

Setting the Groundwork for a Critical Sociohistorical Approach to Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

This paper explores the theoretical and applied groundwork for a new sociohistorical paradigm for intercultural communication. It argues that no academic discipline—intercultural communication included—grows out of a vacuum. All disciplines develop and evolve within the context of concrete social, political, economic and historical conditions and needs. What is more, these needs are not universal to all groups of people, either worldwide or throughout history. Instead, they reflect the interests of certain power groups over others in the society where the discipline develops. Often, although we may not realize it without careful critical analysis and reflection, our own interests as students, teachers, workers, family members, etc., and the interests of the power groups that the discipline serves are in conflict. This paper, therefore, begins with an overview of the world into which mainstream intercultural communication was born and whose interests it has served. Following from this, it critically examines certain key theoretical constructs that underlie the field and notes how they may also reflect interests other than our own. It then introduces the concept of liberation as a tool whereby education and academia (including all forms of social research) can become empowering rather than marginalizing—that is, how they can serve the interests of the exploited and oppressed masses of the world rather than their oppressors. Finally, it asks readers to reflect on how a new and more liberating approach to intercultural communication might be possible.

The theoretical underpinnings for this approach come from the sociohistorical psychology of Lev Vygotsky and A. Luria, the historical and dialectical materialism of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, and the liberatory/critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and Ira Shor.

Key Words: intercultural communication, sociohistorical, liberating, liberation pedagogy, critical social analysis.

Let me begin with a story. It's about a place I just came from—the island of Kosrae in Micronesia, where I have been working to help preserve an endangered language. On Kosrae and many Pacific islands today, the forces of the market are radically rupturing traditional cultural values and belief systems. Strategies for coping, based on collectivist subsistence culture are being increasingly eroded by the needs of the marketplace. The values of individualism, competition, and greed that are imposed by this change run directly counter to the values of collectivism, cooperation and sharing that are marked by a subsistence economy. Fishing, for example, has traditionally been a major subsistence activity. People fished collectively and shared their catch with friends, relatives and others who had none. The same was true of farming for bananas, taro, breadfruit and other staples. People shared what they had. Nobody went hungry. Not to

share was considered a sign of greediness.

Today, however, this tradition is being eroded by the demands of market economics. People now need money to live. In order to get money, they need to find work. But there are few jobs and pay is low, forcing many to work a full week for less than subsistence wages. As a result, there is little time left over for fishing and other subsistence activities. With less free time it is difficult to organize collective work parties. Also, with the exception of some kinds of reef fishing, one now needs money for a motorboat and gasoline. In order to get that money, those who fish are forced to sell their catch. Those without money are increasingly forced to barter or go without.

For those who rely primarily on farming, the situation is even worse. Nearly every family owns some farmland so the market for produce is very limited. Bartering helps to some extent but is not sufficient to meet all needs. As more is bought and sold, less is shared and redistributed communally. The influence of the global market is also taking its toll. It now costs

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less to buy imported frozen pork and chicken than it does to grow pigs and chickens locally. As a result, a small number of families are beginning to accumulate wealth while the majority are finding that they have to work more for less. This is also producing a schism in the value system. Although generosity and sharing are still held in high regard, more and more of those who have some wealth are blaming those who don't for their indigence and lack of individual effort. The values associated with communal sharing are under threat.

We can also see the dehumanizing effects of market economics in the slums and shantytowns of the third world as well as in the increasingly stratified first world. Some refer to this latter stage as the "Third-worldization" of the major capitalist powers such as the United States. What I am witnessing on Kosrae in Micronesia today are the early stages of that process — a stage before people have been alienated from their land. All of this, however, is part of the legacy of 500 years of capitalism.

I believe that those of us concerned with intercultural communication as well as those of us in the field of teaching foreign languages must also be concerned about how capitalism impacts on humanity, on our values, on our students, and on our collective ability to survive and grow. Unfortunately mainstream intercultural communication has largely failed to study the connection between cultural values and belief systems, and the economic systems which help create and foster them. So there is a great need for such data to be collected. This need extends beyond indigenous populations to all of us here today wherever we come from. As intercultural communication researchers, trainers and foreign language teachers, we must make connections between what is happening globally and what is happening locally.

