

Lecture 2: A theoretical approach to intercultural communication (Part 2)

The second level of information is sociocultural. This includes data about the other's group membership, or the groups to which they seek to belong. This type of information is the predominate data used in intracultural communication. Finally there is psychocultural data. This information is about the individual's characteristics, and is the sort of data most relevant to communication with friends. We understand such data by the process of social cognition. Social cognition is a dialectical process which involves both grouping particulars into categories based on their similarities and of distinguishing individuals from their categories based on their differences. To improve communication with strangers we must pay attention to their unique, individual features. Gudykunst and Kim argue that effective communication with strangers requires an increased awareness of our communication behaviours. First, we tend to categorise things automatically, and so we are less aware of doing it. It takes more of our conscious awareness to differentiate particular individuals from their stereotypical categories.

Second, much of our daily communication follows familiar scripts, and so we are not consciously aware of that communication behaviour. We cannot rely on such familiar scripts and norms when communicating with strangers. Our communication will be improved if we recognise that familiar scripts do not apply, and seek to modify our communication behaviours accordingly. In addition, we need to point out the importance of personal and social communication which are best characterised by Young Kim, in her model.

1. Personal communication refers to the individual's host communication competence; that is the degree to which the stranger can encode and decode verbal and nonverbal messages within the host environment.
2. Host communication competence also refers to the degree to which the stranger understands the host's language rules and norms, understands effective and appropriate conflict resolution strategies, and is motivated to initiate and develop host culture relationships.
3. Social communication refers to the actual interaction between stranger and host persons. The actual participation in relationships, engaging in conflict resolution, and exposing oneself to the mass communication of the host culture can enhance and facilitate the acculturation process.