

**COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS: THE CASE OF  
BLACK INDIGENOUS ZAMBIANS AND WHITE WESTERN MIGRANTS LIVING IN  
ZAMBIA**

by

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 PREAMBLE**

The study of intercultural communication has assumed prominence in recent years as a result of an increase in intercultural encounters brought about by an increase in migration of people. Human migration has been made easy by advancements in transport and communication as well as information technology (Macionis 2001:80).

Increased human migration and improvements in information and communication technology have contributed to enhanced connectivity between nations, resulting in globalisation. Thus globalisation is defined as the gravitation of nations towards a single “global village” (Croucher 2004:10). Analysts however point to the complexity and multidisciplinary nature of globalisation (Soproni 2011:5–8). Globalisation is predominantly associated with the increased transfer of financial resources from one economy to the other around the world (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard 2004). The transfer of financial resources and the movement of human capital enhance productivity, trade and development (Porter 2006). These in turn increase opportunities for intercultural interaction. Thus globalisation is not primarily economic, but is also associated with a communication revolution (Soproni 2011:5–8).

Kornblum and Julian (2001:464) state that people migrate from one region of the world to the other and from one culture to the other for many reasons. Some people migrate to seek better job prospects, a better lifestyle, or better education opportunities for themselves and their children. Others migrate in search of security because of instability and war in their home countries. Yet others migrate for missionary work, volunteer work and other social responsibilities.

Intercultural interaction occurs when individuals of different cultures interact and communicate. The communication that occurs in an intercultural encounter is referred to as intercultural communication (West & Turner 2000:32).

Scott and Bryson (1997:3) define communication as the sharing of meaning resulting from the attempt to stimulate transfer of meaning through verbal and non-verbal means. Different

cultures have different verbal and non-verbal communication practices (Gamble & Gamble 2002:32). Gudykunst and Kim (1992:13) define intercultural communication as a “transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures”. Globalisation has increased opportunities for intercultural communication, since more people come into contact with other cultures. However, differences in cultural values and practices create misunderstanding and misinterpretation therefore rendering intercultural communication ineffective in most instances (Dumont, Nishida & Nakayama 2005:550).

Although the Republic of Zambia – a landlocked country situated in Southern Africa – is commonly regarded as a Third World country (Kragelund 2014:146), it has also been touched by the multitude of forces associated with globalisation (Jere-Malanda 2000:16). The country’s rich mineral resources, the global integration of its economy through the privatisation of its mining and other industries, the involvement of donors, development agencies and other non-governmental organisations as well as the interest of the country to students and academics have also resulted in an inflow of foreigners to Zambia. Many of these migrants come from Western countries. They enter Zambia with Western prismatic glasses and their contact and interaction with indigenous Zambians are influenced by their Western culture (Gearhart 2005:70; Grainger, Mills & Sibanda 2009:2158).

Similarly, encounters of Zambians with Western migrants are influenced by their indigenous cultural values and practices. However, both Westerners and Zambians are influenced by global cultural changes associated with the spread of American-Western tastes and cultural practices which could also have an impact on their communication and interaction (Jere-Malanda 2000:16).

This study therefore set out to investigate in order to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences in non-verbal communication and other cultural practices between black Zambians and white Western migrants living in Zambia. The knowledge gained was to assist in enhancing intercultural communication as well as adding to the body of knowledge in the field of intercultural communication.

## **1.2 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The overarching aim of this study was to explore in order to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences in non-verbal communication and other cultural practices in encounters between black Zambians and white Western migrants living in Zambia. Additionally, the study sought to gain an understanding of the implications of these similarities and differences. In order to achieve these aims, the following research questions were investigated.

## **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions that directed this study were:

1. How do the cultures of black Zambians and white Westerners compare and contrast with regard to non-verbal behaviour?
2. What other similarities and differences exist between the cultures of black Zambians and white Westerners?
3. What are the implications of these similarities and differences for intercultural communication, and how can communication between the two groups be improved?

## **1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA RECORDING AND PARTICIPANTS**

### **1.4.1 Research Design**

This research utilised a qualitative research design. Cooper and Schindler (2008:162) suggest that qualitative research includes an array of interpretive techniques which are employed to describe, decode and translate in order to come to terms with the meaning and not the frequency of certain phenomena in the social world.

Qualitative research is an inquiry method aimed at gathering detailed data for understanding the behaviour of humans and the reasons for their behaviour. The *why* and *how* of different phenomena are addressed in qualitative research.

A qualitative research design was favoured in this study because the study was aimed at gaining an understanding of non-verbal communication and other cultural practices of black Zambians and white Western migrants living in Zambia.

### **1.4.2 Methodology**

In collecting the data, this study used focus groups in which the participants were asked to discuss at length their personal knowledge and experience of intercultural interactions with members of the other cultural group. A focus group discussion is a form of qualitative research that is used in collecting qualitative data.

Zikmund (1994:95) states that focus group discussions are unstructured, free-flowing discussions with a relatively small group of participants, who express their views, perceptions and reactions towards a specific subject.

Focus group discussions were appropriate for this study because they provided an environment and opportunity for the participants to express fully their views and experiences of aspects of intercultural communication. In the course of this interaction, they could explain, reflect and seek clarification on any of the issues being discussed, and even modify an idea. In contrast, when questionnaires are used, these possibilities are seldom pursued for lack of time.

The discussions were video-recorded. The video recorder was the most appropriate method for capturing the data, as it allowed for recording of verbal communication and the non-verbal behaviour of the participants in real time (Schensul 1999:7). According to Collier and Bornman (1999:141), videotaping provides better access to participants' conduct and their interpretation of the issues concerned.

### **1.4.3 Venue of the Focus Group Discussions**

This study was conducted in Monze, a small town in the Southern Province of Zambia and located 200 kilometres south of the capital city, Lusaka. Although it is a farming town, it has three institutions of higher learning, namely the Rusangu University, the Zambia College of Agriculture and the Monze College of Education.

The study was conducted in Monze because, at the time, the researcher lived in Monze.

### **1.4.4 Participants**

A total of 12 participants were selected for this study using convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is the process of sampling participants who are easily recruitable

(Alreck & Settle 2004:43). Additionally, convenience sampling is best used for exploratory studies (Zikmund 1994:364), as this study indeed was. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method.

Convenience sampling was chosen because it was impossible to select participants randomly, especially white Westerners living in Zambia. At the time, there were only a few Westerners that this researcher could access. Therefore the focus groups consisted of six white Westerners and six black Zambians. The six whites were recruited from Lusaka, where they worked as volunteers in non-government organisations, while the Zambians were sampled from within the Monze community.

### **1.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

This study employed thematic analysis to analyse and interpret the qualitative data collected during the focus group discussions. According to Merton (1967:73), thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or the behaviour of participants. Themes are units derived from patterns, such as conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs (Taylor & Bogdan 1989:131).

The conclusions of this study were arrived at through analysing the data with reference to the overarching aim of this study (see Section 1.2) as well as the research questions (see section 1.3). Themes were derived from the video transcripts of the focus group discussions, and similarities and differences between the Zambians and Westerners in relation to these themes were identified. The advantage of this approach is that the data stemmed from the perspective of the participants, thereby minimising researcher bias (Schensul 1999:29).

### **1.6 SUMMARY AND OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION**

The research focused on the similarities and differences in non-verbal communication and other cultural practices between black Zambians and white Westerners living in Zambia. Additionally, the research investigated the implications of these similarities and differences.

This chapter, chapter one, provides a general overview of intercultural communication in a globalised world and discusses the aim of the study, the research questions that guided the study, the research design and sampling method as well as the data collection and analysis tools.

Major concepts, namely communication, culture and intercultural communication, are discussed in Chapter Two. So is the relationship between culture and communication, and the factors that render intercultural communication either effective or ineffective.

As non-verbal communication formed a significant part of the research, it is discussed in detail as a form of communication in Chapter Three, while further theoretical bases of this study as well as related research works are discussed in Chapter Four.

The application of the chosen research design, more detailed information on the participants and how they were selected as well as the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation are presented in Chapter Five. The various research choices made by this researcher are also substantiated in this chapter.

Chapter Six presents the findings, that is, the key similarities and differences in non-verbal communication and other cultural practices between the white Westerners and black Zambians. The chapter also discusses the implications of these similarities and differences as well as what needs to be done to improve communication between the two cultural groups. Chapter Seven summarises the research by discussing the implications of the study, and recommends possible areas for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the concepts “culture” and “communication” are discussed, starting with definitions of each as well as an analysis of the relationship between them. Furthermore, intercultural communication as well as what ought to be done for communication between individuals of different cultures to be effective are furthermore discussed in this chapter.

Culture and communication are interlinked (Jandt 1998:44). The manner in which people consider communication, how they communicate and reasons for communicating are all culturally derived, according to Jandt. Disregarding this important connection in intercultural interaction leads to misinterpretations and barriers to effective intercultural communication.

#### **2.2 CULTURE DEFINED**

In everyday language, culture is often loosely defined and used. The term “culture” is sometimes used to capture behavioural patterns, art, artefacts and even the values, norms and practices of a particular community or organisation. In order to clarify the meaning of the concept “culture”, it is best to start by examining the evolution of the word “culture”. Its etymology can be traced to its Latin root word “colere”, translated as “to build”, “to care for”, “to plant” or “to cultivate” (Dahl 2000:10).

Thus, culture involves prototypes of human conduct, ambiguous and unambiguous, gained and conveyed through codes and cultivated over time by a particular cultural grouping (Adler 1997:14). Adler adds that cultural systems are a product of actions as well as predictors for future behaviour because they are cultivated over time.

For the scope of this discussion, two key perspectives on the concept “culture” will be looked at. These are the sociological perspective and the anthropological perspective. A review of these two perspectives will help to define culture more clearly.



### **2.2.1 Sociological View of Culture**

Sociology is the systematic study of human societies. Sociologists define culture as the total, generally organised way of life that includes values, norms, artefacts and institutions passed on from one generation to the next (Macionis 2001:1), or as “the values, beliefs, behaviour and material objects that, together, form a way of life for a particular group of people” (Macionis 2001:61). Henslin (1999:35) has a similar view: Culture, which includes language, values, beliefs, norms, behaviour and material objects, is passed on from generation to generation.

Therefore, central to the definition of culture is the element of the togetherness of a human society, which has an organised way of maintaining and perpetuating their language, values, norms, beliefs, artefacts and institutions. In maintaining and perpetuating their culture, human societies educate, interact, socialise and transmit their way of life.

Culture results from human dealings with nature and the universal manner in which humans interact socially. This includes knowledge, language and belief systems that are shared by a group of people (Communication and Culture... 2006).

According to Spencer (1982:562), culture is a way of life that includes systems of ideas and customs passed on from generation to generation. Kammeyer, Ritzer and Yetman (1990:679) state that culture is the entire complex of ideas and material objects that people of a particular society have created and adopted for carrying out the necessary tasks of collective life.

Culture is transmitted from generation to generation through sharing of information such as the nature of life, customs and traditions, norms, beliefs and practices and other important aspects of human life (Baghramian 2004).

Suffice to say that culture refers to the historically created system of explicit and implicit patterns of living, which system is shared by all members of a society or a specifically designated group at a specified point in time (Kluckhohn & Kelly 1945:98).

### **2.2.2 Anthropological View of Culture**

Anthropology is the study of human species and their immediate ancestors (Kottak 2001:4). Henslin (1999:7) states that anthropology is the sister discipline of sociology. It is a discipline that looks at a people's total way of life. Cultural anthropology studies cultural variations in different human societies. Anthropologists have a slightly different view of culture.

Anthropologists subdivide culture in the following four segments: the artefacts of a group of people, the structure of the group, the ideas of the group, and the forms of communication of the group (Henslin 1999:7).

An artefact is anything tangible that is made by mankind. Each culture has artefacts. These are material things that identify one culture and separate it from other cultures. For instance, Middle Eastern men, especially of Arabic heritage, wear long robes and headscarves; Jewish men, especially deeply religious Jews, wear black suits, white shirts, black hats and long unshaved beards; Zulu men wear animal skins around their loins and brandish short spears and shields during certain traditional ceremonies; and traditional Lozi men in Zambia wear long-sleeved white shirts, long colourful skirts with matching waistcoats and berets during certain traditional ceremonies.

Culture furthermore defines the thought patterns of its members. Goodenough (1964:36) suggests that culture does not only refer to the material objects and behaviour of its members, but also to "the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them". Hofstede (1994:25) adds that culture refers to "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another". He adds that culture is not the property of individuals, but of groups.

Giddens (1997:42) concludes that the concept of "culture" is one of the most profound conceptions in the study of human societies. He defines culture as a people's total way of life in society or in a grouping in society. Culture includes art, literature and paintings, how people dress, their customs, their patterns of work and religious ceremonies. It furthermore involves the accumulated habits, attitudes and beliefs of a group of people and their total set of learned activities. In the end, although different scholars may define culture differently, common to all the definitions are the facts that culture is man-made as well as social, has

collective and shared objects as well as behavioural models, which are standards that make up a particular culture.

Most importantly, culture guides communication. Gamble and Gamble (2002:36) suggest that culture teaches one, for example, how to say hello and goodbye. Furthermore, people of a particular culture learn when to be silent and when to speak, how to act when one is sad, angry or joyous, and how to use non-verbal cues at appropriate junctures through cultural orientation. In other words, people learn how to act, think, talk and even listen in a particular culture.

### **2.2.3 Multidimensional views of Culture**

Culture has been extrapolated as a multidimensional concept by different scholars. Scholars such as Geert Hofstede (De Mooi & Hofstede 2011:85) and Harry Triandis (2004:90) distinguish various dimensions of culture. Triandis identifies a number of dimensions of culture. He states that some dimensions of cultural variations are primary, with a direct linkage to the variations in ecology, while others are secondary, emanating from the primary dimensions.

The main dimensions that distinguish between cultures as identified by De Mooi and Hofstede (2011) and Triandis (2004) are individualism versus collectivism, power distance, masculinity versus femininity, low-context versus high-context, high uncertainty avoidance versus low uncertainty avoidance and a long-term versus a short-term orientation.

#### ***Individualism versus Collectivism***

Triandis (2004:90) suggests that the most outstanding characteristic of collectivist cultures as opposed to individualistic cultures is the emphasis on context more than content. Collective cultures emphasise context, suggesting that such traits as intonation of voice, gestures and the communication context have more meaning than the words being communicated.

Individualistic cultures on the other hand place an emphasis on content more than on context. In order to contrast between individualist and collectivist cultures, Triandis gives the example of United States of America Secretary of State Richard Baker, who at a United Nations conference in Geneva Switzerland told Iraqis to vacate Kuwait, or risk being attacked.

However, Secretary Baker spoke in a calm and composed tone, and therefore the Iraqis did not take him seriously (Triandis 2004:90).

Individualism versus collectivism furthermore describes how people of a particular culture describe themselves in their relationships with other people (Gamble & Gamble 2002:40). Individualism occurs where people place great emphasis on individual goals. Individualistic cultures promote individual creativity, achievement and advancement at a personal level. Examples of individualistic cultures include those of North America, France, the United Kingdom and Germany.

Collectivistic cultures, on the other hand, emphasise the importance of group goals. People in a particular collectivistic culture are expected to put aside individual desires, goals and plans for the sake of group goals. Examples of collectivistic cultures are found in most parts of Africa, Asia, South America and the Arab world.

#### ***Low-Context versus High-Context Cultures***

Low-context cultures encourage directness in communication. Martin and Nakayama (2000:256) state that people of low-context cultures are more open in communication, even with strangers. Most Western countries have low-context communication styles.

High-context cultures reflect a tradition-bound system of communication that relies heavily on indirectness (Gamble & Gamble 2000:40; Grainger et al 2010:2159). The Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures as well as most African cultures are high-context cultures. In Japan, for example, silence is valued so much that a person of few words is considered to be thoughtful, wise, trustworthy and respectable.

#### ***Low-Power Distance versus High-Power Distance***

Power distance represents a cultural guide that gauges how much a particular culture reveres authority (Rutherford 2005:36).

Low-power distance cultures view inequalities in power and status as superficial. Those who wield power in these cultures deemphasise it and allocate whenever possible some of that power to others and share power (Rutherford 2005:37).

High-power distance cultures uphold inequality in power and status. It is an acceptable norm in high-power distance cultures to regard certain individuals in society as smarter, more influential and more powerful than others.

### ***Masculinity versus Femininity***

Masculinity versus femininity is another dimension by which cultures can be distinguished. Jandt (2007:171) states that cultures that place higher value on masculine traits emphasise assertiveness, competition and material wealth. Masculine cultures distinguish maximally between what men and women are expected to do. Cultures that value feminine traits are more permissive of overlapping social roles for the sexes. Feminine cultures put more emphasis on quality of life, interpersonal relations and concern for the vulnerable and weak.

Understanding the above differences simplifies intercultural exchange by helping to reduce anxiety, ease the exchange and ensure better meaning sharing.

### ***Uncertainty Avoidance***

De Mooi and Hofstede (2011:89) define uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which people in a particular culture feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and attempt to avoid such situations. In cultures that are more inclined to avoid uncertainty, people have a need for rules and formality to structure social situations – a need which is often associated with a search for truth and a belief in experts. People belonging to cultures high in uncertainty avoidance are furthermore less open to change and innovation than those in low uncertainty avoidance cultures.

### ***Long- versus Short-Term Orientation***

This dimension relates to the extent to which the people of a particular culture holds a pragmatic orientation towards the future rather than a conventional, historic or short term view (De Mooi & Hofstede 2011:90). A long-term view is characterised by values such as perseverance. Relationships are furthermore ordered by status, thrift, having a sense of shame and the pursuit of peace of mind. It is furthermore associated with investment in the future. A short-term orientation, on the other hand, emphasises stability, personal steadiness, respect for tradition and the pursuit of happiness rather than peace of mind.

The multidimensional views of culture have been employed in various ways in the study of non-verbal communication. Hwang and Matsumoto (2014:177–191), for example, used De Mooi and Hofstede's (2011:85) power distance dimension to study cultural differences in the victory signals given by judo players from different countries at the Olympic Games.

Park, Baek and Cha (2014:333–354) investigated culture-specific facial expressions of emotion as reflected in the use of emoticons on Twitter by people from different cultures. They found, among others, that the emoticons used by people from individualistic cultures were distinctly different than those used by people from collectivistic cultures (Triandis 2004:90). Westbrook (2014:281–294) investigated the influence of culture in online learning. He found that students from high-context cultures struggled as the low-context written material lacked the non-verbal cues they would normally expect. The conclusion can be drawn that the dimensions of culture as distinguished by De Mooi and Hofstede (2011:85) and Triandis (2004:85) are not only relevant for the study of communication, but in particular also for the study of non-verbal communication.

## **2.3 ELEMENTS OF CULTURE**

Five key elements of culture can be distinguished: symbols, language, values, norms and material culture.

