers only the more general term, dialogue. Several of the suggestions merit notice here. Like all dialogue, ICD is an active, co-constructed creation, requiring the cooperation of participants to engage in potentially new ways of interacting. Like all dialogue, ICD

serves as a beginning point, benefiting from intercultural competence. Like any form of competence learning through experience plays a critical role.

Dialogue assumes difference; ICD specifically assumes intercultural differences between participants. As Wierzbicka (2006) points out, people who already share assumptions have no need for dialogue. Instead dialogue implies members of different groups holding conflicting opinions and assumptions, speaking to one another in acknowledgment of those differences, attempting to bridge the gap. In wishing to present his or her own views and have them heard each participant must agree to listen to the views of the other(s) in exchange. Dialogue between those holding the most divergent viewpoints is the most difficult, but also the most critical. Although by common definition dialogue does not require agreement, participants frequently express hope that agreement — in at least some areas — may be achieved. At the very least, understanding serves as a reasonable beginning, and is preferable to conflict.

Dialogue in general has long been an accepted research topic, granted attention within communication, with Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin frequently referenced as forebears. In fact, the goal of communication sometimes has been assumed to be "authentic dialogue." Public dialogue has been a major focus of research to date, especially by those taking a coordinated management of meaning approach, often through such groups as the public dialogue consortium. But ICD as its own topic often has been discussed without being identified by name, and there is far less research using this label than is warranted. Even studies of contexts where ICD clearly plays a central role typically do not use the term explicitly but use other terms and vocabulary.

ICD is frequently promoted by diplomats describing an ideal world, rather than as a statement of current reality. Thus, the term is most often heard in international gatherings, whether sponsored by the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Union (EU), or individual countries (e.g., Azerbaijan's World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, held in 2011 and again in 2013). There have been frequent formal statements from these bodies (European Commission, 2008; European Cultural Parliament, 2007; UNESCO, 2009), a Year of Intercultural Dialogue (European Union, 2006), and a widely circulated white paper on the subject (Council of Europe, 2008). Most recently, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations 5th Global Forum issued the Vienna Declaration, again highlighting the importance of ICD to diplomacy. In this use, ICD employs communication as a tool to address social change and social justice on an international stage. A systematic review of the ways in which these various practitioners use the term suggests ICD is described with the following characteristics:

- increases respect for cultural diversity, human rights, and freedom;
- develops sense of community in multicultural populations;
- promotes tolerance, pluralism, openness, mutual respect;
- improves ways of living together;
- strengthens social cohesion;
- strengthens democratic governance;

- increases peace and harmony in a multicultural world; and
- prevents and/or resolves intergroup conflicts.

However, it is not entirely clear that ICD can actually accomplish all or even most of these worthy goals. More research to confirm whether ICD in fact brings about these results, and if so, what elements are most critical, and how these can be taught and learned, would be appropriate. Communication as a discipline should, logically, play a central role in the study of ICD and in answering these questions, for it is through communication that participants engage in dialogue. Specifically, since ICD occurs through face-to-face interaction during intercultural encounters, LSI scholars should be contributing much more frequently to the conversation.

There has been attention in Europe, much of it sponsored by the Council of Europe, to address the link between education and ICD; typically that work focuses specifically on higher education contexts. Given both their international populations and disciplinary study of international interactions from multiple disciplinary points of view, universities are places to begin explicit discussions of ICD. Wächter (2010) outlines two roles for higher education, one immediate (to foster ICD on campus) and one more general (to promote ICD in the surrounding community). Thus, universities must not only encourage ICD within their walls, but also prepare their students to become active organizers and facilitators of ICD after graduation when they take on a more active role as members of the larger society. LSI scholars have a potential role to play in developing, offering, and evaluating such training.

Poglia, Mauri-Brusa, and Fumasoli (2009, p. 18) move the process along by identifying, first, specific goals for ICD:

- to share visions of the world, to understand those who see things differently;
- to identify cultural similarities and differences;
- to combat violence;
- to help manage cultural diversity in a democratic manner;
- to bridge the divide between those who perceive diversity as a threat and those who view it as an enrichment;
- to share best practices.

