



Intercultural Discourse and Communication

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What is it?

Intercultural discourse and communication (IDC) describes the communicative acts between members of different communities or cultures. Scholars have looked at both successful and problematic examples. Problems arise due to different linguistic codes and cultural assumptions as well as power differentials connected to cultural, national, religious, ethnic and racial differences. Those who study IDC assume that close analysis of actual instances of communication will help us understand the individuals involved in the discourses, their home cultures, and their co-constructed interactions.

Who uses the concept?

IDC is a term used by scholars studying areas including intercultural communication, discourse analysis, ethnography of communication, pragmatics, interactional sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology. While these have had separate histories, there has been considerable recent overlap. Discourse analysts focus particularly on the structure of conversations and texts, while sociolinguistics, pragmatics scholars and linguistic anthropologists examine speech varieties, speech events and performances in their broader contexts. To date, research has emphasized business, education, law, medicine, and religion. Topics often include identity construction and cross-cultural comparisons, taking into consideration the impact of race, ethnicity, class, and gender on forms of communication.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Intercultural dialogue can be seen as a subset of intercultural discourse and communication. Successful acts of IDC are examples of successful dialogue. The disciplines that study IDC aid future intercultural dialogues by providing the analytical tools necessary to understand the ongoing construction of dialogue as well as the failures of communication that hinder such dialogue. For example, scholars can look at how cultural practices manifest themselves in particular communicative settings from casual interactions to formal diplomatic relations.

What work remains?

All examples of dialogue can be analyzed using the qualitative and quantitative methods of IDC analysis. Particularly as the focus of international relations moves away from Europe and the United States onto a much broader international stage, analysis of how people with varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact becomes essential. Ethnographic analyses, where specific events are put into social, economic and historical contexts, are becoming ever more important.

Resources

- Kiesling, S. F., & Paulston, C. B. (Eds.). (2005). *Intercultural discourse and communication: The essential readings*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Paulston, C. B., Kiesling, S. F., & Rangel, E. S. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of intercultural discourse and communication*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.