### **2.3.1 Symbols**

Kottak (2002:271) holds that a symbol is something verbal or non-verbal, within a particular language or culture, which stands for something else. Kottak adds that there is no obvious connection between the symbol and what it symbolises. Henslin (1999:38) suggests that a symbol is anything that carries a particular meaning recognised by people who share a culture and a language.

According to Kottak (2001:271), holy water in Roman Catholicism for example is a potent symbol. The water symbolises holiness. The national flag of the Republic of Zambia has green, copper, black and red colours. The green symbolises natural resources such as copper and other mineral resources; black the black indigenous citizens; and red the blood that was shed by freedom fighters during the fight for political liberation.

White (1959:3) suggests that culture depends on symbols. Human behaviour can be seen as the conception and manipulation of symbols reflected in meanings associated with certain acts. These acts may include raising a thumb, which may imply praise and approval in some cultures and an insult in others. People depend on a particular culture's symbols to communicate and interact. Culture and the concept of symbolic exchange are best explained by the sociological perspective referred to as symbolic interaction. This theory is discussed in relative detail in Chapter Four.

### **2.3.2 Language**

The second element of culture is language. Language often serves as the primary means of communication as it involves an arbitrary system of symbols for communicating (Kottak 2001:316; Scott & Bryson 1997:46). Language, according to Macionis (2001:64), furthermore not only allows humans to communicate, but also ensures the continuity of culture. It is the key to cultural transmission, as the older generation teaches the younger generation through language how to act, what to do and how to use their language.

Language assumes many functions for humans. Firstly, the principle of linguistic relativity holds that one's language influences one's perception of the world and the people in it (Badhesha 2002; Scott & Bryson 1997:48). Thus it is suggested that different languages are associated with different thought patterns as the words and grammatical structures of each languages is unique (Kottak 2001:324). The language a person speaks therefore determines in a significant way the nature of that person's thoughts. Linguistic relativity furthermore suggests that people's worldview is constructed by the symbols they use in their language.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis explains linguistic relativity a little further. Anthropologist Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf, the proponents of the hypothesis, suggest that grammatical groupings of different languages promote diversity in the thinking patterns of the speakers of each of the languages (Henslin 1999:42). According to Sapir and Whorf, people are not born with language. Rather, language is acquired and determined by culture, leading to different interpretations of reality. Language furthermore describes the way in which people of a particular culture think, feel and behave. As argued by the proponents of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, language shapes the perceptions and patterns of thinking of its speakers. According to Scott and Bryson (1997:51), it is consequently necessary to understand the language of a particular group of people in order to understand their culture.

Schaefer (2000:71) holds, for example, that language colours the world around people. He explains that although humans have the unique physical ability to make a million colour distinctions, languages differ in the number of colours that are identified. In the English language, for example, the colours yellow, orange, red and purple are distinguished. In the Dugum Dani language of New Guinea, in contrast, only two basic colours are acknowledged namely “modla” for white and “mili” for black.

In order to be effective, communicators in intercultural encounters must therefore not assume that the symbols they use in their own language and culture are used in the same manner and with the same meaning in other cultures. Similarly, it would be inaccurate to assume that individuals from different cultures speaking different languages have the same worldview and perception of specific objects.

Secondly, language provides a social and shared past (Schaefer 2000:52). Henslin (1999:41) argues that people use language symbols such as words to recall and share experiences with others. Through experiences and present circumstances, people are able to predict the future. Planning can be done because of the ability of humans to codify language in terms of time, goals, purposes, plans and so forth.

Thirdly, language allows for sharing of perspectives or understandings. In every communication transaction, humans exchange perspectives through language symbols, according to Henslin (1999:41). Words personify human experiences. The essence of social life emanates from sharing understanding through talking about events. Language also provides a convenient catharsis for people’s inhibitions (Rosman & Rubel 2001:57).

Sharing a language does not, however, imply sharing a culture. For instance, although English is spoken in Great Britain and the United States of America, there are many marked cultural differences between these two societies. In addition, the versions of the English language spoken in each one of these societies are different. Bryson (1990:178) identifies the following differences in certain English words as used in the United States of America and Great Britain:



**Table 1: Different words for the same meaning**

<b>UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</b>	<b>GREAT BRITAIN</b>
What's up?	Hello
Car trunk	Boot
Pharmacist	Chemist
Buddy/partner	Mate
Brewski/a beer	Pint
Rude	Cheeky
Later/goodbye	Cheerio
Gas	Petrol
Baby's crib	Cot
Thread	Cotton for sewing
Zucchini	Courgette
To loaf	To skive
Cotton candy	Candy floss
Period (punctuation)	Full stop
Quotation marks	Inverted commas
Idiot, boor	Berk
Skilled carpenter	Joiner
Worn out	Knackered
License plate	Number plate
Policeman	Old Bill
Runaway	Scamper
To hurry along	To chivvy
Pedestrian underpass	Subway
Slot machine	Fruit machine
Ladies' underwear	Smalls
Long distance bus	Coach
Petty thief	Spiv
To whine	To grizzle
To carry a heavy load	To hump

*Sourced from Bryson (1990:178)*

Language thus not only promotes and preserves culture as well as perpetuates its existence. According to Henslin (1999:40), language also allows human experiences to snowball. The snowball effect of language occurs when one generation passes profound skills, knowledge and experiences to the next generation to help avoid pitfalls as well as to enjoy certain experiences. Through language, the younger generations learn of the experiences of the preceding generations, thus the young people are able to avoid where possible the failures and mistakes of the older generation.

### **2.3.3 Values and Beliefs**

Schaefer (2000:58) states that values are the collective conceptions of what is considered good, desirable and proper. Giddens (1997:586) also defines values as the ideas held by human beings, individuals or a group about what is desirable, proper and good.

Additionally, values serve as broad guidelines for social living (Henslin 1999:42). In order to understand the standards by which people define good and bad, beautiful and ugly and so forth, one has to uncover people's values. Values are enduring beliefs about good and evil and about what is moral and immoral. For instance, those who oppose the death penalty argue that the idea of taking another person's life for whatever reason is always wrong.

Scott and Bryson (1997:167) identify two sets of values, namely terminal and instrumental values. Terminal values are about life's goals, which could be the desire for a comfortable or exciting life, the desire for accomplishment, the desire for equality and security, freedom, happiness, peace and so forth.

Instrumental values concern modes of conduct that guide behaviour and the methods by which terminal values are achieved. Instrumental values include ambition, having a broad and open mind, being capable, cheerfulness, cleanliness, courage, honesty and so forth.

Values are inculcated in humans at a tender age. They are therefore very difficult to change. Because values are widely shared by people in a particular society, they are tied to the cultural heritage of that particular society.

Beliefs, on the other hand, are specific statements that people hold as true. Scott and Bryson (1997:167) define a belief as a conviction that something is either true or false. There are beliefs that are obvious and non-debatable, such as the belief that the earth is round.

However, other beliefs attract much controversy, for instance the belief that television violence has an effect on behaviour.

According to Macionis (2001:67), cultural values and beliefs not only affect human perceptions of the environment, but also contribute to the formation of the core of an individual's personality. Through the process of socialisation, humans learn how to think and act according to accepted standards. Therefore, values and beliefs are an integral part of a particular culture.

Each culture has different values and beliefs in its different subcultures. However, universal values and beliefs are held in the larger culture (Macionis 2001:69). For instance, while the United States of America is considered a cultural mosaic due to its long immigration history, some values apply to the United States culture overall. These include equal opportunities for all, a desire for achievement and success, material comfort, activity and work, practicality and efficiency, progress, democracy and free enterprise, freedom and racial identity (Williams 1970:10).

### **2.3.4 Cultural Norms**

Norms are rules and expectations by which society guides the behaviour of its members. Henslin (1999:43) states that sociologists use the term "norms" to describe the expectations or guidelines of behaviour based on cultural values and practices. When the norms are violated, there are negative consequences. Similarly, when the norms are upheld, there are rewards.

Macionis (2001:69) divides norms into two categories, namely proscriptive and prescriptive norms. Proscriptive norms are those norms that state what should not be done. For instance, lessons on the avoidance of premarital, extra-marital and other casual sexual behaviours are lessons in proscriptive norms. Prescriptive norms, on the other hand, suggest those things that should be done. Examples include sexual fidelity in marriage, abstinence and chastity for unmarried individuals, and the practice of safe sex by adults who cannot abstain from sexual activity outside the matrimonial bounds.

Sociologist William Graham Sumner in his 1906 research on social norms concluded that some norms are regarded more important than others (Goodman 1992:33). The concept

“mores” arose from Sumner’s research. Mores are those norms that are observed and have greater moral significance among the members of a particular society (Macionis 2001:70).

Also referred to as taboos, mores dictate what is regarded as right and what is regarded as wrong. For instance, incest is regarded as a taboo or is strongly opposed in most cultures around the world. Similarly, sexual contact between an adult and a child is prohibited.

However, there are other norms, referred to as “folkways” that deal with the routine, mundane and casual contact between people. Macionis (2001:70) states that folkways distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Examples include what society regards as appropriate dress for particular occasions. For instance, a woman going to church dressed in a party dress may be flouting folkways.

Every society has a means of controlling and enforcing its norms. Sanctions, either negative or positive, are meted out every time an individual contravenes or complies with societal norms. Schaefer (2000:58) states that sanctions are the penalties and rewards for conduct concerning a social norm. Norms are about culture, because they are the basic rules for everyday life in a particular culture. Norms make interaction between and among people more orderly and predictable. Rewards or punishments are meted out to those who respectively uphold or break the cultural norms of a particular culture.

### **2.3.5 Material Culture and Technology**

In addition to the intangible components of culture discussed in the preceding paragraphs, culture also has tangible objects. Humans create material culture. Material culture, according to Henslin (1999:35), refers to the material objects that distinguish a group of people, such as their art, buildings, weapons, utensils, machines, hairstyles, clothing and jewellery.

Goodman (1992:31) states that material culture is passed on from generation to generation. In some instances, some of the objects are modified over time, while others go through little or no change. For instance, cars have evolved tremendously from the way they were many years ago. For instance, in the earlier years, cars were very basic with ordinary gear, accelerator, break and clutch pedals.

In the modern era, cars are computerised, with temperature sensors, pressure sensors, and so on and so forth. The bicycle on the other hand has not changed much. Bicycles were designed with foot pedals, handle bars and a saddle. To this day, the bicycle is still the same. Yet other cultural artefacts are phased out only to be brought back, such as the hula-hoop in America.

Sociologists believe that the profoundness of material culture is the reason for the existence of each of its artefacts (Ferrante 1992:85). In addition, material culture is regarded as significant, as is evident from the fact that some of the members of society are saddened by the absence of particular artefacts and will do everything possible to acquire them (Kluckhohn 1949:23).

## **2.4 COMMUNICATION**

Barnett and Kincaid (1983:173) define communication as the process of convergence in which two or more participants share information in order to reach a mutual understanding of each other and the world in which they live. In communication, there is transfer of meaning, carried out intentionally as well as unintentionally (Treece 1987:3).

In communication transactions, there is a sender of the message, a receiver, a channel through which the message is transmitted as well as a particular context in which the communication exchange takes place, which context includes the situation as well as the cultural context (McQuail 1975:17).

### **2.4.1 Models of the Communication Process**

Various models have been derived to present the communication process and make it understandable. Models not only describe and summarise the communication process, but also assist in identifying communication problems by showing where misinterpretation and misunderstanding could have occurred in a communication interaction (Baldwin 2008).

Models, however, have limitations. A model represents a process more like a “snapshot” than a “motion picture”. Models may also focus on a limited number of aspects and neglect others that are crucial. For instance, the transactional model (presented in Figure 3) identifies the elements of sender, receiver, noise, feedback, experience and relationship. However, the model does not overtly address people’s feelings and moods when they engage in communication.

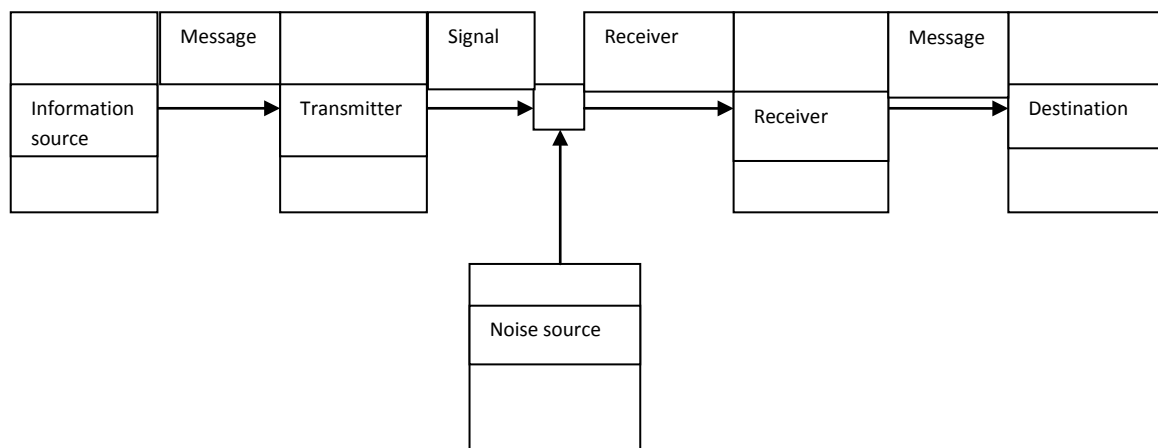
In essence, models are not theories. Models give details of a theoretical process in a pictorial or graphic form, but do not address why and how a process comes about.

**Action Model of Communication**

This model, also referred to as the linear model of communication, describes communication as a one-way process (Scott & Bryson 1997:4). The earliest communication model, it suggests that communication is linear, mechanistic, clearly indicating the sender who encodes and sends the message to a receiver, who receives and decodes it.

Some scholars and communication theorists have referred to this model as the Shannon-Weaver mathematical model, named after engineer Claude Shannon and his assistant, Warren Weaver (Mortensen 1972:30). The two theorists investigated the most efficient way of transmitting electrical signals from one location to another. This innovation became the forerunner of the action or linear model of communication, according to Mortensen. The action model is demonstrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Shannon-Weaver Mathematical Model (Action Model of Communication)**



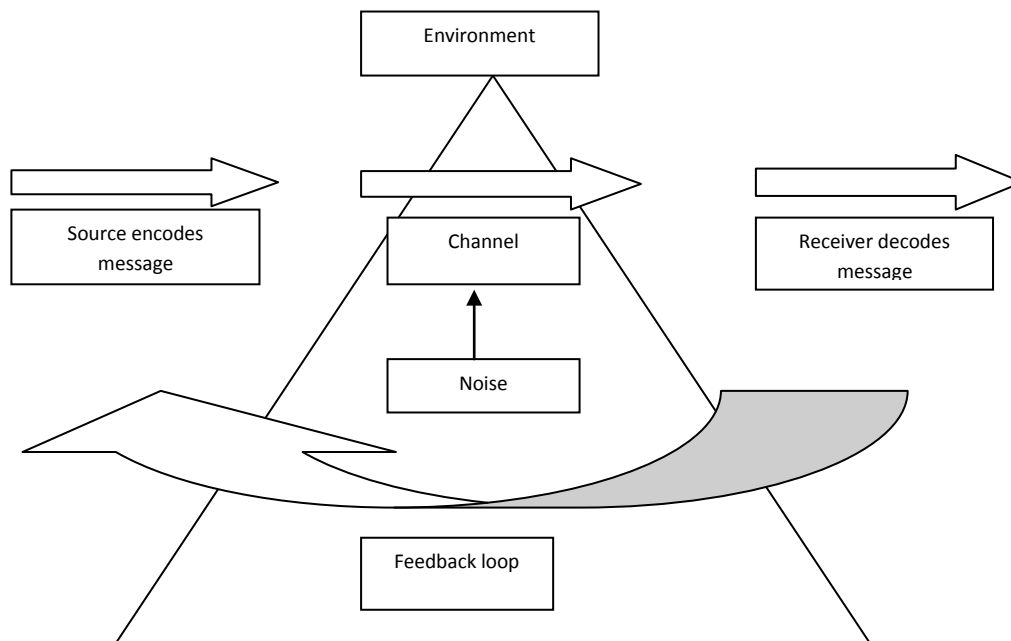
*Adopted from Scott and Bryson (1997:4-5)*

According to this model, a message is sent from the source through a medium to the receiver with potential interference in the form of noise. One major weakness of this model is that it does not indicate any kind of exchange. Feedback is not addressed.

### ***Interaction Model of Communication***

The interaction model reflects advancements in the knowledge and understanding of communication. It depicts communication as an interactive process (Scott & Bryson 1997:5). The model identifies a circular, interdependent feedback process transposed over the linear communication model (Baran 2002:5). The interaction model can also be referred to as two-way communication. It is depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Interaction Model of Communication**



*Adopted from Scott and Bryson (1997:4-5)*

This model suggests that the sender transmits a message in words that reflect his or her background, experience, culture, gender, biases, attitudes, values and communicative skills. The receiver also decodes or interprets that message in a way that is consistent with his or her own experience and background, frame of mind at that time and any other factors at play (Civikly 1992:8).

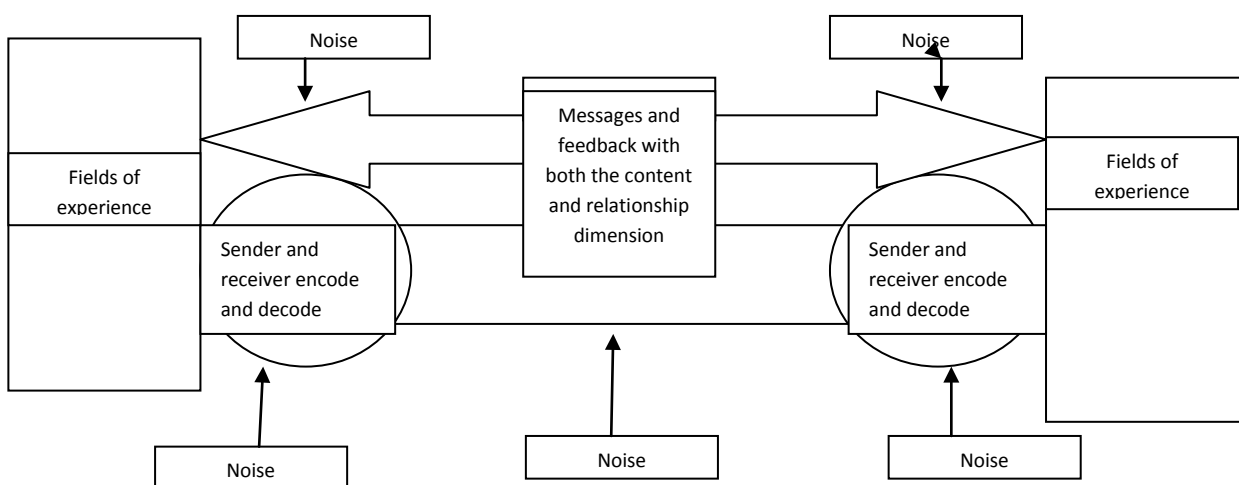
However, the communication process is still more complex than the interaction model suggests. Whereas the interaction model suggests that messages are sent, received, interpreted and responded to in a perfect manner, the reality of information exchange in human communication is not that ideal. Responses to messages are not always in accordance with the intent of the sender.