Specifically, we need research on the relationship of globalization and class stratification to such mainstream intercultural communication constructs as individualism and collectivism, power distance, gender relations, culturally based psychological stressors, risk taking, and conflicts in cultural values and belief systems—just to name a few.

There is a moral imperative for this, one which I take from the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Frerire, a Brazilian educator who won international acclaim for linking adult literacy among the poor in his country and around the world to issues of social consciousness.

What Freire did was to encourage people to analyze their reality, to become more aware of the constraints on their lives, and to take action to transform their situation (Brown, 1974). For Freire, education is either liberating or domesticating, teaching people either to be critical and free of constraints or to accept things as they are. This is a process by which we first struggle to become aware of—and then struggle to overcome—the structural inequalities that are part and parcel of our society and the educational institutions that support and help reproduce that society. From the perspective of intercultural communication, our aim is to become the active subjects in creating new and liberating cultures, rather than simply being passive and marginalized objects who have no alternative but to assimilate to an unjust society. We must first do this by taking a closer look at how things such as economics and the material realities of the globalizing world we live in affect us culturally.

To set the stage for this next step, let me begin with a quote from Adam Smith, the 18th century economist who has often been hailed as the intellectual father of capitalism:

For one very rich man, there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many (Gonsalves, 2002).

In other words, what Adam Smith is asserting is that by its very nature capitalist society needs to be highly stratified. Or to phrase it more simply, in the era that Adam Smith wrote that, capitalism in England was probably creating something on the order of the statistics he cited: approximately 500 poor and indigent losers for every wealthy landowning winner.

As someone involved in the field of intercultural communication, I am struck by the fact that such assessments are largely lacking in our field—particularly as regards the influence of economic systems on cultural beliefs, values, psychologies, etc.

But first, let's bring Adam Smith's observation up to the present with a few additional statistics. A 1999 United Nations Human Development report states "the net worth of the world's 200 richest people increased from \$40 billion to more than \$1 trillion from 1994 to 1998. The assets of the three richest people are greater than the combined GNP of the 48 least developed

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countries and the number of billionaires in the world has increased by 25 percent in only the last two years. Collectively, these 475 individuals are worth more than the combined incomes of the poorest 50 percent of the world's people." (Gonsalves, 2002).

Meanwhile, in another 1999 report—this one from the World Bank—researchers found that "globalization appears to increase poverty and inequality... The costs of adjusting to greater openness are borne exclusively by the poor, regardless of how long the adjustment takes." (Gonsalves, 2002)

And next, in a CIA report entitled "Global Trends 2015," an agency analyst writes, "The rising tide of the global economy will create many economic winners, but it will not lift all boats... It will spawn conflicts at home and abroad, ensuring an even wider gap between regional winners and losers than exists today... Regions, countries, and groups feeling left behind will... foster political, ethnic, ideological, and religious extremism, along with the violence that often accompanies it."

Finally, one last quote. This one from Thomas Friedman, a proponent of neoliberal global economics, in his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*:

The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. (Friedman, 2001)

We now have both anecdotal descriptions from Micronesia and quotations from some rather conservative sources which support capitalism, neoliberalism and globalization that capitalism *does* produce winners and losers. It *does* create stratification and conflict. Given all of the conflicts and strife in the world today—conflicts which range from ethnic cleansing to terrorism to religious and racial trauma—it seems to me that what I just cited should be of some concern to those in the field of intercultural communication. I say this because many in our field have argued that, given the tools of our trade, our discipline is particularly well placed to help resolve these conflicts. These tools include a vast body of accumulated research and literature relating to problems of cultural misunderstanding, stereotyping, ethnocentrism and prejudice. In fact, the very reason for the existence of our discipline

is to build understanding and respect for people of diverse cultures. How can we do this unless we address the underlying economic causes of cultural conflict?

