



Language and Intercultural Communication

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What is it?

The term “language” may refer to spoken and written language (verbal codes) and nonverbal codes (e.g., body movements). Intercultural communication describes any interaction between two or more members of different cultural groups (international, interfaith, interethnic, interracial). Language and intercultural communication concerns core elements of language (e.g., phonology, pragmatics, semantics, syntactics) and their impact on intercultural communication. In relation to intercultural dialogue, this area of study explores such aspects as the relationship between language, worldview, and communication; the role of language and power in intercultural interactions; and the connections between language, culture and identity.

Who uses the concept?

The role of language in intercultural communication is central to the work of applied linguists and second language teachers, learners, and researchers. The impact of language use, attitudes, identity, and positioning on intercultural relations is relevant for individuals in all domains (e.g., health care, communication studies, business, tourism, education abroad, human resources, etc.).

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Language is a core element in intercultural communication. As language is closely tied to one’s identity, worldview, and positioning, it influences how people from different cultural backgrounds interact and perceive one another. Language and cultural misunderstandings and identity misalignments can hamper intercultural relations. Language barriers may be mistaken for cultural

barriers if one does not have an adequate understanding of linguistic elements and the communication process. To enhance intercultural dialogue, it is vital to have a solid grasp of the linguistic dimension of intercultural communication.

What work remains?

There is a need for interdisciplinary research that investigates the complex connection between language, culture, power, and identity in intercultural dialogue. It is imperative for more scholars to systematically study the role of language in intercultural interactions in various contexts and situations, including online.

Resources

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