They then name the essential conditions necessary for fulfilling these goals:

- equal dignity of all participants;
- voluntary engagement;
- a readiness to look at both cultural similarities and differences;
- at least minimal knowledge of the distinguishing features of one's own and the other culture; and
- the ability to find a common language.

Together, these lists serve as an excellent starting point for further research.

ICD within communication

Despite its significance to diplomats, most especially in Europe, ICD rarely has been used as a technical term within the discipline of communication, let alone served as the primary object of research. Exceptions most often take an indirect approach to the topic.

Indirect approaches

There has been discussion of dialogue in a cross-cultural perspective, which entails comparison of what different cultures do or say as related to the concept and practice of dialogue, pointing out that assumptions about what dialogue entails do not necessarily translate across cultural boundaries. Relevant exemplars in this tradition include the study of cultural groups in conflict and analyzing interaction to discover difficulties. This research strand descends from the ethnography of communication. As ethnography typically begins by documenting what a single cultural group takes for granted, cross-cultural studies have a long and distinguished history, but they are a better starting point than final result when the goal is to have participants from different cultures interact.

There has been considerable use of the phrase intergroup dialogue, sometimes as a synonym for all of ICC, other times more narrowly as a synonym for ICD as used here. Much of this research has its origin in language and social psychology, often taking a cognitive approach, rather than focusing on actual examples of people interacting.

There has been substantial research examining conflict, negotiation, mediation, and so on, overlapping ICD, again typically without using the phrase, even when the focus has been intercultural contexts. Much of this work has focused on contexts of intractable conflicts in places like the Middle East, Northern Ireland, or Cyprus. A separate strand of research has considered the role of translator as mediator and coordinator of intercultural interactions.

Another indirect approach has been to examine intercultural competence, that is, what participants need to know or do in order for ICD to be successful. Much of this work has been within ICC, but there is much room for research into details of interaction still to come. Intercultural competence as a term sees frequent use within the same international organizations as ICD, and there are many relevant materials (most recently, UNESCO, 2013). This strand developed quite explicitly from Dell Hymes's discussion of communicative competence, and is still a common emphasis of language teachers and applied linguists.

John Gumperz began studying examples of ICD starting at least as early as the 1970s, choosing interactional sociolinguistics for his technical label. His work, especially that on contextualization cues, supports ICD research, and his students are trained in combining ethnographic and linguistic methods to document intercultural interactions. Much of the work pioneered by Gumperz emphasizes miscommunication — difficulties caused by cultural differences in assumptions about communication, and which might be described as the inverse of ICD since it describes what happens when things go

wrong, when participants do not listen to one another. This has led to research on inter-cultural pragmatics, cross-cultural pragmatics, cultural discourse analysis, and, more broadly ICC research specifically emphasizing discourse.

Andreas Pöllmann (2013) draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to propose consideration of intercultural capital. This expands beyond the usual study of intercultural proficiencies (e.g., intercultural skills, competencies, sensitivities required for intercultural competence) to include more subtle elements. As is the case with other forms of cultural capital, intercultural capital is symbolic and invisible (like knowledge) rather than visible (like cash). A few examples may make his proposal more concrete: those who are bilingual are especially useful in multilingual groups; those with expe-rience working internationally can most quickly find their footing when sent to yet another country to conduct business. Thus, such individuals should find their skills and experiences valued, and themselves much in demand, whether as employees or friends. The implications of cultural capital are enormous, as they suggest that those in the third world who are multilingual have something of great value that many in the first world lack.

ICC has a long tradition of studying what happens when participants make different cultural assumptions, but either the methodologies (such as surveys, questionnaires, interviews) do not examine what actually occurs in interaction—instead focusing on what people think occurs, or the participants interact without the requirements of dialogue—that is, not deliberately privileging attention to learning about the other. Similarly, those who emphasize actual examples of interaction typically do not also examine dialogue in particular. ICC scholars, like LSI scholars, thus could pay far more explicit attention to ICD.

There has been some effort aimed at making dialogue central to the teaching of ICC, in this way privileging ICD in learning about cultural matters. For example, there have been calls for increased dialogue between members of different cultural groups, includ-ing the use of online dialogues, as a pedagogical tool in teaching ICC. However, arguing on behalf of ICD is not the same as studying the practice of ICD.