Yet the very same intercultural communication experts who say how well placed we are to help resolve these problems rarely make reference to the structural causes of inequality, stratification and conflict. Instead, they cite a litany of atrocities ranging from ethnic cleansing to genocide in support of a biological reductionist theory that human intolerance is a natural state. I quote from Milton Bennett (1993):

Intercultural sensitivity is not natural. It is not part of our primate past, not has it characterized most of human history. Cross-cultural contact often has been accompanied by bloodshed, oppression, or genocide. Clearly, this pattern cannot continue. Today, the failure to exercise intercultural sensitivity is not simply bad business or bad morality—it is self-destructive. So we face a choice: overcome the legacy of our history, or lose history itself for all time. Education and training in intercultural communication in intercultural communication is an approach to changing our "natural" behavior.

It may be that interculturalists such as Bennett simply don't have access to the literature that links capitalism and globalization to imperialism and exploitation. However, the sources I quoted are all mainstream. What we do hear from interculturalists is a litany of human rights abuses and atrocities carried out by tyrants ranging from Hitler and Stalin to bin Laden and Hussein. Totalitarianism, religious fundamentalism and ideological extremism are the cited causes. Training programs which teach multicultural tolerance and respect for human rights, are seen as the solutions. Also not infrequently mentioned is the need to implant the seeds of democracy. Coincidentally or not, this is almost the same thing that people in the World Bank are saying. Maybe some interculturalists do read their literature and publications after all.

It's interesting too, what's missing from these lists of atrocities and human rights abuses. We rarely see references made to things such as British and European colonialism, slavery, American genocide against the Indians, divide and conquer imperialism, or the legacy

that these things are reproducing today in the 21st century in the name of free market economy, globalization, rationalization and structural adjustment. Similarly, when talking about terrorism, human rights abuses, or lack of respect for civil society, democracy and international law, rarely do we hear any mention made of state terrorism or the crimes committed by first world nations against Third World States. Rarely to we hear about the overthrow of democratically elected progressive governments by the United States and other First World powers.

This fact calls us to another task—that of critically examining our own field. We must remember that intercultural communication was not created in a vacuum. No discipline is. Martin (1994), writing from the viewpoint of European critical theory, argues that “...all research—from decisions about what is studied to what and whose work gets published—is political, value laden, and occurs within a context of power hierarchy.” To this, I would add that all research needs to be critically analyzed within the discipline and the discipline, in turn, has to be critically analyzed within the sociohistorical context in which it develops.

Here, the term sociohistorical comes from Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist. Vygotsky began to do for psychology what we now need to do for intercultural communication—he integrated anthropology, sociology and other social sciences concerned with history into psychology (Vygotsky 1987, 1992). Rosa and Montero (1990) state that from Vygotsky’s perspective, “history is not simply a narrative that permits an understanding of the past; rather, history relies on material bases to explain the events that have affected a particular society” (p.60). Only by incorporating history into intercultural communication can we ever hope to guide it or make it work for us. If we exclude history from our analysis, we will be left with mere description—some of it accurate, some of it mythological, but none of it truly explanatory. On a very practical note, such a critical sociohistorical analysis has some fairly immediate goals. These include:

1. Opening up new areas of research.
2. Coming up with new technical concepts and terminology.
3. Reconstructing some of the tools which now exist.

Now, let me turn to a sociohistorical overview of the field. Cross-cultural communication, as the field of intercultural communication was originally called, originated primarily as an American phenomenon. It grew out of conditions that existed at the end of World War II when the US Foreign Service Institute began sending advisors of various kinds overseas in large numbers to represent American interests (Hoopes & Pusch, 1979; Martin, 1994). In the late 1940s, Edward Hall was contracted to design Foreign Service Institute (FSI) training materials. Following from this the State Department, the CIA, the Department of Defense, and other US government agencies began contracting for training programs before sending their personnel overseas. Also from the late 1940s there developed a need to train people from other countries. This was particularly true of the sons of the wealthy in Latin America, who were coming to study at US universities, usually with the intention of returning home after graduation, often to work for American-owned corporations, in family businesses with ties to US corporations, or for their governments.