Additionally, whereas the interaction model suggests independence of the parties in the communication exchange, participants in a real communication exchange are interdependent. The transactional model addresses some of the voids in the interaction model.

### ***Transactional Model of Communication***

The transactional model of communication describes a communication transaction that involves a person’s experiences from birth to the present, as well as his or her future aspirations and plans (Gamble & Gamble 2002:14). Jandt (1998:25) states that the transactional model involves sharing of information because relationship is the goal. Jandt further suggests that people who communicate with the goal to create, maintain or engage in relationships are employing the transactional model of communication because they seek meaning.

**Figure 3: Transactional Model of Communication**



*Adopted from Rothwell (2000:15)*

With transactional communication, there is mutuality of behaviour, whether simultaneously or sequentially, as the behaviour of one participant has an influence on the behaviour of the other (Sarbaugh 1993:8). In both the interactive and transactional communication models, feedback has to be consistent with the message sent in order for a meaningful exchange to occur (Singer 1987:95).



## **2.5 LINKING CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION**

Culture can be referred to as the lens through which people view the world. It is a mirror that assists people to interpret reality (Gamble & Gamble 2002:36). People learn how to think, what to think about, how to talk and what to talk about as a result of socialisation in a particular culture.

The relationship between communication and culture involves all aspects of communication, such as language, verbal and non-verbal communication, customs, perceived values as well as people's interpretation of space and time.

At this point, the relationship between communication and culture must be clarified.

### **2.5.1 Influence of Culture on Verbal Communication**

In verbal communication people use lexical items to help create and transmit meaning as well as fulfil expectations (Baran 2002:10). Meaning is shared when people communicate.

Culture influences verbal communication in the following ways: The words that are used in verbal communication are culturally determined (Gamble & Gamble 2002:118). Word usage varies from culture to culture. When something is of profound value to a particular culture, various lexical items are used to describe it.

In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, maize meal is the staple food of indigent Africans. Most of the sub-Saharan societies use different names for the thick porridge made from maize meal, which symbolises its significance in the lives of the people. For instance, among the Tonga people of Southern Zambia, it is referred to as "insima", and is also called "kalimba bula" (meaning "one that fills up the tummy").

The American society also attaches great importance to food and the process of eating. Rosman and Rubel (2001:78) state that in American culture, eating is regarded as a group activity. Therefore, those seen eating alone in public places are considered social outcasts. Thus culture in this case influences the coinage of such individuals. Additionally, because of the great significance the American society attaches to food, various regions of the country are symbolised by different types of food. For example, the southern part of the United States

is represented by grits, fried chicken, black-eyed peas, and collard and mustard greens. Boiled dinners, clam chowder and lobster meals are again popular in the New England states.

However, there is no relationship between the word and the object it represents.

Communication theorists Ogden and Richards developed the triangle of meaning to explain this (in Gamble & Gamble 2002:113). The triangle of meaning has three dimensions, namely thought, word and thing. Ogden and Richards argue that thoughts link a word to its referent as a result of what culture instructs. For instance, the word “insima” is used in Zambia to refer to the thick porridge made from maize meal, while the same meal is referred to as “sadza” in Zimbabwe.

### **2.5.2 Influence of Culture on Non-Verbal Communication**

Gamble and Gamble (2002:175) state that culture also plays a significant role in modifying the use of non-verbal language in human communication interaction. Culture guides people on how to interact interpersonally and socially (Civikly 1991:103). For instance, culture dictates the amount of space that people hold as their own as well as the space they share with other people. Interpersonal and social space is referred to as proxemics.

According to Anderson (1982:272), contact cultures are those cultures that promote close body contact between individuals in a social interaction. These include countries such as Saudi Arabia, France, Italy, most North African countries and so forth. People of Scandinavia, Germany, the British Isles and North America on the other hand, prefer to reserve a certain amount of personal space in public interaction.

Just as people of different cultures differ in the way they use personal space between two or more communicators, emotional expressions can also differ. Gamble and Gamble (2002:175) state, for example, that the people of the Mediterranean region tend to be uninhibited in expressing their emotions, while people of the Far East like the Chinese and Japanese tend to withhold their emotions in public.

The desire to be touched is a perfectly human desire. Touch can serve as a demonstration of openness, comfort with and trust in the other person (Gamble & Gamble 2002:173). The amount of touch that is acceptable to individuals and how they want to be touched are largely determined by culture. Gudykunst and Kim (1992:320) suggest that different cultures value

touch differently. For instance, Asian people, such as the Japanese, shy away from touching in public, because their cultures forbid this. On the other hand, most Westerners display affection in public because their cultures tend to encourage this.

Another element of non-verbal communication that is influenced greatly by culture is the perception of time. The interpretation of time and its value differ around the world. Some cultures tend to be preoccupied with time, while people in other cultures do not care much about time (Levine 1997:15).

Because of the culture-determined use of non-verbal communication such as personal space, gestures, touch, facial expressions and so forth, misunderstandings between individuals are often inevitable, especially in intercultural communication. For instance, a Japanese interacting with an American for the first time may conclude that Americans are loud, overly friendly and patronising, because they express their emotions in a public conversation. On the other hand, an American may conclude that the Japanese are cold, unfriendly and boring, since the Japanese tend to hold in their emotions in public conversation (Gamble & Gamble 2002:175).

Furthermore, the same non-verbal cue may carry different meanings in different cultures. Gamble and Gamble (2002:175) refer to nodding one's head, which symbolises agreement in North America, whereas in Japan this may imply someone has received the message but not that he or she agrees with it.

## **2.6 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Intercultural communication is the communication that takes place between cultures. It implies communication between people of different cultures (Neuliep 2000:6). Griffin (2000:404) defines intercultural communication as the management of messages for the purpose of creating meaning between cultures, while Gudykunst and Kim (1992:13) state that intercultural communication is a “transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures”.

Barnett (1988:101), on the other hand, defines intercultural communication as the exchange of cultural information between groups of people with significantly different cultures. Intercultural communication centres on the interchange of information among social systems

entrenched in a universal environment, which communication results in the reduction of uncertainty about the future behaviour of the other system through an increase in understanding of the other social group (Barnett & Lee 2002:276).

### **2.6.1 Models of Intercultural Communication**

A number of models of intercultural communication are hereby discussed.

#### ***Contextual Model of Intercultural Communication***

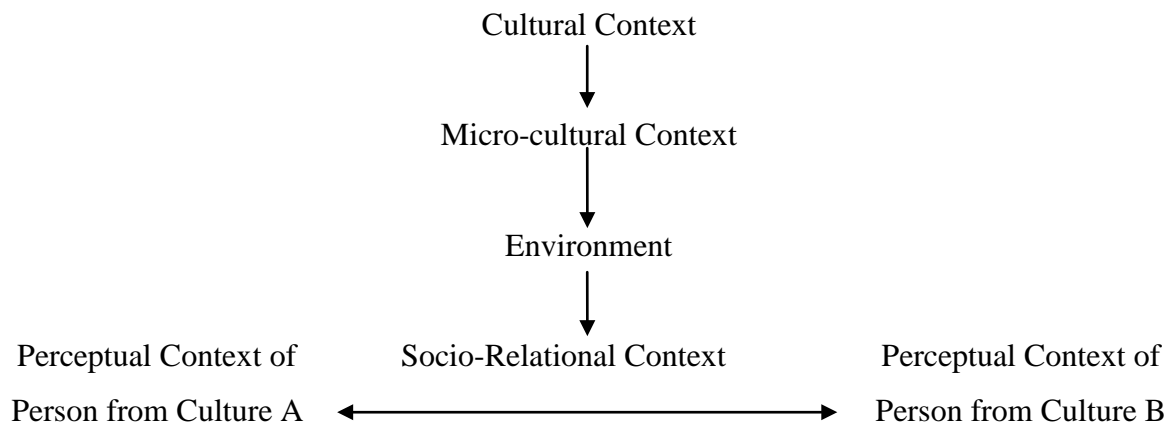
Jim Neuliep developed the contextual model of intercultural communication in 2006 (in Baldwin 2008). Neuliep argues that intercultural communication occurs in five contexts, namely the cultural, micro-cultural, environmental, socio-relational and perceptual contexts.

The cultural context deals with the beliefs, norms and practices of a particular community. The micro-cultural context refers to the subculture or culture within a culture, for instance Italian Americans, Irish Americans, African Americans and so forth. The environmental context implies the setting, surroundings, situation as well as location in which the intercultural communication is occurring. The socio-relational context relates to the nature of the connection or association between the communicators, which is likely to influence the effectiveness of intercultural communication. Lastly, the perceptual context involves the individual's perception of other participants in intercultural communication, which may impact positively or negatively on the communication interaction between two parties.

These contexts have an influence on communication in the sense that they all create an ambience within which communication takes place. The influence of the ambience or environment including cultural, social, environmental or perceptual, dictates the success or failure of the communication transaction. In essence, the cultural context is the umbrella context in which the social, environmental and perceptual contexts exist and operate.

An individual perceives his social and environmental context under the influence of the culture in which they live and have been brought up.

**Figure 4: Contextual Model of Intercultural Communication**



### ***Dialectical Model of Intercultural Communication***

Critiques of Neuliep's contextual model have argued that it is too linear and that the intercultural communication process is more complicated than Neuliep suggests. Therefore Martin, Nakayama and Flores (2002:3) propose an alternative, the dialectical model.

The dialectical model of intercultural communication introduces the elements of uncertainty, unpredictability and tension in human communication. It is argued that there are no two human beings who will think alike simultaneously. In a communication exchange, one communicator might want predictability whereas the other might prefer novelty. Therefore, tension may arise between the two communicators.

The dialectical approach to intercultural communication concludes that human relationships are murky, messy and unpredictable. As opposed to the contextual model of intercultural communication, which suggests that as long as the context is right, communication will be effective, the dialectical model acknowledges the fact that other factors might render the communication process ineffective even when all the contextual factors are positive.

### ***Anxiety-Uncertainty Management Model of Intercultural Communication***

The conceiver of this approach, William Gudykunst, argues that the central issue in intercultural communication is the ability to manage uncertainty and anxiety (in Baldwin 2008). Gudykunst defines certainty as the cognitive ability to explain and predict the behaviour of the other person; uncertainty would then imply the absence of this ability. Anxiety, according to Gudykunst, is the affective or emotional trepidation or fear of things

that may occur in the interaction. People have a whole range of anxieties such as the fear of looking stupid or the fear of being rejected.

Gudykunst argues that when one gains control of anxiety and uncertainty, one is better placed to experience shared understanding, which he refers to as effectiveness.

### **2.6.2 Sources of Misunderstanding in Intercultural Communication**

Misunderstanding in intercultural communication is inevitable because people come from diverse cultural orientations and experiences. The reasons for misunderstanding in intercultural communication are discussed in more detail below.

#### ***Ignoring Differences in Meaning***

One factor that leads to intercultural misunderstanding is the process of sharing meaning (DeVito 1992:192). There is often a difference between perceived meaning and intended meaning (Gamble & Gamble 2001:136). Meaning does not exist in words or messages; rather, it is in the people who send and receive messages, according to DeVito (1992:192).

Often misunderstandings take place when people assume a word has a direct connection with its referent (Griffin 2000:492). Anything that comes between the sender's intended meaning and the receiver's actual understanding of the message is noise (Gamble & Gamble 2001:578). For example, the word "woman" may have one meaning to an American, but a completely different meaning to an Iranian. An American may associate the word with strength, independence, goal-getting and so forth, whereas an Iranian may associate it with a homemaker, housewife and so forth (Henslin 1999:38).

As meaning is in people and not in words, what people say is received and perceived according to the perceptive abilities of the receiver as well as the ways in which these abilities have been shaped by past experience, background, language and cultural attachments. Effective intercultural communication therefore requires that the communicators are as clear as possible about the meaning of whatever words are being used. Additionally, senders of messages can seek feedback to see if their message is understood as it was intended, and receivers can also seek clarification on what they do not understand.

Communicators can attach relatively similar meaning to the message that is sent and received. Powers and Lowry (1984:58) refer to such mutual understanding as “basic communication fidelity”. Communication fidelity refers to the extent to which the sender and the receiver have a similar perception of a message and attach a similar meaning to it (Gudykunst & Kim 1992:230).

In order to enhance basic communication fidelity, communicators from different cultures must understand and appreciate the fact that each culture has a unique set of rules, norms and practices that distinguish it from others (Ruben 1992:443). They must also understand that meaning in communication is context-based. A set of words or non-verbal messages used in a particular context may mean one thing in that context, but something different in another context.

Therefore, when each participant in intercultural communication is aware of the differences in the meaning associated with certain words and non-verbal cues, the communication should be effective.

### ***Stereotyping***

Misunderstanding in intercultural communication is also caused by stereotyping. Stereotyping is the creation and perpetuation of inappropriate unsubstantiated conclusions about other people (Gamble & Gamble 2002:581). Due to a conception gained either through own or other people’s experience, people tend to stereotype individuals of certain cultures, leading to failed communication.

For instance, in Zambia, the Bemba people of the Northern Province are regarded as thieves and robbers. Therefore, a Bemba-speaking person, whether of the Bemba tribe or not, will be considered a crook. In contrast, the Tonga people of the Southern Province of Zambia are regarded as mellow, honest village people who know nothing about city life. So in an urban place like Lusaka, Tonga-speaking people are easily taken advantage of.

In the United States, Mexicans are believed to be illegal immigrants who jump the border and take jobs from Americans. Since Mexicans are part of the larger group of Latin Americans or Hispanics, all Hispanics, whether from Mexico, Brazil, Honduras, Venezuela or elsewhere, are considered to be illegal Mexican immigrants.

Communicators must therefore be willing to put aside personal prejudices and stereotypes of others who are different from them so that they are able to communicate effectively.

Intercultural communicators have to be non-judgemental and must be willing to learn new things about new people and their culture. Gardner (1962:248) describes effective intercultural communicators as having “an unusual degree of integration, extroverted ... must possess a value system that regards others as valuable human beings”. Judging others based on one’s past experience of people of that kind is inappropriate.

Ruben (1976:341) furthermore points out that in intercultural encounters, a person has to display respect for and have a positive regard for individuals of other cultures, be able to respond in a non-evaluative and a non-judgemental manner, and be sensitive to the needs and rights of others in commencing and terminating interaction.

### ***Ethnocentrism***

Ethnocentrism is another factor that leads to misunderstanding in intercultural communication. Ethnocentrism describes the tendency to view one’s culture as superior to the culture of another person (Gudykunst 1998:106). Ethnocentrism is a learned belief. Rothwell (2000:74) suggests that the inclination of most people to undervalue other cultures is strong because people tend to be more comfortable with what they are familiar with, and to be distressed by what is strange.

Extreme ethnocentrism may lead to a rejection of knowledge of other cultures (Jandt 2007:76). Ultimately it impedes and blocks the free exchange of ideas and knowledge. Furthermore, ethnocentric individuals experience greater anxiety when interacting with people of other cultures (Gamble & Gamble 2001:37).

Practising cultural relativism, that is, viewing cultures as simply different and not deficient, can contribute to effective intercultural communication. Relativism implies accepting other cultures as equal in value to one’s own.

## **2.7 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS**

With increased opportunities for interaction with strangers due to globalisation and other factors, intercultural communication is inevitable in today’s world. However, people are mostly ineffective in these encounters, which ineffectiveness sets strangers even further apart.



Samovar and Porter (2000:5) suggest that many people do not work hard enough to reduce “the strangeness of strangers” simply because they are unwilling to bring strangers into their comfort zones. According to Gamble and Gamble (2002:39), most people set strangers apart as enemies and in this way effectively keep them out of their inner circle.

In order to be effective, however, one must conduct oneself in a manner that will reduce the strangeness of strangers, implying opening oneself to new experiences. The beginning point is to understand that one needs to be a competent communicator to succeed in intercultural communication.

### **2.7.1 Understanding Communication Competence**

Communication is not something that occurs automatically whenever an individual opens his or her mouth. It is the “intentional transmittal of a specific message in a particular context”, according to Scott and Bryson (1997:10). In order for a person to be competent in communication, one has to have competences in certain skills.

Littlejohn and Jabusch (1982:30) define communication competence as the capability and readiness of a person to participate responsibly in a communication exchange so as to maximise the outcomes of the shared meaning. Communication competence is also defined as “the ability to communicate in a personally effective and socially appropriate manner” (Trenholm & Jensen 1988:11).

Although definitions of communication competence differ, there is general agreement on certain points. These are discussed below.

#### ***Communication Competence is a Matter of Degree***

Rothwell (2000:14) states that competence in human communication varies by degree, ranging from highly dexterous to severely inept. Competence in communication is not an “either competent or incompetent” concept. Human beings have strong as well as weak points when it comes to communication. These strong and weak points are dictated by situations and circumstances in which the communication transaction is occurring.

According to Rothwell (2000:14), although an individual can be perceived as a highly proficient communicator, this kind of description could be misleading. It could be that the

individual is proficient as a communicator in one-on-one encounters, but not in public speaking.

### ***Communication Competence is We-Oriented***

As communication is a transactional process, one needs to look at how humans respond to others and not how they fare independently in a communicative situation. In intimate relationships, for example, the “me” orientation diminishes and the “we” orientation is sustained.

The “we” orientation as opposed to the “me” orientation is expounded by Gottman (1994:131) in his 20-year study on the success or failure of marriages. Gottman concludes that interdependence contributes to the success of most marriages, and that couples who view their marriages as a joint undertaking and communicate interdependently have a higher success ratio.

### ***Communication Competence is about Effectiveness***

The effectiveness of a person’s communication style is defined by how well he or she progresses toward the attainment of his or her goals, according to Rothwell (2000:15). Effectiveness is relational, though, and not individualistic.

### ***Communication Competence is about Appropriateness***

According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1989:7), appropriateness in communication is when a person avoids breaking social or interpersonal norms and rules. Shimanoff (1980:57) states that the context, which is the environment where communication takes place, is regulated by rules.

Rules involve prescriptions of obligated, preferred or prohibited behaviour in certain contexts. Rules determine which behaviour is expected and regarded as appropriate in a particular context. With rules, appropriate behaviour is expected; communication becomes inappropriate if rules are deliberately violated (Getter & Nowinski 1981:303).

For instance, in most cultures, a funeral speech will not be presented in the same manner as a wedding speech. A funeral speech is presented in a sombre, mourning mood, while a wedding speech is a celebratory speech. If a speaker at a funeral speaks in a celebratory tone,

he or she will not be understood and will be regarded as having broken social norms and rules.

Additionally, social norms in most cultures dictate that people respect the dead. Unless the deceased was a dangerous criminal who terrorised his or her community, mourning is to be expected and celebration would be frowned upon.