Similarly, there has been research investigating intercultural relationships of vari-ous sorts, the relevance of understanding cultural assumptions within health-care set-tings, or the impact of culture upon organizational communication. While all of these contexts are intercultural, and presumably require dialogue between participants, ICD again has not yet been the explicit focus of study.

Direct approaches

So what existing research has explicitly emphasized ICD? Many answers to this question have been written by scholars from other disciplines, based outside the United States, or both, and do not directly address LSI concerns (i.e., Aman, 2012). The largest topic thus far has been interfaith dialogue; but even here interaction typically has not been emphasized. The same applies to the impact of study abroad experiences. Given the substantial push within the EU for mobility over the past few years, seeing that so much of this research comes out of Europe should be no surprise. Näss (2010) is one of the

few academics to seriously question whether the emphasis on ICD within the EU can achieve the lofty goals it is intended to meet.

Among the very few studies to match explicit use of the term ICD to a focus on LSI, Baraldi (2010) provides a case study analysis of Children's International Summer Villages, an organization designed to improve ICD among adolescents. Through combining videotapes, interviews, and questionnaires, Baraldi's team set out to examine specific factors leading to success. Their results highlight the ways in which language may be used within interaction to provide cues for analyzing cultural assumptions. This research is provocative, setting a good model for further investigation by others.

Similarly, Gobbo (2011) reports on ethnographic research investigating classroom interaction after teachers attended a training session for working with Roma students and parents in Turin, Italy. The results were shared with the teachers, who then became ethnographers of their own schools. Gobbo concludes that ethnographic research in particular helps scholars and practitioners alike remember to deliberately attend to differences in cultural assumptions, and the impact these have for ICD. Her point speaks directly to LSI scholars.

There has been some recent movement within communication in the United States to directly address ICD. In July 2009, the National Communication Association Summer Conference on Intercultural Dialogue was held at Maltepe University, in Istanbul, Turkey (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2015). One of the explicit goals of this conference was to create a cohort of researchers to spark additional studies and further meetings. The first outgrowth of the NCA conference was the establishment of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue in 2010 as a project of the Council of Communication Associations. The Center approaches ICD at two levels: encouraging research on the topic, but also bringing international scholars together in shared dialogue about their work. The Center's website serves as a clearinghouse for information on ICD (http://centerforinterculturaldialogue.org), covering such topics as researcher profiles, publication opportunities, and international conferences. A special issue of the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* (Ganesh & Holmes, 2011) was the first publication related to the conference to appear; an edited collection (Haydari & Holmes, 2015) appeared later.

Future research

Given its frequent mention as essential to world peace, new contexts encouraging dialogue across cultural boundaries are steadily being constructed to open the topic beyond formal diplomatic events. With substantial support from UNESCO and other international organizations, libraries, museums, and community centers have begun to redesign their roles to include providing safe spaces where community members may explore their cultural differences. Such contexts will likely provide excellent new research projects for LSI scholars in the future, especially those with an interest in applied research or social justice.

One particularly interesting trend investigates the use of technology and social media in encouraging ICD, especially among geographically separated populations otherwise not easily able to connect. Among other possibilities, virtual exchanges

have been established between students based in different countries. Sometimes called "exchange 2.0" these have been proposed as an affordable substitute for international study experiences when actual travel proves difficult to organize, and certainly they are likely to be better than no international experience at all. Virtual exchanges may be supported by international organizations (such as Soliya, which partners with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations) or established by a single university (East Carolina University's Global Classroom). One of the more ambitious examples has involved placing large electronic screens in public spaces in Australia and Korea, facilitating direct interaction between populations not typically in dialogue, and then analyzing the results (Yue & Jung, 2011). Since technology now permits such inventions, other comparable ideas will presumably be put into practice, and then studied by communication scholars. Just as LSI researchers came to accept telephone conversations as an appropriate research context, examination of ICD not only through face-to-face interactions but also through the use of various mediating technologies will soon become an accepted practice.

SEE ALSO: Cultural Identity; Dialogue; Ethnography of Communication; Interactional Sociolinguistics; Intercultural Competence; Mediation Discourse

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