From the late 1950s the field expanded as major corporations began to contract with intercultural communication trainers to prepare their managers for overseas assignments. And in the 1960s additional government funding was made available to train Peace Corps volunteers for work in semi-colonial Third World countries. About the same time, the civil rights movement in the US opened the field to issues of cultural diversity, multiculturalism and bilingual education. Although mainstream intercultural communication and multiculturalism have often been at odds with each other from the beginning, much of the work on stereotyping, ethnocentrism and prejudice have been influenced by the realities of cultural diversity.

By the early 1970s the field had grown to where some universities were offering graduate programs in inter-cultural communication. A certain number of those graduates remained in academia but large numbers found work in teaching English as a foreign language. Some others became consultants to major transnational corporations. Still others found work with the US State Department, the CIA, the military and other US government agencies. Starting in the early 1990s, the most favored jobs for young and aspiring Ph.D’s in inter-cultural communication and international relations had shifted to the World Bank and similar

development organizations.

Now let's look outside of the field and consider briefly what these various US government agencies, corporations and international institutions were saying and doing during the post-war period. Let me begin with a quote from George Kennan, the chief US negotiator at the 1948 Bretton Woods agreements:

We have 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. In this situation, our real job in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which permit us to maintain this position of disparity. To do so, we have to dispense with all sentimentality...we should cease thinking about human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. (quoted in Skutnab-Kangass, 2003)

This 1948 world of Bretton Woods was also the world which found the former colonial empires of Europe greatly weakened by war. More and more colonized peoples of the world were demanding independence. Meanwhile, in Europe, whole cities and industries were in ruins, some economies were shattered, millions were dead and most who survived were too exhausted to commit to a long military occupation of the rebelling colonies. In order to maintain the unequal relations described by Kennan, a shift from colonialism to the status of equal but unequal post-colonial nation was in order. Here, the concept of nationalism fit nicely both with the demands for self-determination coming from leaders in the colonized world, and with the needs of the superpowers and their international monetary and development organizations.

This new national identity has its own history which can be traced to the rise of the European colonial conquest and the birth of capitalism in the late 15th century. In order to protect "the hidden hand of the market," as Friedman puts it, "the hidden fist" of colonial governments, armies and navies were also needed. This process of colonization encouraged the creation of the nation state. By the industrial revolution, the need to further exploit labor at home exacerbated that process.

Ever since the early days of capitalism, feudal relations had been under threat. Since even before the Protestant Reformation the mercantile classes of Europe had been demanding that people be given the freedom to leave their land, to buy and sell property, and to sell

their goods and services for a profit. For the rich, this was a blessing. For the peasants and poor farmers, however, it was less than liberating. They were dispossessed of their lands and forced into the towns and growing cities to survive by selling their labor wherever they could find a job. With the industrial revolution, this process accelerated. Under conditions which were as bad as—and in some cases worse than—slavery, there was ample discontent and not infrequent rebellion. The Paris Commune is one rather famous example.

A key aspect of these rebellions was that for the most part the oppressed saw themselves as just that—oppressed. They didn't see themselves as French oppressed as opposed to German oppressed as opposed to English oppressed. The concept of nationality as we know it today simply didn't exist in the minds of the common people. In mid-nineteenth century France, for example, only about 40% of the population even spoke French. Other languages and dialects from Britton to Alsatian were still dominant in their regions.

From the perspective of the factory owner, this situation presented both potential and danger. Potentially, different groups could be forced to compete against each other for even cheaper wages and more exploitative working conditions. On the other hand, there was always the danger that the oppressed would unite against their oppressor. This is a constant and real threat to capitalism—one, which must be checked at any cost.

An important vehicle for solving this problem came from another quarter. One offshoot of the industrial revolution was that it created the need for a minimally trained labor force. This resulted in the introduction of compulsory education, which in turn, allowed for the creation of a national consciousness. Now, for example, the sons of French peasants could be taught in French rather than in some regional language or dialect. They could be taught that they are French, that their protection and individual rights emanate from the French state, that their allegiances are exclusively to that state, and that their enemies—to the extent that enemies exist—are outside of that state—in Germany or England, for example.

This creation of a national identity accomplished a number of objectives. First, it reduced the threat to the oppressor class within the nation state. The enemy is now the Germans, the British or the Americans. So,

instead of the workers of the world uniting, we now have the workers of France uniting against the workers of Germany. This, in fact, is exactly what the Social Democrats in Europe did in World War I. It was only the Bolsheviks who truly understood the class nature of nationalism.