## **2.7 SUMMARY**

It has been argued in this chapter that in order for communication to be effective in intercultural encounters, the relationship between culture and communication must be understood. Furthermore, it has been argued that effective intercultural communication requires skills on the part of the communicators, such as steering away from stereotyping and ethnocentricity and practising cultural relativism.

An understanding of traits that distinguish cultures is very important. These traits include masculinity as opposed to femininity, low as opposed to high-power distance, low as opposed to high-context cultures, and collectivism as opposed to individualism.

Chapter Three will offer a relatively detailed discussion of non-verbal communication and how culture influences it.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CULTURE AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

You are walking home late at night. You notice a man is walking toward you. He suddenly quickens his pace, body leaning forward, hands out in fists moving rhythmically with his stride. His eyebrows are drawn in the middle. His eyes are wide. His lips are tight. He looks right at you (quoted in Matsumoto, Frank & Wang 2013:3).

Whatever one would think and feel when reading this story is based on an assessment based exclusively on the nonverbal behaviour of the man (Matsumoto et al 2013:8). There is no mention of a single word being spoken. Yet any onlooker would form a distinctive impression on the basis of how he or she interprets the man's nonverbal behaviour. This example serves to illustrate the impact of nonverbal communication in the real world. It also serves to highlight the focus of this chapter.

Culture and how it influences communication were discussed in the previous chapter. As already been mentioned, this chapter focuses on nonverbal communication examining its definition, key elements, functions, and how it is influenced by culture, as well as how nonverbal communication influences the effectiveness of intercultural communicators.

#### 3.2 NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION DEFINED

Something in the way she moves  
Attracts me like no other lover  
Something in the way she woos me  
Somewhere in her smile she knows  
That I don't need no other lover  
Something in her style that shows me

You're asking me will my love grow

You stick around now

It may show

(from the song “Something” of the Beatles as quoted in Knapp 1972:16–17).

Whenever one is thinking of communication, the term “language” comes to mind (Matsumoto et al 2013:4). Yet – as the above example shows – much of our understanding of human interaction and behaviour is co-determined by various forms of nonverbal communication.

In popular culture the term “body language” is used to refer to forms of communication that do not involve written or spoken language (Matsumoto et al 2013:4). Researchers have however defined nonverbal communication to encompass all forms of human communication outside the spoken and written word. Matsumoto et al consequently define nonverbal communication as the “... transfer and exchange of messages in any and all modalities that do not involve words” (Matsumoto et al 2013:4)

The definition of Poyatos (2002:xvii) also emphasises the encompassing nature of nonverbal communication:

... the emission of signs by all the nonlexical, artifactual and environmental sign systems contained in the realm of a culture, whether individually or in mutual co-structuration, and whether or not those emissions constitute behaviour or generate personal interaction.

Non-verbal communication thus goes beyond speech and writing (Baron & Byrne 2000:40). It encompasses, as already indicated, all kinds of human messages and responses that are articulated without the use of words (Moorhead & Griffin 1998:260).

Poyatos (2002:103) distinguishes what he calls “a triple structure” in human communication which includes language on the one hand, but also nonverbal communication in the form of paralanguage (eg prosody, pitch, volume and intonation) and kinesics (body motion such as facial expressions and gestures). It is however often not easy to dissect human interaction in order to distinguish between verbal and nonverbal forms (Knapp 1972:3). The various forms

of communication are often mutually blended and subtly intermingled in order to convey meaning.

The conclusion can be drawn that non-verbal communication can be perceived as a symbolic activity that communicates meaning. Gamble and Gamble (2002:145) state that in every dyadic communication interaction, verbal channels convey about 35 per cent of the social meaning of a message, while non-verbal channels carry about 65 per cent. Since non-verbal communication conveys the larger portion of meaning in communication, understanding meaning in a communication exchange can be improved by analysing the non-verbal signals.

Similar to other forms of communication, contextually determined rules also govern non-verbal communication. Culture is one of the most important factors playing a role in modifying and directing non-verbal communication. For instance, Anderson (1982:272) identifies the cultures of Saudi Arabia, France and Italy as those that encourage contact when two people are communicating, whereas the German, English and Scandinavian cultures value a certain social distance between individuals.

### **3.3 EVOLUTION OF THE STUDY OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

The study of non-verbal behaviour as a social science discipline was played down for many years, according to Segerstrale and Molnar (1997:5). Its advancement to its current level can be credited to a number of scholars in the social sciences.

Different scholars from different disciplines have attempted to study non-verbal behaviour. However, none created as much of an impact in the pre-twentieth century as Charles Darwin. Darwin, in his 1872 book *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* initiated the modern study of facial expressions (Knapp & Hall 1992:25).

Although isolated studies were done in the early half of the twentieth century in the areas of voice, physical appearance, body movements and facial expressions, none was given much attention until the 1950s. Several researchers carried out studies in non-verbal behaviour. Henslin (1999:98) gives the examples of anthropologists Birdwhistell and Hall, who applied the principles of linguistics to create labels that initiated the study of body movement.

Another researcher, Trager, studied and delineated components of paralanguage that led to the study of vocal cues. According to Trager (1958:10-11), psychiatrist Jurgen Ruesch and photographer Weldon Kees combined their expertise to conceive the term “non-verbal communication”.

Another researcher in non-verbal communication was Frank, who in his article “Tactile Communication” (Frank 1957:210) suggested a number of hypotheses about touching in human interaction, which led to the study of haptics as we know and understand it today.

In the 1950s, studies in non-verbal communication increased, but the 1960s saw a greater increase. Knapp and Hall (1992:26) state that researchers separated specific parts of the human body and rendered them subjects of extensive research.

However, the classic theoretical study of non-verbal behaviour of the 1960s was that of Ekman and Friesen (1967:711). It dealt with the origins, usage and coding of non-verbal behaviour and identified five major areas of non-verbal study, namely emblems, illustrations, affect display, regulators and adaptors.

According to Knapp and Hall (1992:27), the 1970s evidenced very little non-verbal communication research, except for work synthesising and digesting the research of the 1960s. Knapp and Hall further state that the 1980s were somewhat different in that, although researchers were still referring to the studies of the 1950s and 1960s, many started recognising the various ways non-verbal signals operate together in accomplishing common communicative goals (Knapp & Hall 1997:27).

### **3.4 ELEMENTS OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

This section discusses various elements of non-verbal communication.

#### **3.4.1 Body Language**

Non-verbal communication involves the use of body parts in conveying messages. In studying what is, as already mentioned, also called “body language”, attention has been given to facial expressions as created by movements of the eyebrows, the forehead, the eyes and the mouth (Gamble & Gamble 2002:148; Matsumoto & Hwang 2013a:75). However, body language also involves body posture as well as hand, head or other gestures that

communicate meaning. After all, mankind has been programmed to pay attention to any form of movement for hints of threat and danger (Johns & Saks 2001:318).

The face is one of the most important conveyers of messages expressing emotions and, according to Roman orator Cicero, a reflection of the human soul (Baron & Byrne 2000:40). It is furthermore the most complex nonverbal signalling system and the seat of the greatest amount of nonverbal information (Matsumoto & Hwang 2013c:15). The face is in particular important in revealing emotion. A frown may indicate pain, disapproval or disgust, while a smile may indicate approval, joy or sarcasm. It is therefore possible to learn much about another person's feelings and emotional state by simply looking at the face. The importance of the face in communication is reflected in commonly used phrases such as "face-to-face", to get in "people's faces", "face time", and so forth.

Eyes communicate numerous messages, too. Spanish women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century flirted with members of the opposite sex by combining eye language with the movement of a fan to express non-verbally what they could not say in public (Gamble & Gamble 2001:153). Eye language is also influenced by culture. For instance, in Western cultures, eye contact in dyadic communication is acceptable. In the African cultures, the Zambian culture in particular, eye contact especially in dyadic communication between an elder and a young person is avoided.

The mouth is another part of the face that communicates messages intentionally and unintentionally. Humans smile with a grin on the mouth. People who do not smile at others are regarded as unfriendly and uninterested in others (Gamble & Gamble 2001:154).

Body language also involves gesturing, that is, the use of the hands, the face or any other part of the body to convey meaning. It can include waving the arms, turning one's hands in one direction and the other, rolling the eyes, raising the eyebrows and smiling or frowning. Gestures are particularly interesting as they are perceived to represent forms of embodied cognition (Matsumoto & Hwang 2013a:75–76). That means that they express some kind of thought or thought processes. It is believed that gesturing coevolved with the processes associated with adaptations in our physical anatomy and our cognitive and language capabilities. They provide in faster and more efficient communication systems that go beyond words. Due to their close relationship with cognitive processes, gestures can serve to relieve



cognitive load. People are, for example, more correct when allowed to point when counting. They also tend to strengthen verbal messages (Johns & Saks 2001:324). For instance, when speakers wish to emphasise the enormous size of an object, they extend their hands wide apart.

Posturing is another form of body language and includes slouching, twisting, crouching, kneeling, cringing, slumping, towering, pelvic tilt and so forth (Blatner 2002: Gamble & Gamble 2002:156). Various messages are conveyed by these postures. For instance, elementary school pupils in Zambia are taught that sitting in a slouching position in class is an indicator of a dull, disinterested pupil. However, sitting up demonstrates sharpness, alertness and confidence.

Gestures, too, have different meanings in different cultures. Cultures differ, for example, both in the amount and type of gestures that can be used to convey meaning (Matsumoto & Hwang 2013a:77). Highly expressive cultures such as Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures encourage, for example, the use of large illustrative gestures. Italians are also expected to “speak with their hands”. The British are, in contrast, far more reserved and regard large gestures as impolite. In East Asian cultures large gestures are however not only regarded as impolite, but also as a sign of aggression. Cultural differences are also not restricted to the frequency and expansiveness of gestures, but can also be detected for other forms of nonverbal behaviour. In Western cultures, for example, people learn to point at things with their index finger. In Japan people point, however, with their middle finger – a gesture which is regarded as obscene in many other but in particular in Western cultures.

### **3.4.2 Personal Space**

Personal space is critical in human relationships. It refers to the distance with which people feel comfortable when approaching others or when being approached by others (Gamble & Gamble 2002:164). Latin Americans or Middle Easterners are comfortable with standing close to each other, whereas Western Europeans prefer to have some physical distance from others (Henslin 1999:106).

Different distances are also intuitively assigned between communicators in intimate relations, ordinary personal relationships, social relations and public relations. Generally, though,

people only allow others in their personal space when they trust, love and feel secure about the person they are interacting with.

Hall and Hall (1997:97) distinguish between four personal space and distance zones in North America, namely intimate distance (extending from one's body up to 18 inches), which is reserved for intimacy, lovemaking, hugging as friends and acquaintances; personal distance (extending from 18 inches to 4 feet), which is reserved for friends, acquaintances and ordinary everyday conversation; social distance (extending from 4 feet to 12 feet from the body), which is reserved for formal impersonal interaction, such as interviews; and public distance (extending beyond 12 feet), which is reserved for public speaking.

According to Henslin (1999:106), these spaces differ from culture to culture. For example, South Americans prefer standing much closer to each other than North Americans when having a conversation in public.

### **3.4.3 The Voice**

We all know the phrase: "It is not what you said, but how you said it" (Frank, Maroulis & Griffin 2013:53). This phrase is common in our parlance as we all understand the effect and importance of nonverbal cues that are associated with the spoken word.

Frank et al (2013a:53) distinguish three forms of information that are unleashed via the voice channel when we speak. The first subchannel – the verbal channel – consists of the words that we speak. The second subchannel is associated with speech style consisting of systems of pausing, speed of speaking and other speech irregularities which accompany our verbal language. The third subchannel relates to speech tone which is associated with the acoustic characteristics of speech such as pitch and loudness. Pitch implies the highness or lowness of the voice, while volume implies the degree of loudness (Gamble & Gamble 2002:161). For example, an annoyed person may speak in a high-pitched tone, while a disappointed individual may speak in a low tone; and a salesperson may speak fast when pressed for closing a deal.

Frank et al (2013a: 54) hold that the three subchannels of voice usually work together to convey the same meaning. It is however possible that communication via the nonverbal channels, also known as paralanguage, can convey a different meaning than the spoken word.

This usually happens when we are sarcastic. It is important to note that it is the nonverbal cues – and not the verbal language – that are changed when we are trying to be sarcastic. The nonverbal subchannels do however serve more purposes than merely to reveal sarcasm. They reveal important information about our demographic characteristics (age, gender, and even our ethnicity or native language as reflected in our accent) as well as our transient state such as emotions, attitudes and the degree of mental effort we are engaged in when we speak. Differences in the use of pitch may also be indicative of different personality traits (DeVito 1992:210). Simply from hearing the voice, one may say whether the speaker is shy or aggressive, male or female, a sober person or an evil menace. Therefore, paralanguage can inform one's perceptions about people. The nonverbal subchannels thus serve to reveal a lot more than the mere meaning of the words that we speak.

The conclusion can be drawn that paralanguage reveals a cavalcade of information which we usually process without much thinking (Frank et al 2013a: 60). When a stranger gives us a telephone call, we usually form a picture of the caller on the basis of his or her voice. Research has shown that these “pictures” are often surprisingly correct. Paralanguage is also helpful in persuasion and in creating interest in the communication process. Communication research indicates, for example, that rapid speech attracts listeners more than slow speech (MacLachlan 1979:113), although this probably excludes interpersonal interaction (DeVito 1992:211). People are furthermore likely to remember information better when the speaker varies his or her speech and amplitude (Frank et al 2013a:67). MacLachlan (1979:113) also concedes that if the receiver does not have the time to compose a response due to the rapid speech of the sender, resentment may arise. Paralinguistics furthermore play an important role in managing conversations (Frank et al 2013a:67). We usually do not need to say “over” like an astronaut when trying to end a conversation. We usually make use of subtle changes to our voice pitch, amplitude and speech style to indicate that we want to end or withdrawn from the conversation.

From the above it is clear that paralanguage can enhance or distort meaning and must be mastered in order to communicate effectively. Voice clues are especially important in applied settings where people interact primarily by means of speech (Frank et al 201a:69).

#### **3.4.4 Silence as Non-Verbal Language**

Silence is a form of non-verbal behaviour and can be as effective in conveying meaning as any other form of non-verbal communication. It accords a speaker time to recollect thoughts and think of the next idea to verbalise, or the best wording for a message in an intense situation (DeVito 1992:211).

Silence may be used as a weapon to hurt others, or to suggest that abuse will not be accepted, or that one dislikes what happened (Jandt 2007:113). Silence is also used to demonstrate indifference towards the other person or denial of his or her presence.

The functions of silence alluded to above may not apply to all cultures. For example, in the traditional Apache culture (Basso 1972:28) strangers visiting a home are not introduced to friends and neighbours until they have been watched for several days to determine if they are healthy. An Apache man and woman will also not talk to each other on their first date, and will talk very little after that until several months into the courtship. This is a demonstration, especially by the women, of modesty and respect (DeVito 1992:212). In certain cultures in Africa, women are not allowed to talk or even express excitement during wedding ceremonies. In fact, they are expected to lower their heads for the duration of the ceremony.

Therefore, silence, like facial expressions, gestures and so forth, can convey messages (DeVito 1992:212), such as subservience or obstinacy.

#### **3.4.5 Touch**

As the most primitive of all forms of non-verbal communication, touch conveys five categories of messages (Jones & Yarbrough 1985:19), namely positive emotions, playfulness, controlling behaviour, ritual fulfilment and task accomplishment.

Firstly, positive emotions are conveyed through touch by people in love, close friends and relatives. Touch is used to show support, appreciation, inclusion, sexual interest, affection and so forth (DeVito 1992:205).

Secondly, touch may be used to modify behaviour. People may touch others as a way to seek their compliance, or to communicate dominance over the other person (Henley 1977:100). For instance, in a superior-subordinate interaction, the boss initiates touch and not the other

way round. The superior may use touch to prompt a worker to do an assignment as quickly as possible.

Thirdly, touch may communicate playful feelings. For instance, people use touch to indicate that the message was actually a joke, which the communication is not to be taken seriously.

Fourthly, ritualistic touch occurs when greeting or saying goodbye. Whereas some people shake hands, others kiss, hug or embrace another person when greeting or departing (DeVito 1992:206).

Fifthly, touch is sometimes part of a task. For instance, a nurse bandaging an injured person may touch the shoulder or hand of the patient to convey encouragement, and a waitress in a restaurant may touch a patron lightly while serving him or her to show reassurance or appreciation.

Not all cultures practise touch in public places. The Korean culture, for example, deems touch as an intimate gesture. Therefore, if a storeowner touches a customer, it is regarded as disrespectful (Johns & Saks 2001:324). In contrast, cultures that do not mind public touching may regard avoidance of touch in public as a sign of coldness.

### **3.4.6 Time Management**

Time management is about the use and management of time (Gamble & Gamble 2002:170). Time has different meanings in different cultures and countries around the world. Differences in time management may explain why some people may appear to be in a hurry all the time, while others are relaxed and laid back. In the American culture, for example, people are pre-occupied with time and time management (Levine 1997:53).

According to Jandt (2007:108), the American Indian culture manages time differently from the Western cultures in that the former regards time as cyclic, with no past, present and future, whereas Western cultures regard time as linear, with a definite past, present and future.

The use or misuse of time says a lot about an individual. Punctuality, when going for a job interview, for instance, may send a message that the person is serious about the outcome of his or her job, whereas tardiness may imply a lack of interest, care and unreliability.

Status enhances a person's ability to control the time of others as well as his or her own time (Levine 1997:30). Levine further states that there is no greater symbol of control and domination than the ability to control other people's time.

### **3.5 FUNCTIONS OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

One of the major barriers to effective intercultural communication is the misinterpretation of non-verbal communication. Jandt (1998:103) points out that while people expect languages to differ, they are less likely to expect and recognise differences in non-verbal symbols.

Knowing the functions of non-verbal communication could help remove this barrier. Jandt (1998:103) distinguishes between the following functions:

#### **3.5.1 Replacing Verbal Messages**

Replacing verbal with non-verbal messages is a necessary function in situations where words cannot be used (Jandt 1998:100), such as when communicating with a hearing-impaired individual. Another example is a teacher who puts a finger on her lips to indicate to the class to be silent, or shrugging your shoulders to indicate a lack of interest and care (Gamble & Gamble 2002:147).

#### **3.5.2 Sending Uncomfortable Messages**

Some messages are regarded as too embarrassing, awkward or impossible to express verbally, but can be communicated comfortably in a non-verbal form. Jandt (1998:101) gives the example of an individual who is too embarrassed to tell the person to whom he or she feels physically attracted that he or she loves that person. This message may be relayed by eye contact, touch, proximity and so forth.

Non-verbal communication is also useful in delivering symbolic messages (Remland 2000:61) in face-to-face communication to signal one's identity and structure interpersonal or group relationships.

### **3.5.3 Formation of Impressions that Guide Communication**

Non-verbal communication helps create impressions. For instance, formal dressing for an interview may indicate a sincere desire to obtain the position applied for, while drudgery may demonstrate a lack of seriousness.

Burgoon, Buller and Woodall (1989:220) suggest that people tend to form impressions of others quickly and automatically, drawing conjectures about them even before they get to know them. These authors also hold that people often base their impressions of others on external characteristics and non-verbal behaviour. For instance, an individual dressed like a janitor may be assumed to be a janitor, even when he is not.

Lastly, the impressions and deductions arrived at are often inaccurate and unfair when you are unfamiliar with the person you are dealing with and with the situation prevailing at the time.

Impressions are informed by the following factors:

#### ***Limited Knowledge***

Burgoon, Buller and Woodall (1989:222) suggest that impressions are a result of people feeling uncertain about others and the situation. People judge others or create impressions about others due to a lack of knowledge.

#### ***Stereotyping***

A stereotype is an assumption of what people are like on the basis of past associations and experiences with them or with other people who possess similar characteristics (Henslin 1999:656). Often stereotyping is a result of false information, though at times it may be a result of conclusions drawn from personal experience. Especially in initial encounters, stereotypes or what people think, may have heard or even experienced about the other person's characteristics may shape the relationship. (See also Section 2.6.2.)

Some personality stereotypes are arrived at on the basis of outward appearance. For instance, people assume that rock stars are drug users. Therefore, to be seen in rock star clothing may lead to conclusions by others that one is a drug user. Physical attributes that may attract stereotyping include the colour of one's hair, height, weight and so forth.

Paralanguage may also be linked to stereotyping. For instance, a person who speaks in a timid and hesitant voice may be judged as being shy. A person who speaks in a loud and resonant manner may be considered as ambitious and confident.

### ***Outward Appearance***

Physical appearance influences people's impressions of others in most first-time encounters (Burgoon, Buller & Woodall 1989:222). For instance, interviewers begin evaluating a candidate for a job simply from what they see. In other words, non-verbal behaviour informs people's judgement of others even before anything is said between them.

This could even lead to losing a job opportunity or a court case or failing an oral examination. However, initial impressions may subside in due course with new information becoming available; with limited subsequent interaction the chances of a change of impression are slim.

In a nutshell, impression formation and management are an integral part of non-verbal communication as well as intercultural communication in that people judge others simply on the basis of their first (visual) encounter with another person. Such impressions may be way off the mark.

### **3.5.4 Assisting in Making Relationships Clear**

Jandt (1998:101) suggests that non-verbal communication can furthermore assist in making relationships clear because such messages reflect content and relationship. Content refers to the subject matter being shared, while relationship refers to the connection that exists between individuals in the communication process.

Although one may be uncomfortable with conveying certain information verbally, non-verbal communication eliminates the discomfort. For example, a boss may not remind his subordinate of his status through his choice of words, but will act in a manner that demonstrates his authority, like sitting back while the subordinate sits up straight or stands.



### **3.5.5 Reinforcing and Modifying Verbal Messages**

Non-verbal communication can be used to reinforce spoken words (Gamble & Gamble 2002:147). For example, when telling someone that a fence is one meter high, raising the hand to that level is an additional way of conveying the height.

Non-verbal communication can also modify spoken words. For instance, the word “no” has different connotations depending on how it is emphasised. When said in a loud tone, it may imply anger, but when said in a low, soft tone, it may imply refusal expressed in a polite way.

## **3.6 LINKING CULTURE AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Human communication is a symbolic activity. Non-verbal communication, which is a form of human communication, constitutes two-thirds of all dyadic communication (Knapp 1978:30). Human beings appreciate and understand each other, among other means through the ability to understand the non-verbal communication of another person, based on shared social, psychological and cultural faculties (Seegerstrale & Molnar 1997:5).

### **3.6.1 How Culture Influences Non-Verbal Communication**

Culture influences non-verbal communication significantly, and in the following ways: Firstly, people of a particular culture act in a particular culturally acquired way in interpersonal and social settings (Civikly 1991:103). Culture also determines people’s management of social distance or personal space, that is, the imaginary area or territory that is regarded as one’s comfort zone and which one would not want others to violate (referred to as proxemics).

In the so-called contact cultures people tend to get close to each other when they communicate face to face. According to Anderson (1982:272), the Saudi Arabian, French and Italian cultures are contact cultures, whereas the Scandinavian, German, English and American cultures are characterised by a reasonable distance between people in public interaction.

People’s use of personal space, gestures, touch, facial expressions and so forth is determined by their culture. Given their own frame of reference in this regard, misunderstandings are often inevitable in intercultural communication. For instance, in a first-time encounter between Japanese and Americans, Japanese may conclude that Americans are loud,

overfriendly and patronising because they express their emotions freely, whereas Americans may conclude that Japanese people are cold, unfriendly and boring because they restrain the expression of emotions (Gamble & Gamble 2001:175).

Touch demonstrates openness, comfort with and trust in the other person. Touch also demonstrates status, romantic interest and healthy living (Gamble & Gamble 2001:173). The amount of touch that is acceptable to individuals, how they want to be touched and to touch is also largely determined by culture.

Another element of non-verbal communication that is influenced greatly by culture is time and time management. The interpretation of time and its value differs around the world. Some cultures consider time to be cyclic, while others consider time as linear (see section 3.4.6).

In conclusion, even though the same non-verbal cues are used in different cultures, they sometimes carry different meanings. Gamble and Gamble (2002:175) give the example of nodding one's head, which in North America symbolises agreement, while in Japan this merely implies that an individual has received the message, not that he or she agrees with it.

### **3.6.2 Effective Non-Verbal Communication between Cultures**

Jandt (2007:103) suggests that when people do not share the same language, they often opt for gestures, facial expressions and certain body movements to communicate. When this happens, they may realise that gestures and bodily expressions are also not necessarily universal.

According to Burgoon (1986:498), non-verbal communication in a particular culture rests on consensually recognised meanings captured in certain non-verbal expressions, and the consistent usage of those expressions whose meaning is agreed upon forms a vocabulary of non-verbal codes. However, since interpretation is mitigated by context, certain non-verbal expressions are vague and confusing even within the same culture (Burgoon 1986:510). For instance, touch can mean romantic or sexual interest, but can also mean a genuine expression of concern for the other person.

Cultural differences in nonverbal behaviour make intercultural interaction and communication however more difficult than in the case of intracultural interaction (Matsumoto & Hwang 2013b:114). Whereas messages spoken in a particular language could be relatively clear to all participants if they all know the language, ambiguity and uncertainty can arise regarding the interpretation of nonverbal behaviour. Cultural differences in nonverbal behavioural norms could furthermore give rise to aversive reactions which can enhance the potential of misunderstanding, miscommunication and the formation of negative attributions which can, in turn, increase the potential for conflict. Most aversive reactions arise automatically and unconsciously as they are rooted in cultural filters that evaluate the appropriateness of behaviour including nonverbal behaviour.

Many of these interpretations and attributions could however be incorrect due to the fact that the cultural filters used to evaluate behaviour could be rooted in a different cultural system than those of other participants (Matsumoto & Hwang 2013b:115). Thus, in considering nonverbal behaviour in intercultural settings, it is important to recognise that intercultural differences exist, that such differences can give rise to negative reactions, and that these differences and concomitant reactions are an inevitable part of communication processes in intercultural encounters. By being aware of these potential pitfalls, one can ensure that intercultural communication does not become a negative experience, but rather serve to establish a platform for better understanding and relations between different cultures.

Therefore, effectiveness in non-verbal communication between cultures calls for communicators who are mindful of the possible misinterpretations.

### **3.7 SUMMARY**

Communication and culture are inseparable (Jandt 2007:103). In order to learn, communicate and share aspects of another culture, the communication codes and symbols must be learned and shared. If not, misunderstanding and misrepresentation will result, which is a barrier to effective intercultural communication. Approaching intercultural settings with mindfulness and knowledge of cultural differences in non-verbal behaviour should go a long way in creating understanding between people of different cultures.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEORIES ON COMMUNICATION AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

West and Turner (2000:37) define a theory as an abstract system of related concepts that explains a particular phenomenon. A theory is a premise that attempts to relate a field of study to various aspects of human, cultural and social systems (Baran 2002:374). Therefore, theories serve as a map in unfamiliar academic territory (Griffin 2000:4).

In order to understand the theoretical basis of this study, it is important to understand culture. As discussed in Section 2.2, culture is defined as the language, beliefs, values, norms, behaviours and material objects that are passed from one generation to the next (Henslin 1999:35).

Culture, according to Macionis (2001:61), involves the thinking and acting of people in a particular community. It is a way of life that includes systems of ideas and customs passed on from generation to generation (Spenser 1982:562). Culture defines the spectrum of complex ideas and material objects that people of a society have created and adopted for carrying out the tasks of collective life (Kammeyer, Ritzer & Yetman 1990:679).

Culture also describes the cooperative mode by which individuals in a particular society think, feel and behave (Scott & Bryson 1997:51). How language is used distinguishes one culture from all the others. In other words, each culture has specific symbols that are used in constructing and sharing meaning. Culture and the concept of exchange of symbols are best explained by the symbolic interaction theory.

#### **4.2 SYMBOLIC INTERACTION THEORY**

Symbolic interaction is a sociological perspective that views human beings as existing in a world of objects with meaning (Schaefer 2001:19). These objects may include tangible things, actions, relationships as well as symbols.

Following the conception of the symbolic interaction theory by George H Mead, Herbert Blumer (1969:2) discusses three core concepts to explain this theoretical perspective, namely

meaning, language and thought. These concepts are basic to a person's self-conception and socialisation into a larger community.

#### **4.2.1 Meaning and the Construction of Social Reality**

Human beings act towards other people and things based on the meanings that they attach to those people or things (Nelson 1998). In terms of symbolic interaction, meaning is paramount in explaining human behaviour. In other words, people act towards other people or things depending on the meaning they attach to those stimuli – Blumer's (1969) starting premise according to Griffin (2000:54).

In the 1994 epic movie *Nell*, a story of a young woman who grew up in the Appalachian Mountains in near seclusion exemplifies Blumer's argument. Raised by her mother, Nell learned a language that sounded gibberish, but this was the result of the paralysis of the left side of her mother's face following a stroke. The various characters that Nell encounters after her rescue view her differently based on this gibberish. The sheriff thinks she is crazy, his depressed wife thinks she is free-spirited, the chief psychiatrist at the local hospital regards her as an opportunity to make research history, the small-town doctor sees her as a human being who just needs to be understood, and a group of young men at the pool hall look at her as an opportunity for fulfilling their sexual fantasies. Therefore, who the real Nell is depends on the meaning other people assign to Nell and her behaviour. According to Griffin (2000:54), once you define something as real, it is very real to you. You will not alter the view until you attach a different meaning to that thing.

Another real-life illustration of symbolic interaction is provided by Dodge (1988:49). Dodge states that the mental image most Americans have of Mexicans is that they are lazy people, who take siestas in the afternoon after heavy lunches and spend endless hours soaking their near naked bodies in the sun on the beach with sombreros pulled down over their heads. Americans came to perceive Mexicans that way because the American mass media constantly reports on Mexico's poverty, ascribing it to laziness. In contrast, Japan has invested in Mexican manufacturing plants because the Japanese perceive Mexicans as hard-working individuals who provide affordable labour (Pearce 1987:47). This is the result of Japanese media portrayals of Mexicans as poor people who desire to work, but have no jobs.

Creating meaning is thus a society project, a collective hunch (Griffin 2000:55) based on shared symbols that pave the way for effective communication.

#### **4.2.2 Language and the Interpretation of Social Reality**

Jandt (2007:154) states that language is a set of symbols that are shared by a community and used to communicate meaning and experience. Unconsciously, when a child learns his or her native language, he or she learns his or her culture also. However, as the child grows and learns one or more other languages, he or she becomes aware of how each language informs the perception and reality description of the speaker. Human language, however, does not only consist of verbal and/or written signs, but also has a “silent” component, namely non-verbal language (see chapter 3 – Argyle, 1988). Thus spoken language, in particular, is supported by non-verbal signals. In order to make sense of human communication, it is consequently necessary to understand the symbolic significance of particular non-verbal signs within a particular community.

#### **4.2.3 Thought and the Interpretation of Social Reality**

Differences in cultural orientation lead to differences in the perception of social reality and thought patterns of people. Social reality is interpreted differently because of different thought patterns of different cultural orientations (Scott & Bryson 1997:51).

In a nutshell, the theory of symbolic interaction has a clear and direct link to this study as it explains how meaning is constructed and shared through the communication process (Ferrante 1992:32). It is therefore frequently used in the study of communication – also of non-verbal communication. Wang and Kwan (2010:677–688) studied for example the communication between autistic children and their parents and focussed, among others, on aspects of non-verbal communication such as eye contact and gesture. They found that the children’s ability to correctly interpret the symbolic meaning of particular non-verbal cues improved significantly during an intensive intervention of two weeks which resulted, in turn, to an improvement in their communication and social interaction overall. Matoesian (2012:365–391) studied the iconic interplay of multimodal practice and symbolic forms within a community of police trainees. He demonstrated how forms of non-verbal communication such as gesture, gaze and postural orientation were infused with symbolic meaning to reflect group identity, social solidarity as well as social opposition. These studies serve to illustrate that non-verbal communication can only be effective or is more effective

when the communicators share meaning which is also reflected in the coordinated management of meaning theory discussed in the next section.

### **4.3 COORDINATED MANAGEMENT OF MEANING THEORY**

Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen were the earliest proponents of the coordinated management of meaning theory (Pearce 2005:35). Conceived in the 1970s, this theory describes communication extensively, especially in intercultural settings. According to Philipsen (1995:13), the theory is important, because it focuses on the relationship between the individual and society.

The fundamental assumptions of the theory are that human beings live by means of communication, that they co-create social reality and that information transactions depend on personal and interpersonal meaning (West & Turner 1997:89). Pearce (1989:3) suggests that communication is basic to whatever it means to be human.

The coordinated management of meaning theory has three main premises (Cronen, Chen & Pearce 1988:66). Firstly, the theory seeks to understand humanity and life, and how these are related to the process of communication. Communication goes beyond the verbal and non-verbal messages that are shared; it is dependent on a particular context (DeVito 1992:259). In addition, the theory holds that aspects of the human experience have different meanings and are viewed differently in different cultures. These differences have led to research on intercultural communication.

Secondly, the coordinated management of meaning theory seeks to “render cultures comparable while acknowledging their incommensurability” (Cronen, Chen & Pearce 1988:67). Although intercultural comparisons are necessary in highlighting the fact that people all over the world are human, such comparisons also help to define the distinct differences in lifestyles, practices, beliefs and values among the cultures of the world. In studying another culture, one learns more of one’s own peculiarities and eccentricities.

Thirdly, the coordinated management of meaning theory highlights not only the differences between cultural practices, but also critiques the state of affairs so as to find means of enhancing human life (Cronen et al 1988:67).

In the study of meaning in intercultural communication, it is vital to accept that personal and/or group experiences influence meaning and that meaning must be shared if communication is to be effective.

#### **4.3.1 Experience affects Meaning**

In interpersonal communication, meaning is assigned on the basis of one's experience (Gamble & Gamble 2002:135). Since no two or more people have the same set of experiences, they will also not interpret social reality in the same way. Furthermore, since no two or more cultures possess the same values, their approach to representatives of other cultures in intercultural communication will differ. Language – both verbal and non-verbal – captures these experiences and values and, in turn, moulds thought and perception (Rothwell 2000:96).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis supports the above assertion: The labels people use shape the way they think, view the world and behave (Gamble & Gamble 2002:119). According to this hypothesis, people from different cultures perceive stimuli differently and communicate differently, as a result of differences in language or the use of certain labels. In other words, language and perception are intertwined (Kay & Kempton 1984:65; Bucher 1992:222).

As already mentioned in chapter two, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is closely linked to the concept “linguistic relativity”. Linguistic relativity refers to the belief that people of different languages perceive the world differently (Wood & Wood 1999:248). In other words, the language a person speaks determines in a significant way the nature of that person's thoughts. Linguistic relativity suggests that people's worldview is constructed by the symbols they use in their language.

Lewis (1996:16) gives the example of the Zulu language that has 39 words for the colour green, whereas English has only one word for this colour. The various Zulu words for green can be traced to the long distances the people used to walk years ago across the savannah, guided by descriptions of different tree leaves, shrubs and grass along the way.

In order to be effective, communicators in intercultural encounters must not assume that the symbols they use are used in the same manner and with the same meaning as other cultures



do and, accordingly, that individuals from different cultures have the same worldview and perception of stimuli.

#### **4.3.2 Meaning should be shared**

As discussed in Section 4.2.1, creating meaning is a society project in which symbols are shared. Without this sharing, communication cannot be effective. However, effectiveness in intercultural communication requires time, as a message may not be understood immediately as intended, prompting the receiver to ask the initiator of a message to explain the meaning of an utterance (Gamble & Gamble 2002:136). The initiator could also ask the receiver to give his or her views, thoughts and conclusions about the communication that just occurred so as to determine if they are at the same level of perception of the message. Sharing meaning is central in effective intercultural communication.

#### **4.3.3 Language and the Process of Sharing Meaning**

Schaefer (2001:69) defines language as a conceptual scheme of word meanings and symbols (verbal and non-verbal) that explains all facets of a culture, and D'Achille (2000) states that understanding is the result of the communication of symbols. According to Nelson (1998), language allows humans to negotiate meaning through symbols. Herbert Blumer suggests that meaning is not inherent in objects (Griffin 2000:55).

Rothwell (2000:87) identifies three key characteristics of symbols: arbitrariness, representativeness and ambiguity.

Arbitrariness suggests that the symbols (words) used in language are not naturally connected to their referents. They merely allude to an object, a subject or a person (Scott & Bryson 1997:46). Meaning is therefore co-determined by the users' experiences associated with the words. For instance, a signpost on the side of the road indicating the number of miles to the next town does not represent the town itself.

Representativeness is the use of words or non-verbal cues, known as symbols, to represent objects, subjects and people (Rothwell 2000:87). For instance, a map of Africa is not Africa itself, but a representation of it.

Ambiguity implies that words can have multiple meanings. Rothwell (2000:89) cites the example of a headline reading “Prostitutes appeal to Pope”, which could either mean that prostitutes made an appeal to the Pope for the acknowledgement of their rights or that the Pope was turned on sexually by prostitutes.

Another example is the statement “Kids make nutritious snacks”, which could imply that kids bake nutritious snacks or that, if eaten, kids are nutritious snacks. This ambiguity makes for confusion and misunderstanding unless the communicators ask for or give additional information.

#### **4.3.4 Thought**

Language is a system of symbols strung together in an infinite number of ways for the purpose of communicating abstract thought (Henslin 1999:40). Thought processes modify the interpretation of symbols (Griffin 2000:56). West and Turner (2000:81) refer to the thinking process in human interaction as an inner conversation. They cite the example of Roger Thomas, an engineering graduate, who comes to terms with the significant differences in lifestyle between rural Mid-Western USA where he grew up and the hustle and bustle of city life in Houston, Texas, through introspection.

However, inner conversations are motivated by social stimulation and interaction with other people. People engage in what George Herbert Mead referred to as “role taking” (West & Turner 2000:81), that is, imagining oneself in another person’s situation (Griffin 2000:56). This calls for bringing culture into the picture.