National identities can also be used to build support for the military and police. Here, young men from the lower classes can be indoctrinated to become cannon fodder to fight for the private property rights and economic interests of the state—both at home and abroad. Another bi-product of nationalism and national consciousness is that it creates a new commodity which can be bought and sold, the modern Olympics, the World Cup and other international sporting events being examples. Here, multi-billion dollar entertainment industries peddle nationalism as competitive sport. In many countries the underclass of permanently unemployed, or underemployed youth use these competitions to vent their anger against society in nationalist and sometimes even semi-fascist voices. A few of the more lucky of these youth may graduate to military service in Iraq or some other axis of evil state being returned to direct military and colonial occupation.

Returning to the early days of intercultural communication, the field was born into a world of developed nations and aspiring or developing nation states. In order to train personnel to work in such a world, conceptual tools based on national identity were necessary. One such tool was national character study. Another was cultural relativism. Both served the interests of Bretton Woods.

National character studies began in the 1930s as anthropologists sought to gather data on the psychological attributes, values and belief systems of the cultures of various countries. Under this method of analysis, the sum total of the characteristics for a particular nation could be placed on a bell curve to reveal the cultural norms of that country. During World War II the US War Department commissioned many national character studies of its enemies for use in propaganda literature. Ruth Benedict's treatment of the Japanese in her *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is a now classic example. Starting in the late 1940s, national character studies became the primary domain of the newly emerging discipline of cross-cultural communication. This resulted in numerous books to prepare US State Department and military

officials, and later, businessmen and students for overseas assignments. Today, one can find dozens of books on American culture, French culture, German culture, Mexican culture, Russian culture, Korean culture, Japanese culture, Chinese culture, Indian culture, etc. Most of these are written in the national character study mode.

National character studies present us with a number of problems. First, they tend to produce a sort of "Japanese are this way, Americans are that way" collection of overgeneralizations and stereotypes that reinforce ethnocentrism and prejudice. Second, they largely ignore non-dominant groups within the geopolitical boundaries of the nations they study. Instead, they focus on the values, attitudes and belief systems of the dominant members of that society. National character studies of North Americans, for example, tend to idealize the values of wealthy, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male society. Let me quote at length from one very good example of this. In their now classic *American Cultural Patterns*, a cross-cultural reference book used widely both by English as a Foreign Language and intercultural communication teachers, Stewart and Bennett (1991) make the following claims about American attitudes and values regarding individual achievement:

The dominant motive for the typical American is... externalized achievement. Its impulse has been described as the key psychological factor in producing unparalleled economic abundance in the United States. ...The limit on success is not ascribed to resources, to actions of others, to the agency of government, or to fate. For, as prescribed by the Protestant ethic, those who have the desire and work hard enough will have their labors rewarded with success... Doctrines such as Marxism, which promulgate inevitable conflict among classes because the limited goods of the world are acquired by a few who exploit the masses, have rarely achieved great favor among Americans. Traditionally, Americans have seen failure as a lack of will and effort on the part of the individual. According to the Protestant ethic, successful accumulation of worldly wealth was a sign that the individual belonged to the select group that enjoyed the grace of God. The same idea is still present in a new version: a rich person cannot be

completely bad—or else the person would not be rich. (p. 80)

I would argue that this statement is nothing more than a cultural myth, which reinforces a set of stereotypes that privilege the dominant elite in American society who are predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, male and wealthy. It completely ignores the long and rich history of the American labor movement. Rather, the authors employ ideological reflections of class to deny its existence (or relevance), and thus marginalize large segments of the population who throughout American history have not shared this view of externalized achievement. These include the working class as well as members of the growing urban and rural underclass. In sum, Stewart and Bennett's stereotype neither reflects the interests nor the realities of the majority of oppressed, alienated, stigmatized and fragmented individuals in American society.