Culture plays a significant role in rendering communication effective or ineffective, because language is not a “given”; it is learned through socialisation in a particular context. How people collectively use language distinguishes their culture from that of others (Scott & Bryson 1997:51). Apart from learned meaning, language symbols are also imbued with value (Hall 1984:50). Therefore, in sharing meaning one shares a language as well as a culture (Scott & Bryson 1997:51).

However, as already mentioned, the coordinated management of meaning does not only apply to spoken language, but also to the silent language of non-verbal signs. The study of Matoesian (2012:315–391) as discussed in section 4.3 illustrates, for example, how distinct

meanings became associated with particular forms of non-verbal communication within a particular context and community, namely police trainees at a training college. These shared meanings also become associated with a particular police culture. The examples discussed in chapter 3 furthermore illustrate how a particular non-verbal signal could have different meanings for different groups and/or cultures. The conclusion can be drawn that the symbolic meaning of particular non-verbal signals is determined by a particular community, group and/or culture within a certain context.

#### **4.4 ANXIETY/UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT THEORY**

The anxiety/uncertainty management theory describes what happens in first-time encounters between strangers. It also stresses the importance of managing uncertainty and anxiety in these encounters (Duronto, Nishida & Nakayama 2005:550).

##### **4.4.1 Uncertainty**

Gudykunst labelled uncertainty as a cognitive cause for communication misinterpretation (Griffin 2000:396). Diminished ability to predict alternative outcomes in a communication encounter between strangers heightens uncertainty. A number of conditions increase the motivation to condense uncertainty about new contacts (Berger 1979:122).

Firstly, the possibility that interaction will re-occur in future comforts the participants because they suppose that the second encounter may be better than the first. Secondly, the interaction implies a benefit for at least one of the participants, which benefit prompts the person concerned to do everything possible to savour the encounter. Thirdly, the realisation that the other person or persons in the communication exchange act weird might comfort the other party to take the communication exchange at ease.

According to Berger (1988:244), it is natural to be uncertain about one's ability to predict the outcome of an initial encounter because interpersonal interactions always commence with uncertainty. This uncertainty is enhanced by the inability to understand the symbolic meaning of verbal and/or non-verbal signals. Uncertainty is however reduced by knowledge, which brings understanding.

Berger expounds eight axioms that explain uncertainty in initial interaction between strangers (Berger & Calabrese 1975:99-112).

1. An increase in verbal communication at the outset of an interaction between strangers reduces uncertainty, and reduced uncertainty in turn increases verbal communication. When people interact for the first time, hardly any shared frame of reference exists, which renders the outcome of the communication uncertain. As the participants share more and more knowledge, they relax, are less uncertain and therefore talk more.
2. In a preliminary interaction, uncertainty decreases as non-verbal communication increases. Reduced uncertainty in turn leads to an increase in non-verbal communication. As the discomfort wears off, indications of warmth, prolonged eye contact and a pleasant tone, longer smiles and head nods occur more often (Griffin 2000:138).
3. The desire to seek information is heightened by high levels of uncertainty, which desire dissipates as uncertainty wears off (West & Turner 2000:138). People ask questions and hunt for hints to get clarity on the other party in initial interaction, and the more they get to know, the more relaxed they become and the less they seek information.
4. High levels of uncertainty in a relationship go hand in hand with reduced levels of intimacy of communication content. As the communicators become more certain about the communication, the intimacy levels increase. This means that intimacy is a function of immediate and forecast outcomes. Intimacy is directly affected by self-disclosure.
5. High levels of uncertainty produce low rates of reciprocity, and low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of reciprocity. People also release information about themselves at the same rate at which their counterparts share their intimate information. This explains why long monologues are uncommon in first-time encounters (Griffin 2000:139).
6. Similarities reduce uncertainty, while dissimilarities heighten uncertainty. The more participants discover they have things in common, the more they relax and the less they are uncertain.
7. An increase in uncertainty raises the level of dislike, whereas a decrease in uncertainty raises the level of liking. Thus, when one gets to know another person, one's attitude towards that person becomes more favourable.
8. Shared communication networks reduce uncertainty, and lack of them increases uncertainty. This axiom extends beyond dyadic communication. People who

communicate often with their families, relatives, friends and friends of their romantic partners tend to have higher chances of sustaining that contact than people who do not engage in such communication (Griffin 2000:140). Networking is critical to the survival of relationships.

Although “the probability of perfect communication is zero” (Berger 1997:222), there are strategies that help improve communication and consolidate relationships.

1. Seeking information. It is imperative to find out how the other person or persons might react to one’s messages. Berger suggests three approaches to seeking information (1997:222): passive, active and interactive. The passive approach entails observation of others from a distance; the active approach entails asking a third party for information; and the interactive approach entails face-to-face, specific questions. According to West and Turner (2000:139), the apparent meddling embedded in the third approach can be avoided by self-disclosure.
2. Hedging. According to Griffin (2000:143), hedging is a means to “save face” if a participant in an intercultural encounter blunders. This can be achieved through humour. When the other person takes offence at some issue, one can easily state that it was just meant as a joke. Being ambiguous also helps to avoid embarrassment when a specific request is refused.
3. Hierarchy hypothesis. According to Berger (1997:39), when people are blocked from achieving their communication goals, they tend to alter the lower-level elements of their messages. For instance, when the other person does not seem to be getting the point of a particular message, the communicator will repeat the message at a much slower pace and in a louder tone rather than repeating the original message in exactly the same way (Berger 1997:17).

Gudykunst (1998:123) states that the uncertainty reduction theory is systematically extended to explain cross-cultural variations in communication, as well as intercultural and intergroup communication. The underlying assumption of this theory is that people try to minimise doubt in initial encounters with strangers. People create forecasts about other people’s attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and actions. In addition, people create retroactive elucidations about other people.

Stress is experienced when an individual interacts with a stranger, since the stranger does not know the home culture. Gudykunst (1988:126) suggests several assumptions about uncertainty reduction.

1. One of the participants in an intercultural interaction is an outsider to the culture.
2. A stranger's initial encounter in a new culture is often accompanied by crises situations, such as feeling insecure, not knowing how to behave and keeping in mind that his or her behaviour may have negative consequences (Stephan & Stephan 1985:159).
3. The communicator of the home culture does not think of the consequences of his or her behaviour (Triandis 1980:204).

#### **4.4.2 Anxiety**

Anxiety is the feeling of uneasiness, tension, worry and apprehensiveness about what is expected to happen (Gudykunst 1991:13). It is also a term allotted to the feelings of fear and uncertainty, accompanied by physical symptoms such as perspiration, unsteadiness and a turning stomach (Scott & Bryson, 1997:386). Anxiety and uncertainty are dependent dimensions of intercultural communication. Therefore, even though strangers can reduce uncertainty about such an encounter, they may have high anxiety and vice versa.

Turner (1988:61) suggests that anxiety rests on the expectation that an interaction may yield disapproval and negative consequences. Turner further asserts that with high anxiety, people's drive to communicate with others plummets, even to the extent of removing themselves from the situation. Since communication with strangers increases anxiety (Duronto et al 2005:551), people may even avoid communication from the outset.

The importance of nonverbal communication in anxiety reduction has been illustrated in various empirical studies. Westerman and Tamborini (in Westerman 2007) investigated, for example, the relationship between the extent of nonverbal information available in particular communication modes and questions and disclosures as indicators of interactive anxiety reduction strategies. They found that modes of communication where more nonverbal cues are available were not only related to reduced uncertainty, but also to a higher degree of

liking of other communicators. Gudykunst and Nishida (1984) found, on the other hand, that cultural similarities were positively associated with various measures reflecting reduced anxiety such as more self-disclosure and the display of expressions of nonverbal affiliative expressiveness.

The opposite was true when the participants of different cultures interacted. Nonverbal signals are consequently not only conducive to the reduction of anxiety, but the display of more affiliative nonverbal communication is, on the other hand, also indicative of reduced anxiety. Cultural similarity and/or dissimilarity can, however, enhance or limit the role of nonverbal communication in reducing anxiety and/or expressing affiliation.

#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter discussed effectiveness in communication as the process of minimising misunderstanding by overcoming uncertainty and anxiety through mindfulness. Therefore, in intercultural communication in particular, knowledge, motivation and skill are critical if the communicators seek a positive outcome.

In the following chapter, Chapter Five is discussed in detail the research design used in order to complete this study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter covers the research design and method, the participants, and procedures for data collection and analysis. The procedures chosen for this study are also substantiated.

##### **5.1.1 Research Questions**

As mentioned in chapter 1, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do the cultures of black Zambians and white Westerners compare and contrast with regard to non-verbal behaviour?
2. What other similarities and differences exist between the cultures of black Zambians and white Westerners?
3. What are the implications of these similarities and differences for intercultural communication, and how can communication between the two groups be improved?

#### **5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

In order to achieve the aim of the study (see Section 1.2) and answer the research questions (see Section 1.3), a qualitative design was chosen. A qualitative research design implies research that obtains data in the form of words, phrases or images derived from documents, observations or transcripts of interviews (Alreck & Settle 2004:446; Neuman 2006:157).

Qualitative researchers furthermore search for meaning through becoming immersed in the data. Instead of variables that are measured quantitatively, concepts take the form of themes, motifs, generalisations or taxonomies. Data analysis generally involves the extraction of themes and generalisations from the evidence gathered and the organisation of the data in order to present a coherent, consistent picture of the most important findings. The analysis and interpretation of qualitative data are dependent on subjective judgement.

The aim of the study was to gain an understanding on how and why there were similarities and differences between the cultures of black Zambians and Westerners. In order to carry out



this investigation, this study utilised a qualitative design because the data collected was of a subjective nature, which had to be analysed qualitatively. The data was subjective in the sense that respondents spoke of their personal views and experiences from interacting with individuals of the other culture.

### **5.3 RESEARCH METHOD**

Focus group discussions were adopted in this study to allow for the views and interpretations of the participants to be heard. Collier and Bornman (1999:140) suggest that focus group discussions accord participants the opportunity to elaborate in relative detail their points of view. Pitout (2009:498) states that a focus group discussion allows the researcher to explore the intersubjective experiences of a group of people or a community. A focus group usually consists of a group of people or participants – typically about six to twelve people – who are selected on the basis that they have something in common which relates to the topic of a study.

The roots of the use of focus groups in scientific research can be traced to Sociology. According to Millward (1995:275), focus groups as a source of data were used in the investigation into the effectiveness of war-time propaganda and the social effects of the media. Market researchers and consultants have however adopted the use of focus groups to study the preferences, opinions and behaviour of consumers, and thus enhancing the methodological evolution of focus groups as a research method. Because much of the data on how to conduct focus group discussions emanates from the marketing domain - other than from the scientific realm - focus groups have been dubbed relatively inexpensive and an easy way of gathering data on client needs.

However, focus groups are increasingly being used in social science research, as the use of this data gathering tool can not only assist researchers to find answers to research questions and management problems, but can also assist in generating new questions and may stimulate researchers to perceive an issue or topic from different angles or perspectives (Millward 1995:276). Focus groups are also often used for the preliminary exploration of a topic or issue in the application of other methodologies. For example, focus groups are often employed to assist survey researchers in the development of a questionnaire and to help enhance the content validity of the questionnaire. Focus groups are, in fact, one of the most popular research methodologies used in the triangulation of methodologies.

In order to guarantee the relative quality of the data obtained from focus group discussions, the researcher has to ensure that the techniques of using this method are fully adhered to. That means that the responsible and scientific researcher must give painstaking consideration to the following aspects; the interview schedule, sampling and recruitment of participants, stratification of groups, sample size, group size, location and setting, length of discussion, methodology and procedure, moderator style and skills, recording of the data, data analysis, and ethical issues.

According to Neuman (2000:510), a focus group is a type of group interview in which the interviewer poses questions or presents topics or issues to a group of individuals who respond in an open and receptive discussion among the group members. Millward (1995:275) places an emphasis on the fact that a focus group is - as the term suggests - indeed “focussed” on a particular issue or topic.

Focus groups are thus well-managed, well-staged and well-designed meetings organised to discuss a particular topic or issue (Millward 1995:278). Thus the focus group discussion is not an open-ended type of interview. Rather, the researcher provides an interview guide to direct the discussion. Such a guide sets the parameters of the discussion. Sometimes researchers also make use of a pre-group questionnaire to obtain preliminary information on the demographic details of the participants and their opinion on some aspects of the issue at hand. The participants are carefully selected on the basis of their ability to contribute knowledge or opinions with regard to the topic at hand. The process is furthermore well-designed in order to enhance both the eminence and the amount of data gathered.

A focus group discussion is usually led by a moderator who has the task to foster interaction between the participants and sees to it that the discussion remains focused on the topic of the study. Fife (2005:10) suggests that the facilitator “must be gregarious, with low levels of communication apprehension”. He or she must be able to lead the discussion positively and with purpose.

Millward (1995:276) suggests that, when applied correctly, focus groups can provide rich insight into the topic or issues under discussion. One of the most important advantages of using focus groups above individual interviews is the fact that the data generated are not only determined by the individual contributions of each participant, but also by the group

dynamics that evolve during the discussion. Focus groups are thus particularly useful when conducting exploratory research on a topic, which little is known.

Millward (1995:276) furthermore points out that the proceedings of a focus group discussion should be understood on two levels. The first level is intrapersonal in nature and refers to the feelings, attitudes, opinions, values and experiences of the individual participants. The second level pertains to the communication and interaction between the participants. Thus focus groups can provide rich insight into how reality is defined within a group context and the dynamic effect of group interaction on the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, feelings and experiences as expressed by the participants. A focus group can consequently be regarded as a communication event that provides an opportunity for studying the interplay between the personal and the social aspects.

The main focus of the current study was non-verbal communication. Focus groups are currently widely recognised as a method for studying non-verbal communication as is highlighted in the many studies reported in journal articles in which this method has been employed to study communication phenomena related to non-verbal communication. Taylor, Hester and Wilson (2011) used focus groups, for example, as part of a mixed methods study to investigate the differences between face-to-face conversations and those carried out by means of a video link in supporting health care students. Eye contact – one of the key issues in non-verbal communication – was identified as one of the main problems of communication via a video link.

Ziner, Kookan, Russel, Haase and Lu (2007) used focus groups to study the non-verbal communication experiences of African American breast cancer survivors. Williams, Harricharan and Sa (2013) also used focus groups to study the problems that Caribbean students experienced at a medical school specifically regarding non-verbal communication. Räsmark, Richt and Rudebeck (2014) furthermore used focus groups to study non-verbal communication – touch in particular – in the interaction between staff and children within the context of a rehabilitation centre.

The conclusion can be drawn that the focus group was indeed an appropriate method to use in the current study where similarities and differences in non-verbal communication between Zambians and Westerners were investigated. The focus groups provided in the first place a

social and interactive setting for studying non-verbal communication which is in essence a medium for social interaction. Also culture is essentially vested within a group. Focus groups were furthermore appropriate as the investigation was in essence an exploratory study. Little information is available in the literature with regard to intercultural encounters and the differences and/or similarities between the cultures of Zambian people and Westerners. The focus groups thus provided the researcher the opportunity to gain insight into the participants' experiences of and opinions regarding their own culture as well as the culture of the other within a group setting.

## **5.4 PARTICIPANTS**

### **5.4.1 Sample**

A total of 12 participants were selected. Six of them were black Zambians living in Monze, a small town 200 kilometres south of Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. Since no eligible whites lived in Monze, six white Western migrants living in Lusaka were selected to make up the rest of the discussion group. They were recruited through mutual acquaintances and had to be transported to Monze.

Although the researcher intended to have an equal number of men and women in the group, no white men were available for inclusion in the group. So the white participants consisted of women only. As for the Zambian participants, only one woman was willing to participate, and she was joined by five men. The demographic details of the participants are given below.

**Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Education</b>
1	Female	37	White (American)	Master's degree
2	Female	26	White (Canadian)	Bachelor's degree
3	Female	19	White (Danish)	High school
4	Female	19	White (Danish)	High school
5	Female	19	White (Danish)	High school
6	Female	22	White (American)	Bachelor's degree
7	Male	36	Zambian	Diploma
8	Male	37	Zambian	Certificate
9	Female	26	Zambian	Diploma
10	Male	27	Zambian	Diploma
11	Male	38	Zambian	Diploma
12	Male	42	Zambian	Master's degree

The sum of the ages of the participants was 348, with the mean age being 29, and the mode being 19. All the participants had at least a high school certificate, which was required from the outset so as to ensure understanding of particular conceptual metaphors to be used during the discussion.

#### **5.4.2 Sampling Design**

Convenience sampling was used to select the participants. This involved sampling participants who were readily available (Cooper & Schindler 2008:701) or most conveniently available (Zikmund 1994:368). Hence the sample was probably biased and the findings could not be generalised to the larger population.

#### **5.5 PROCEDURE**

The services of a university lecturer were used to act as moderator. At the age of 44, he had lectured for close to 10 years at university level in Zambia. He demonstrated knowledge of social processes although his field of specialisation was in the Agricultural Sciences. On that basis, he was requested by this researcher to assist lead the discussions. He stimulated discussion and ensured the discussion remained focussed and on topic.

The focus group discussions were held in the staff lounge of the Health Help International (HHI), a local Non-Government Organisation (NGO) in Monze. The discussions were held on the afternoon of 10 June 2008.

An acquaintance of the researcher arranged for the convenient selection of the white Western participants. They were given the date for the discussion and informed about the transport logistics. On the day of the discussion, a vehicle was allocated to pick up the white participant from Lusaka and bring them back to Lusaka after the discussions.

The black participants were also conveniently sampled, although not from Lusaka, but from within the Monze community. Even though it has been stated in the earlier section that Monze is a small town, it has a relatively large population, which however is predominantly rural. This placed a challenge on the researcher as it was rather relatively difficult to obtain records from the local authority in order to randomly select participants as most rural people may not appear in the registers at the municipality offices. The rural people instead appear in the records of their local village headmen. Besides, the records at the municipal offices are not accurate often as they are not updated regularly.

Therefore, the black Zambian respondents were selected conveniently as they were known to the researcher. Furthermore, they had their own means of transport to get to the meeting venue, a virtue that greatly assisted as the researcher had already been strained financially transporting the white respondents all the way from Lusaka and back, a distance of close to 600 kilometres. Additionally, the sampled black Zambian respondents were of a certain level of education, at least high school and above, who definitely had the ability to articulate issues in one way or the other, particularly as far as discussing their experiences in interacting white Western migrants is concerned.

The white respondents were not initially known to the researcher. They were conveniently sampled through an acquaintance to the researcher, who had worked with these people in various community projects around Zambia. These respondents were relatively young people, as revealed in table 2, in the age column, who were in Zambia from various Western countries working in a variety of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as volunteers.

The white respondents were conveniently sampled due to the challenges of locating white Western respondents in the little town of Monze. There were no white people to be sampled from Monze at the time of conducting this study. Therefore, through an acquaintance to the researcher, six white Western respondents were identified in Lusaka.