But national character does more, because not only is the culturally diverse majority ignored, their nonidentity is now turned into a new false identity. As authors like Stewart and Bennett interpret American culture and cultural values for the world, the non-dominant groups of society are incorporated into the dominant stereotype—the American melting pot, as it used to be called. And then through the schools, the textbooks and the mass media, this stereotype is given back in the form of a national consciousness. There is a term for this. It is called marginalization.

In principle, national character was a tool that could also be used in Third World nation building. This was particularly true during the Cold War. However, with the death of the evil empire and the rise of a single superpower to police the world, the power of the nation state is on the decline. At the same time, Third World resistance and rebellion can no longer be blamed on the worldwide communist conspiracy. A new enemy had to be found and that enemy was tribalism, ethnic cleansing, religious fundamentalism and terrorism. Here again, intercultural communication has had a marketable tool in the form of intercultural training programs to teach cultural diversity and tolerance.

Mainstream intercultural communication first got its feet wet with cultural diversity during the US civil rights movement of the 1960s. In spite of the fact that the marriage between intercultural communication and other disciplines concerned with cultural diversity has

never been easy, there have been contributions and influences both ways (multicultural and bilingual education, Black, Indian, Women's and Gay and Lesbian Studies—just to name a few—tend to be too radical for intercultural communication). One of the earliest was the use of psychological constructs to define, diagnose and supposedly cure ethnocentrism and prejudice. This particular construct falls into a category known as psychological reductionism.

It begins with the observation that all humans make generalizations about the world around us. Without such generalizations we would not be able to survive. In the process of making generalizations about our world, we also make generalizations about different groups of people. These are known as stereotypes. We have both positive and negative stereotypes about outside groups, although it is the negative stereotypes that is of most concern to intercultural communication. Negative stereotypes about outsiders reinforce a belief that our own culture is superior. At this level, stereotypes become ethnocentric worldviews. Taken further toward intense dislike, ethnocentrism becomes prejudice. According to this psychological model, we are all capable of holding prejudices.

In looking for a cure for prejudice, intercultural communication turns to another relic from anthropology—cultural relativism. In the 19th century, anthropology offered intellectual justification for colonialism by dividing the world into the civilized Euro-American and uncivilized colonial ones. It became known as “the White Man's Burden” to elevate the savage to Western standards. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many anthropologists were turning away from this model, arguing that ethnography refrain from all moral and ethical judgments and recognize that each culture has its own sets of values and belief systems. This initially liberating worldview, while appearing to be neutral and even tolerant, when applied to nation states, actually supports the status quo of unequal relations called for at Bretton Woods. This made cultural relativism a useful tool during the post-colonial period.

With the shift in emphasis from national character to cultural diversity, cultural relativism also had a role to play. Here, all ethnic groups and cultural minorities can be represented and treated with equal respect. Problems of religious and ethnic conflict—caused by our “natural intolerance” as Bennett puts it—can now be addressed through a new Ethnorelativism of

education and training in intercultural communication. Literally hundreds of training programs, videos and curriculum materials have been designed to do just this. However, there is a fly in the ointment.

Psychological constructs fail to distinguish between the righteous anger of the oppressed and the racism and hatred of the oppressor. Both are seen as forms of prejudice. In the United States, where much of this work is centered, for example, this opens the way for Blacks and other oppressed minorities to be seen as having prejudices as well. Any sign of anger or resentment toward the white majority is now labeled as prejudice. The result, of course, is punishment and even criminalization of the victim. The US national government as well as many state and local bodies have enacted what is called “hate crime” legislation. Anything, which constitutes an overt display of hatred toward another group, is now a criminal act—hate crimes and human rights abuses against Moslems, of course, are an exception. Likewise, many schools have enacted no tolerance policies where students who act in a way, which displays intolerance toward another group, are punished. The vast majority of those punished under these laws and regulations are Blacks and other minorities.

From a sociohistorical perspective, of course, the solution to the problem is to address the continuing legacy of oppression and exploitation first. If, after alleviating the symptoms there is any prejudice left over, then maybe a psychological approach will help.