The participants were divided into two discussion groups of six people each according to their culture. A third discussion group consisted of all 12 participants. In doing so, the researchers could investigate both intracultural processes in the separate groups for Zambians and Westerners, as well as intercultural processes in the mixed group. Before commencing the discussions, but with the video camera already turned on, each participant was asked to provide his or her demographic data. These are shown in Table 2. As the whites were to return to Lusaka on the same day and were unavailable for another discussion on a later date, all three discussions were held that afternoon.

The participants of the two cultural groups were required to express their experiences to and interact with members of the other culture freely. In addition, they could ask questions to seek clarification from the other participants as well as clarify their own thoughts.

## **5.6 DATA RECORDING**

The discussions were held in a room with an informal appearance so that the participants could interact in a natural manner. A video recorder was used to record the discussions. Using a video camera was important, because it could deepen insight into the non-verbal behaviour of the participants (Collier & Bornman 1999:140), which would not be possible if the discussion had been audio-recorded only (Schensul et al 1999:7). However, since funds to hire professional video camera people were limited, an armature home video was opted for, which yielded a substandard recording.

## **5.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As has been discussed in the earlier sections, this study involved human subjects in the data collection process, namely the participants in the three focus group discussions. Therefore, ethical considerations to this research were of paramount importance both for moral reasons and in order to prevent litigation from the participants due to the data collection process.

In the first instance all the participants participated voluntarily in the focus group discussions. They were under no obligation to participate (Neuman 2006:135-136). They were furthermore informed that they were free to withdraw from the group discussions whenever they felt like doing it. The topics discussed were not really sensitive, but care was taken not to cause psychological discomfort to any of the participants during the discussions.

Alreck and Settle (2004:9) furthermore suggest that the researcher has an ethical obligation towards the respondent by ensuring that the respondent's privacy is guaranteed as well as maintaining their anonymity as agreed at the beginning. Whatever promise the researcher makes must be kept. However, in the event that the respondent's identity may be revealed or even partially revealed, the researcher must seek prior permission from the respondent, who may be at liberty to either accept or decline participation. In the case of the current study, the privacy of the respondents are protected by providing only limited demographic information of each participant. No names or any other personal information is furthermore mentioned in the reporting of the data.

The focus group discussions were however, as mentioned in section 5.7, video recorded. The video recording enabled the researcher to obtain detailed audio-visual data that assisted the researcher to not only be informed about the interaction experiences of the respondents from the two cultures under study, but also the non-verbal behaviour of these respondents during the discussions. Because of the visual element, the identities of the participants are partially revealed in the sense that their faces were captured on video even though their names were not recorded.

Therefore, this researcher, before commencing the focus group discussions, sought the permission of the participants, firstly, for their participation in the discussions, and secondly, for their permission for the discussions to be video recorded. The process of seeking permission from the respondents did not involve any coercing of any kind, and was free from any kind of inducements to the participants by the researcher.

The participants were also assured of partial anonymity in the sense that even though their faces would appear in the video, their names, residential addresses, their work details, marital status and all such information would not be revealed. The video recordings were furthermore



only accessed by the current researcher, his research assistant, the supervisor and co-supervisor as well as the examiners of this dissertation.

## **5.8 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data that were transcribed from the video recordings of the focus group discussions. Thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behaviour which is organised into categories (Cooper & Schindler 2008:421; Neuman 2006:460).

In this study, three major concerns were central to enhancing the probability of arriving at relatively accurate conclusions.

1. According to Starosta (1984:185), a researcher is supposed to create units of time and space, because messages are expressed in time and space. In transcending the physical metaphors of time and space, the researcher had to identify conceptual metaphors such as demonstration of respect, public display of affection and so on and so forth.
2. Because the researcher had to identify, develop and describe clearly the symbols or themes to be highlighted (Starosta 1984:186), he had to ask himself what was relevant and what was not.
3. The coding process should be objective, so all personal and cultural biases in determining the appropriate symbols to be utilised must be avoided. In this study, one of the participants together with the local co-supervisor assisted the researcher in the coding process. As the research was conducted on a limited budget, the researcher could not afford coding services by an external party. The use of local human resources to conduct the coding required a great effort on the part of the researcher, though.

This study followed various steps in conducting the thematic analysis (Neuman 2006:460-464). Data were initially collected using a video camera; patterns of shared experiences were deduced from the data in the video transcripts. A process of open coding was then followed in which the researcher and his assistants scanned the bulk of data in search for identifiable themes imbedded in the data. According to Taylor and Bogdan

(1984:131), themes are derived from patterns, such as conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs. Themes bring together components or fragments of ideas or experiences that would be meaningless if viewed alone. The choice of themes must be substantiated, though. The theoretical overview, research question and sub-questions served as guidelines in the search for generalizable themes. Following this first scanning procedure, meaningful codes and/or labels were assigned to the themes that emerged.

A second step involving axial coding followed. In this step it was attempted to find connections between the themes that were identified during the process of open coding and to cluster themes together. In this step it was furthermore attempted to link the themes - as well as the theme clusters - to theory on non-verbal communication. Themes dealing with various forms of non-verbal behaviour were, for example, clustered together and linked to relevant theory.

A third step involved selective coding. All the identified themes and clusters were scanned to look for examples that best illustrate particular themes. These examples were used in the discussion of the data in chapter 6. Themes that emerged for the two cultural groups - black Zambians and white Westerners - were furthermore compared and contrasted where applicable. Again, comparisons between the two groups were linked to relevant theory.

It is important to emphasize that the themes which emerged from the coding processes were derived from the data transcribed from the video transcripts, that is, from the statements and sentiments voiced by the participants in response to each research question. Hence the themes were defined from the perspective of the participants. Researcher bias was furthermore reduced by the fact that one of the participants, as well as an academic who was not directly involved in the study, participated in the coding processes (Schensul 1999:29). Furthermore, although variations occurred among the people involved in the coding processes, each category discussed in chapter 6 demonstrated consensus among the individuals involved in the coding.

## **5.9 REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL INFLUENCE OF THE RESEARCHER**

In qualitative research, the researcher often forms part and is immersed in the research process (Neuman 2006:151). The analyses and interpretation of the findings are furthermore subjective and interpretive in nature which is not the case to the same extent in quantitative research. It is therefore necessary to reflect critically on the role and potential influence that the researcher could have had on the group discussions as well as the analyses and interpretation of the findings of this study.

### **5.9.1 About The Researcher**

This researcher hails from Zambia, black by race and a resident of Monze, a small university town almost 200 kilometres South of Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. This researcher is an academic who studied at tertiary level of education, both within Zambia and in the United States of America.

The decision to conduct research on this topic was influenced in part by the interactions this researcher had with individuals of the American society, having lived in the USA for six (6) years. The American culture is part of the larger culture of Western Europe and North America. The fascination was particularly to gain a deeper understanding into the communication dynamics between White Westerners and Black Zambians.

However, being part of the black Zambian community, this researcher's perception of the findings in this study may have unintentionally played a part in the conclusions arrived.

Furthermore, being a resident of Monze, all the black participants in the focus group discussions were very well known to this researcher before this exercise was done. It is possible that their participation in the discussions was modified by the fact that they knew the researcher. For instance, it is possible that some of them might have modified their stance on racism for the sake of compliance or perhaps desiring not to offend this researcher.

However, this researcher identifies with and definitely agrees from experience growing up in the Zambian community that the ideas shared by the black participants are indeed a true reflection of the Zambian culture as it relates to other cultures such as the Western culture.

This researcher was present during the focus group discussions merely as an observer. In retrospect, his presence nevertheless had the potential to influence also the manner in which the white Western participants shared their experiences. White participants could have modified their stance on racism as might have been the case with black Zambian participants especially with the knowledge that the researcher was within their midst during the discussions.

The white participants could have censored their contributions in as far as how negative their experiences in interacting with black Zambians have been. Furthermore, white participants could have preferred to take a much more mild view point on their experiences for the sake of compliance and in order not to offend this researcher. This therefore negatively impacted on the reliability and validity of the results of the research as there may not have been full disclosure of the true experiences of white participants.

#### **5.10 SUMMARY**

This chapter summarised the procedures used and the choices made in conducting this study in order to explore the similarities and differences in nonverbal communication and other practices of black Zambians and white Westerners living in Zambia. To achieve this aim, a qualitative design and focus group discussions were used. A total of 12 participants were sampled conveniently, six blacks and six whites. A video recorder was used to record the data, and the collected data were analysed thematically. The next chapter, Chapter Six, is a detailed presentation of the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the data gathered from the focus group discussions and an analysis of these data. The aim of the study was to explore non-verbal communication in an intercultural setting. To this effect, the study investigated the similarities and differences in the cultural values, norms and practices of white Western migrants living in Zambia and black Zambians, as drawn from their views expressed in homogeneous and heterogeneous group discussions as well as their observed non-verbal behaviour in these encounters.

#### 6.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The data were analysed thematically. This resulted in the identification of themes as presented in following sections.

##### 6.2.1 Theme 1: Demonstration of Respect

“Respect” means different things to different people. However, although it can be defined differently, both the black Zambians and white Westerners stressed the importance of demonstrating respect in dyadic and group communication. Respect was expressed in different ways, however.

##### *Handshaking*

The Westerners identified handshaking as a token of respect.

The Zambians confirmed that this was also the case among them, although a visitor was first given a seat and then he or she was greeted by a handshake. This showed that the host was glad to be visited and appreciated, and respected the presence of the guest in the home.

A white Western participant in the mixed group acknowledged this difference as follows:

In the Western world, you can go into a home as a visitor, go directly to the host and shake their hand and say, “Hi, how are

you today?” Here in Africa, I have noticed that a visitor has to wait to be given a seat first, and then when they are seated, the host will go over and politely shake their hand, and carefully greet.

A Zambian participant highlighted another difference between Zambian and Western culture:

Shaking hands [in Zambian culture] is not common in public interaction. Normally, it is done at home, where people will either kneel or sit down and then shake hands.

### ***Greeting***

In the Zambian culture, particularly among the Lozi people of the Western Province of Zambia, respect was demonstrated by clapping hands lightly when two or more people greet in public. A further sign of respect would be to stretch one’s open palms towards a person.

One Zambian participant in the Zambian group stated the following:

In our culture, we clap hands when greeting as a demonstration of respect. I have seen this practice even among the Shona people of Zimbabwe.

### ***Age-related Issues***

Western participants identified respect to the elderly as an important point of difference between the two cultures. The Western participants stated in their discussion group that when being given something by an elderly person, one did not necessarily have to receive it in any special way as was the practice in the Zambian culture. A Western participant put it as follows:

When being given an item by an elderly person, one does not have to receive it with two hands.

Apart from receiving something with two hands, kneeling was identified by Western participants as a way in which Zambians expressed respect to the elderly. One Western participant stated the following:

The showing of respect is over-dramatised here. Kneeling when giving something to someone respectable or elderly is too much.

This particular participant expressed amazement and even dismay at the amount of respect that adults in the Zambian culture were accorded from young people. She stated that this was completely different from what she was used to in her culture, where respect was accorded people who had done admirable things in life, not on the basis of their age.

Other Western participants also emphasised that respect should be earned and that adults had even to show respect to young people when they had earned this respect.

One Western participant in the discussion of the whites-only group elaborated as follows:

The segregation between the elderly and the younger people in the demonstration of respect is not that pronounced. What is critical is when one is in a position of responsibility.

In other words, in the Western culture, respect was earned by position in society or through achievement.

Another Western participant in the mixed group said the following:

In the Western world, although one is young, if they have done admirable things, they are respected much more than adults.

### ***Gender-related Issues***

The Zambian participants, on the other hand, stated that children or younger people were not only obliged to show respect to older people, but also to the male parent – the father. One Zambian participant stated the following:

In our set-up, when a child wants to talk to the father, he or she has to communicate through the mother, making his or her request known of whatever it is he or she wants.

In the above quotation respect is indicated by not speaking directly to the male parent. Another Zambian participant in the mixed group discussion also identified kneeling down and keeping your voice down as indications of respect to the father:

When talking to the father, a child will come politely and kneel nicely down and tell the father whatever it is that he/she wants, not standing. The child will have to keep his or her voice down as he or she talks to the father so he or she does not disturb everyone else.

### ***Voice Projection***

In the Zambian context, conversations were usually carried out in soft tones to demonstrate respect. A Zambian participant added that anger towards adults had to be expressed respectfully:

Even expression of anger towards adults has to be done with respect. Not talking loudly and kicking the ground. It is important to actually kneel down when talking to adults or sitting on the ground.

### ***Eye Contact***

When a child was being rebuked by a parent, the following behaviour was expected of a Zambian child, according to a Zambian participant in the mixed group:

You look down, humble and respectful to show that you are sorry for what you have done.

Thus the Zambian tradition demanded of a younger person to avoid direct eye contact when talking to an older person. This demonstrated respect for the older individual. The



participants added that staring into the eyes of an older person when talking to him or her was disrespectful and rude, according to their culture.

Although Western culture also subscribes to the demonstration of respect through a humble and respectful countenance by a child when being rebuked by the parent, eye contact is promoted as a sign of confidence and paying attention in a dyadic communication.

One Western participant stated the mixed group discussions that:

My mother always taught us to be confident and maintain eye contact when talking to another person, whether elderly or not.

### **6.2.2 Theme 2: Public Display of Affection**

Affection in public between lovers and acquaintances is displayed differently in different cultures. In some cultures, it is perfectly normal to display affection in public, whereas in other cultures it is considered distasteful.

#### ***Kissing in Public***

A participant in the whites-only group said:

In Denmark where I come from, public display of affection is acceptable. I usually see my parents kissing openly.

#### ***Holding Hands and Being Close in Public***

Another Western participant in the mixed group stated the following:

In the Western culture, it is okay to hold hands and to walk while embracing each other.

However, in the Zambian culture, it was different. Closeness in public, especially between two people of the opposite sex, was not encouraged. One participant in the Zambians-only group expressed this notion as follows:

Closeness in public for people of the opposite sex is not allowed. Even husband and wife will walk normally the man ahead, while the wife follows behind.

Another Zambian summed it up in the following manner:

Holding hands in the village set-up is regarded sexual and thus offensive, especially when it is between a man and a woman.

Holding hands in public in the African culture was seen to indicate a gay relationship. One Zambian participant said:

Males holding hands in this day and age especially with a suggestive step may be considered gay. It sends the wrong message.

Another Zambian participant suggested the following:

Holding hands in public as an unmarried couple is traditionally not acceptable. It is okay for ladies to hold hands in public. For males, it depends on the circumstances.

A woman in the Zambian group also commented:

Holding hands in public suggests ... after this the next thing.

The implication is that it is believed that when a couple hold hands in public, they will also have sex shortly thereafter. It furthermore serves to offend other people and they would shout offensive remarks towards the couple.

### **6.2.3 Other Non-Verbal Communication Practices**

#### ***Handshaking in Public***

As already indicated in section 6.2.1, the two cultures held different views on handshaking. The Zambian participants said that shaking hands was normally not done in public in their

culture, and was discouraged more in the case of men than in the case of women. A Zambian participant said:

Shaking of hands between a male and a female is not at all common and is discouraged. When a male shakes hands with a female, it means that there is a sexual message being conveyed.

Another Zambian participant had this to say:

It is different the way things are done here. We do not shake hands anyhow with everyone. When I see my mother-in-law coming down the path, I will avoid her and she will know that I am avoiding her. There should be a distance between me and her. We can't shake hands.

The citation implies that in Zambian culture there were certain people in society whom one could not just approach and with whom one could not shake hands with in public. In-laws were in that category.

The Westerners, on the other hand, stated that handshaking was acceptable in their culture in whatever circumstance.

### ***Silence***

The Western participants said that silence was a way of showing disapproval of what someone had said or done. One Western participant said:

You just don't engage in a conversation when in disagreement with what someone was doing or has said.

### ***Facial Expressions***

In the Western culture, frowning was usually associated with failure to understand what was being talked about. In Zambian culture, on the other hand, a man winking as well as squinting one eye at a woman was often taken to express sexual interest.

Facial expressions are also used in Zambia as an expression of insults. Children make facial expressions when angry such as pulling the mouth to one side and then to the other side while squinting the eyes simultaneously. At times they used a fist or palm to express insults by placing it on one's face.

One Zambian participant in the blacks-only discussion said:

When a child does that, he has said big insults.

Facial expressions are also used by parents in the Zambia culture as a means to communicate discipline in a public gathering such in church.

One Zambian participant stated:

A parent will just give certain facial expressions and that will be enough to show that the child should stop what they were doing.

### ***Personal Space***

The use of personal space was another non-verbal practice that received attention. According to the Zambian participants, closeness in public between people of the opposite sex was not encouraged. One Zambian participant said:

Closeness in public for people of the opposite sex is not common. Even a husband will walk a few metres ahead of his wife in public.

The Western participants said that personal space, especially in public interaction, was very important. One Westerner said the following:

Personal space is very distinct in public interaction.

A Western participant mentioned that Westerners preferred that people maintain a relatively large personal distance when interacting with another person. She felt offended when Zambians stood too near to her and she would step back in order to enlarge the distance. The conclusion can be drawn that Westerners preferred a larger personal distance than what was the case in Zambian culture.

### *Eye Contact*

As already discussed in 6.2.1, eye contact was another non-verbal practice discussed in the focus groups. Eye contact communicated meaning. However, participants of the two cultures approached eye contact differently.

According to the Westerners, eye contact in dyadic communication, no matter who the person was talking to, was normal practice in their culture. It showed attentiveness, interest in the conversation and interest in the person one was communicating with. Eye contact also demonstrated confidence in the speaker. Avoiding eye contact was considered rude, disrespectful and arrogant.

One Western participant said the following:

My mother constantly instilled this in me that when you want to appear confident, you have to look people straight in the eye.

Another Western participant expressed the following opinion:

In communication, one ought to maintain eye contact as a demonstration of concentration. Maintain eye contact and nodding when talking to someone.

Yet another Western participant said the following:

When you look people in the eye, you appear confident and people give you more respect like that.

One Zambian participant said that although it was important to look down when talking to elderly people in their culture, when one was doing a job interview, one had to look up, even looking the interviewer in the eye.

Western participant in the mixed group asked whether it was appropriate in the Zambian culture for a woman to look a man in the eye when engaged in dyadic communication in public. A Zambian participant responded in the following way:

It depends on the look. Is it a glance, a stare or a lingering look?

The Western participants, on the other hand, said that maintaining eye contact in a communication exchange was important. One Western participant said:

In dyadic communication, participants ought to maintain eye contact as a demonstration of concentration. Maintaining eye contact and head nodding when talking to someone are important.

The Zambians also stated that eye contact was acceptable in their culture among peers and individuals who shared a certain relationship such as an intimate relationship. A man can furthermore show his interest in a woman by passing her, looking her in the eye and slightly raising his eyes.

### *Dress*

Dress was yet another non-verbal practice dealt with in the discussions, more particularly in the mixed group. One Zambian participant referred to one Western participant who was wearing a very short pair of soccer shorts and said that her dress was inappropriate.