However, I am speaking from a liberatory perspective. From a Bretton Woods perspective of continued world domination, this technique of criminalizing the victim works just fine. One contribution that mainstream intercultural communication has made in this area is the biological reductionist myth that ethnic conflict is the natural state of humanity rather than something caused by divide-and-conquer domination. This, of course, is a throwback to 19th century anthropology. Again, I quote from the ethnorelativist position of Milton Bennett (1993):

If we look at our species' primate past and to our more recent history of dealing with cultural difference, there is little reason to be sanguine. Our initial response to difference is usually to avoid it. Imagine, if you will, a group of our primate ancestors gathering around their fire, gnawing on the day's catch. Another group of primates comes

into view, heading toward the fire. I wonder how often the first group looked up and said (in effect), “Ah, cultural diversity, how wonderful.” More likely it was fight or flight, and things have not changed that much since then. We flee to the suburbs or behind walls to avoid cultural difference, and if we are forced to confront it, there often is a fight. (pp. 1-2)

Needless to say, both history and anthropology prove them wrong. Even intercultural research indicates that people from culturally diverse urban population centers are more tolerant of cultural difference than people from homogenous rural areas. Likewise, sociolinguistic research on endangered languages shows a clear correlation between biodiversity and cultural diversity. In those areas with the greatest linguistic diversity among small groups of indigenous peoples there is also the greatest tolerance, not just for cultural and linguistic difference, but also for biodiversity as well. It is not until the infrastructure of roads bring in bulldozers and trucks to cut down the forests, extract the natural resources and set up single-crop plantations for agribusiness that biodiversity, cultural and linguistic diversity are destroyed, to be replaced by stratification, ethnic and class conflict.

So this is at least a partial sketch of intercultural communication in the real world. I should add that there is another trend—a universalist trend—in intercultural communication today which seeks a universal baseline of moral standards, usually rationalized in terms of human rights and democracy. Abuses committed to perpetuate capitalist domination of the world by the few, however, are not part of the agenda. The universalists seem more concerned with Third World abuses such as female circumcision, child prostitution and slave labor, the conspicuous consumption and corruption of local warlords and clan leaders, the endless tribal, ethnic and religious fighting, the further corruption and ineptitude of national leaders, and of terrorists and other extremists who threaten the new world order. Under such circumstances, along with other intercultural communication tools such as cultural relativism, cultural diversity and national character studies, universalism and universalist human rights principles can be co-opted to serve in the War on Terrorism.

But the question remains, what do we do about all this? How do we as linguists, intercultural

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communication specialists and language teachers become subjects in the process of change? As I see it, for a sociohistorical paradigm for intercultural communication to be complete, it must be more than a simple method of analysis. It must also be liberating. It must empower us to build new and liberating histories. Some key tools in this process come from the sociohistorical psychology of Lev Vygotsky and the liberatory pedagogy of Paulo Freire and others. Unfortunately, I don't have time to detail them here except to say that they all involve us as social beings in the process of connecting our everyday realities with those of others, while at the same time connecting both to theory. For those of you interested in this, I will try to cover many of the key tools during my workshop.

Instead, given the limitations of time, I have focused on a few key concepts which underpin intercultural communication and which I believe are important for understanding the state of intercultural communication today. I have also suggested how a sociohistorical approach to the field might empower us to do our work in a more liberating way. There are many other areas of intercultural communication that I have not had time to touch on, but which would be enhanced by sociohistorical analysis as well. In lieu of that analysis, I leave you with some homework. Please consider these questions:

1. What kinds of cultural values, belief systems, assumptions and psychologies develop among the social classes in various stages of capitalist development up through the present?
2. How universal are these values and to what extent are they compatible with other cultural systems—such as, for example, the subsistence economies of many indigenous cultures around the world?
3. How might this knowledge help to reframe the thinking of First World professionals sent as technical consultants, aid workers, administrators, businessmen, etc. to Third World countries?
4. How might it help reframe the thinking of foreign language teachers and intercultural communication trainers?
5. How might we be able to connect this knowledge with the realities of our students?

And finally, I should add that there are teachers and researchers in all of the social sciences who are

beginning to raise their voices, ask questions, be critical, and look for meaningful rather than superficial answers. Many of these voices are in the tradition of critical theory and postmodernism. A few, like myself, are more Marxist. I believe all of them are worth listening to. Please listen to these voices and share your stories.

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