The Zambian participant added:

Dress is key here. When I see a woman in a bum short, I think as a black man, “Who does she think she is?” I would not expect a fellow black lady to dress like that. It is offensive.

The only Zambian female participant responded:

One thing about us, we understand that you guys [whites] come from a totally different cultural background with different beliefs. But for us here, I can't walk around in a pair of soccer shorts like the one you are wearing right there.

The Western participants said dress was not such a big deal to them, and that wearing ear studs was cool on men. One Western participant actually said:

Wearing ear studs is cool for guys. Normally they will wear studs, not dangling ones. Guys who wear studs are placed in certain categories, metro-sexual maybe. It is actually sexy for a guy to wear an ear stud.

The Zambians responded by saying that the wearing of ear rings or studs and plaiting of hair were Western cultural practices. One Zambian said the following:

Traditionally our parents used to wear certain strings on their ears as a sign of wealth, but not anymore.

### ***Lingering Handshake***

One Westerner had this to say:

The lingering handshake, holding on to my hand for longer periods of time, is uncomfortable. To hold on to someone's hand against their will is offensive. It is scary when someone holds on to your hand for a long time.

Handshakes were a common practice in both the Zambian and the Western cultures. However, in the Zambian culture, people shook hands and at times held on to each other's palms a little while longer than was the practice in the Western world. This practice made the Western women uncomfortable, especially in an encounter with a man.

In the researcher's experience, a lingering handshake in the Zambian culture demonstrated a certain level of connection between two people. For instance, two male friends could shake hands and might hold on to each other's palm for a little while longer while they were greeting. It was considered normal in the Zambian culture.

### *Expressing Sexual Innuendos*

It was heard in the discussions that in the Zambian culture, a lingering handshake with the scratching of the other person's palm using the index finger was an expression of sexual interest.

## **6.3 OTHER CULTURAL PRACTICES**

The moderator of the discussions wanted to know what personal experiences the Westerners had had that they could identify as being at variance with certain norms in their cultures.

Some of the issues that were raised are the following:

### *Offering Food to Guests*

It was a common practice in the Zambian culture for hosts in a home to offer visitors food without first asking whether they wished to eat or not. One Western participant responded to this as follows:

It is uncomfortable to be offered food when you have not been asked whether you want it or not.

Another Western participant said:

It would be good if people would be asked whether they want to eat or not. They should have the pleasure to choose either to eat or not to eat. At least with water, when I am offered water and I know it is not boiled, I will explain politely that I will be sick if I drink it. That is not so difficult to get out of.

### *Nose Picking in Public*

The Western participants identified nose picking in public as a common practise in Zambian culture. The Western participants stated that this was an alien practice to them and made them feel uncomfortable whenever someone did that. One Western participant said:

I have noticed here that people will pick their nose even in public. In Danish culture, you don't pick your nose in public. It is in fact rude to pick your nose in public.



### ***Breastfeeding in Public***

The Western participants indicated that in the Western world, female breasts were not to be exposed in public generally or in a group of people. The Western participants complained that they had seen mothers breastfeeding their babies in public in Zambia without making any effort to cover their breasts. One Western participant said:

Breasts are a sacred part of a woman's body that should not be shown anyhow. Here women breastfeed in public. I have never seen my own mother's breasts.

Another Western participant stated:

I have never seen my mother's nipples.

For their part, the Zambian participants identified the following Western practices that differed from what was common in their culture:

### ***Husbands Doing Chores in the Home***

The Western participants revealed that in their culture, it was not at all uncommon for men or husbands in the home to do chores on a rotational basis with their spouse. This was not the case in Zambia according to the Zambian participants. One Zambian participant said:

Is it normal in your culture (Western culture) for a husband to be asked by the wife to do chores in the kitchen? With us, it is different. It is not normal.

One Western participant complained though at the lack of gratitude by husbands towards their wives' hard work.

I have observed that husbands here in Zambia will just sit there and will not say thank you for anything that wives do for them. It is cruel and rude.

She added that household chores in Zambia seem to be left to the woman alone.

### ***Mentioning of Body Parts***

In the Zambian culture, some private body parts, such as buttocks, could not be mentioned in public. One Zambian participant said:

There are certain parts of the body that should not be mentioned anyhow. For instance, in Lozi culture, buttocks are a respected body part.

This surprised the Western participants, who said that there was nothing wrong with saying a word like “buttocks” in public in their culture.

### ***Women Wearing Headscarves***

Another sign of respect in the Zambian culture was the wearing of headscarves by women. In the Zambian culture, it was regarded a disgrace for a woman to walk about without a headscarf.

One Zambian participant said:

In fact, it is a disgrace for a woman to walk about without a headscarf. It is just these modern women we marry these days. Otherwise, my mum would wear a scarf definitely. If Mum is relaxed at home, when visitors come, she would have to look for her scarf as well as the waist wrap, called “chitenge” locally, before meeting the visitors. This culture of hairstyles is borrowed.

### ***Relating with in-laws***

Western participants stated that in their culture, relating with one’s in-laws was not such a complex matter as is the case in Zambia.

One Western participant stated:

Even when my fiancé would not be around, I would visit my in-laws and would go into the fridge and help myself. It is no big deal.

### ***Body Weight as a Symbol of Wealth***

In the Zambian culture, body weight symbolises wealth and comfort. The fatter the person is the more they are considered to be affluent.

One Zambian participant stated:

In Zambia when you are fat, it is a sign that you are rich.

### **6.4 CULTURAL CHANGE**

In the Zambian group discussion, there was evidence that certain aspects of the Zambian cultural had been changing and that traditional culture was not practised and strongly observed everywhere. A number of participants mentioned “in the village” or “in my village” as places where adherence to particular cultural practices was paramount. The impression was created that elsewhere – perhaps in the cities or within the university environment – these cultural practices were no longer as important as in traditional and/or rural areas.

The participants furthermore gave examples of certain practises that were no longer strictly followed outside traditional and/or rural areas. Apart from the fact that they had learned to look people in the eye when going, for example, for a job interview, it would furthermore no longer be so strange to see a couple walking side-by-side and not the man walking before the woman. The Zambian female participant even mentioned that her mother did not like it when she walked behind her and urged her – whenever they went somewhere together – to walk beside and not behind her.

The female participant furthermore mentioned that she did no longer force her children to follow these practices when they were together as a nuclear family:

... because they are young!

Some of the male participants reacted however vehemently and voiced the opinion that it is important to teach children to behave appropriately according to their culture from a very young age.

Another participant ascribed certain practises such as the regular washing of one's hands before eating to be as a result of Western cultural influence. Traditionally, one would wash one's hands after having touched a dead body. The washing of hands would then be a sign of spiritual cleansing related to beliefs that one should make a clean break with evil spirits that could potentially be attached to the dead person. However, washing hands had become a regular practice due to the influence of the cleanliness practices associated with Western culture and science.

### **6.5 PARTICIPANTS' NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOUR OBSERVED BY THE RESEARCHER**

By using a video recorder as the primary instrument for data recording, very interesting non-verbal behaviour was captured on tape, which would have been impossible if only an audio recorder had been used. Some of the observations are set out below.

**Seating Arrangements:** The participants in the mixed group were mindful of where they were going to sit when they entered the room. They chose to sit with individuals of their own culture and race, and avoided sitting with those of the other group. Furthermore, the Zambian participants sat in one area of the lounge and the Westerners in another, with the exception of the single Zambian female who could find no other sitting space than in between two Western participants. When going to sit, hesitation was clearly evident. As for the homogeneous groups, the participants entered the room not too mindful of where they were going to sit, perhaps because they knew they were going to meet people of the same race and culture.

**Talking:** The participants clearly enjoyed the homogeneous group discussions more than the mixed-group discussion. They laughed more, cracked more jokes and were at greater liberty to talk about their experiences than when they were in the mixed group. The very people who led the discussions in the homogeneous groups seemed to be shying away from leading in the mixed group.

It can be concluded that the hesitation relative to the seating arrangements and to participation in the mixed-group discussion stemmed from avoidance of uncertainty. In the homogeneous groups there was no uncertainty, hence the ease with seating and participation.

## **6.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on the findings drawn from the recorded data. A number of themes were extracted from the transcribed data. The analysed data indicated that there were more differences than similarities in the intercultural communication, whether in the non-verbal behaviour or other cultural practices. These differences probably rendered the intercultural communication between the Zambians and the Westerners less effective. For instance, the anxiety and uncertainty demonstrated by the race-divided seating and hesitance to speak during the mixed-group discussion probably hindered the transfer of messages.

In the last chapter, Chapter Seven is a summary of the study, elaborating on the conclusions. Recommendations for future research are presented in that chapter as well.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focused on non-verbal behaviour and other cultural practices in communication between black Zambians and white Westerners living in Zambia. In this chapter, the findings are discussed and recommendations are made for improving intercultural communication. In the process, the findings and the literature are compared to establish whether the real-life intercultural encounters concur with the literature.

#### 7.2 NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

From the focus group discussions, various forms of non-verbal communication emerged indicating important differences between the two cultures:

##### 7.2.1 Handshaking

It appears that Zambians and Westerners both shake hands as a way of greeting. Despite the differences in the way it is done and where it is done, both cultures suggest that handshaking demonstrates respect. Handshaking also demonstrates concern about and interest in the other person in a communication interaction.

However, the Zambians reserve handshaking for the home, where a visitor will first be offered a seat and then the host will extend his or her hand for a handshake. A woman however does not normally shake hands with a man. In contrast, the Westerners shake hands anywhere, including in public, and with anybody. Furthermore, the Zambians shake hands and the handshake lingers for a longer period of time than the Westerners. The lingering handshake of the Zambians make the Westerners feel uncomfortable.

##### 7.2.2 Personal Space

It appears that both groups regard personal space in public interaction as an important communication symbol. Within the Zambian culture, even individuals who are married to each other do not walk close to each other in public, let alone hold hands. Such closeness is regarded as a sign of sexual interest. However, Westerners expressed discomfort due to the fact that Zambians tended to stand too near to them when interacting with them. They would

even step back to reinforce a personal space that would be more comfortable for them. It appears that Westerners prefer a larger personal space than is the case for Zambians.

### **7.2.3 Eye Contact**

Although both groups seem to regard it as important for people to demonstrate respect, there are differences in the way they demonstrate respect. For example, in the Zambian culture a younger person in a conversation with an older person has to avoid direct eye contact with that person, especially staring and lingering looks.

In the Western world, on the other hand, indications are that respect is given to individuals who have achieved certain things in life, regardless of that person's age, and Westerners regard avoidance of direct eye contact with anyone in dyadic communication as disrespectful. Within the Western culture looking a person in the eye is furthermore regarded as a sign of self-confidence as well as the fact that a person is taking notice of and is interested in what the other person is saying.

Some degree of Westernisation could be observed in the responses of the Zambian respondents. The fact that they agreed that it was necessary to look people in the eye when going for a job interview can be regarded as indicative that they have adapted to some extent to Western culture. This influence is apparently however restricted to the business and/or professional sphere. There were however also indications that looking another person in the eye could also have special significance in Zambian culture for the relationships between the sexes. Here different types of looks or stares could have different meanings.

### **7.2.4 Other Forms of Non-verbal Behaviour Indicating Respect**

The importance of respect within Zambian culture as indicated in the discussion in section 7.6 is reflected in the fact that respect is indicated by various forms of non-verbal behaviour. Apart from eye contact as discussed in the previous section, the Zambian respondents also indicated kneeling down, receiving things with two hands, not speaking directly to a person and keeping one's tone of voice down as indicators of respect within their culture.

### **7.2.5 Non-verbal Behaviour Indicating Personal Closeness**

The respondents also indicated differences with regard to forms of non-verbal communication that indicate personal closeness such as holding hands and kissing. According to the Zambian participants these forms of behaviour were not acceptable in public and, in particular, not when a couple – a man and a woman – was involved. The Western participants, in contrast, had no problems with the public display of affection between a man and a woman.

### **7.2.6 Dress**

The Zambian participants regarded modesty in dress as important, even critical. For example, the wearing of a short pair of soccer shorts by a woman, exposing her thighs, is regarded as rude and communicates disrespect. They furthermore indicated that they regarded it as important for women to wear a headscarf in public.

No strict dress codes were however mentioned by the Western participants. It appears that Westerners are completely relaxed about dress and that almost anything is tolerated. For example, the Western participants also considered the wearing of ear studs by men as normal, even sexy or “metro-sexual” and as an indication of people who take extra care of themselves, their skin, hair, face and so forth.

In contrast, the Zambian participants reserved the wearing of ear studs for women only. When a man wears an ear stud, Zambians can interpret it is an indication that the person is gay.

### **7.2.7 Silence**

There were indications that the two cultures could also be using and interpreting silence in different ways. One of the Western participants raised the issue that in their culture silence indicated disapproval. It was however not clear how this use and interpretation of silence differed in Zambian culture.

## **7.3 OTHER CULTURAL PRACTICES**

Various other cultural practises were also indicated as differences between the two cultures:



### **7.3.1 Offering Food**

One of the issues raised by the Western participants as an issue that they found irksome in Zambian culture was the offering of food. According to the Western interpretation, Zambians regarded it as rude when they refused food offered to them. However, they regarded as their right to be able to make a choice.

### **7.3.2 Exposing Breasts in Public**

The Westerners found breastfeeding in public unacceptable, since breasts were not to be exposed in public view according to their view, even to the extent of not ever seeing one's mother's breasts. Breastfeeding in public was regarded as acceptable by the Zambian participants.

### **7.3.3 Nose-Picking**

Another Zambian practise that the Western participants identified as exasperating was the habit of many Zambians to openly pick their noses in public.

### **7.3.4 Household Chores**

Household chores in the Zambian culture are the responsibility of the woman in the home. Men are not obliged to even express gratitude to a woman when the woman has done something for them. It is considered as part of a woman's responsibility.

## **7.4 DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE**

Various conclusions can be drawn with regard to differences between Zambian and Western cultures in terms of the dimensions of culture as identified by De Mooi and Hofstede (2011:89-90) and Triandis (2004:90). There were various indications that Zambian culture can firstly be identified as collectivistic. The Zambian participants emphasised the importance of various relations such as the relationships between younger and older people, between the father and the child and between a man and a wife.

Within the Zambian culture great importance was, for example, attached to the significance and meaning of various forms of non-verbal behaviour such as kneeling, taking things with two hands, stretching one's open palms towards a person, eye contact or the avoidance of eye contact, lowering the tone of voice, and so forth. The context - and in particular the ways that

things were done - was thus as important and in some cases even more important than the content or the actual words being spoken.

Furthermore, Zambian culture can be depicted as a high-context one due to the prominent role that Zambian participants attached to indirect symbolic presentations of power and respect. The Zambian respondents further indicated that power and status differences such as those between the elderly and the young and between a man and woman were important to them – a characteristic of a high-power distance culture.

A sharp distinction was furthermore drawn between the status of men and women and their roles in society. Strict rules were, for example, identified for the dress codes for women in public and the various ways in which they should demonstrate female subservience. Zambian culture can therefore be characterised to be more masculine than feminine. The strict rules and formality that govern behaviour and function to provide structure to social relationships are furthermore indicative of a culture high in uncertainty avoidance. A short-term orientation can moreover be discerned in the emphasis on tradition.

The Western culture as displayed by the Western participants can, on the other hand, be characterised as individualistic, low-context, low-power distance, more feminine rather than masculine, lower in uncertainty avoidance and more orientated towards the future. The Westerners did not, in the first place, attach a high value to status and power relationships in society – an indication of individualism as well as low-power distance. For example, they did not mention any particular ways in which status and power distances between the young and the elderly, a father and a child, and between men and women were symbolised in their culture.

An individualistic orientation was furthermore indicated by the fact that they emphasised individual achievement for earning respect rather than respect being vested in a particular fixed position in society – also indicating a low-power distance orientation. The Western participants further emphasised directness – indicative of a low-context culture – such as the need to look people in the eye and the notion of the right to refuse food or drinks openly and up front if they do not want it.

They furthermore displayed a feminine orientation by being permissive with regard to the place and role of women in society, the open display of affection between a man and a woman in public and the wearing of ear studs by men. However, some indications of masculine elements in Western culture could be discerned in the emphasis on individual achievement and assertiveness in communication such as the need to look people in the eye in order to display self-confidence and assertiveness and to win respect by means of achievement.

The fact that they identified fewer rules that structure relationships and communication in their culture can furthermore be regarded as an indication of a culture lower in uncertainty avoidance. A strong future orientation could be observed in the emphasis on thrift and the notion that respect should be earned rather than vested in fixed societal positions related to age and gender.

The conclusion can be drawn that there were distinct differences between the Western and Zambian cultures with regard to the dimensions of culture as identified by De Mooi and Hofstede (2011:89–90) and Triandis (2004:90). It is, in fact, possible to speak of two different cultural systems.

## **7.5 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY FOR COMMUNICATION THEORY**

The literature review covered three key theories that explain intercultural communication, namely symbolic interaction, coordinated management of meaning and anxiety/uncertainty management.

### **7.5.1 Symbolic Interaction Theory**

Symbolic interaction theory espouses that in the world of symbols, meaning, language and thought are essential in communicating what symbols mean in a particular society (Schaefer 2001:19). Societal consensus is necessary in the construction of meaning (Griffin 2000:55). Communication is effective when the meaning of specific symbols is shared.

The major symbols that can be derived from the focus group discussions in this study are the following:

### ***Symbols of Respect***

Respect was attributed differently by the Zambian and the Western participants. The fact that respect plays a much lesser role in Western culture than in Zambian culture, can be derived from the fact that the Western participants did not identify any particular ways in which respect is conveyed in their culture. Respect as a prominent symbol within Zambian culture, in contrast, is reflected in the various actions identified by the Zambian participants that demonstrate respect such as receiving things with two hands, kneeling, not speaking directly to a person, keeping your tone of voice down and avoiding eye contact.

From the discussions, it was furthermore deduced that there were distinct differences between the two cultures with regard to the reasons why people should be respected. In the Western culture, respect is not linked to age, gender or a particular position in society. A person rather earns respect by his or her achievements. In Zambian culture, on the other hand, respect is closely linked to age, gender and position in society. Young people need to show respect to older people in various ways as well as to their fathers, while women should show respect to men.

### ***Symbols Related to Age***

As indicated in the previous section, age was reflected in many symbolic gestures in Zambian culture, but not in Western culture. In Zambian culture, special respect had to be shown in various ways to elderly persons, while distinct norms governed the behaviour of children towards elders.

### ***Symbols of Male Supremacy and Female Subservience***

Male supremacy was furthermore reflected in many forms of symbolic communication in Zambian culture. The Zambian participants gave various indications that the male figure was deemed with special importance and respect in their culture. Thus children had, for example, to show special respect to their fathers.

Furthermore, in the Zambian culture, even if they were a married couple, a male and a female were usually not expected to walk next to each other in public. The man had to walk in front with the woman following him behind. Female subservience was furthermore indicated by practises such as the fact that women were not supposed to shake hands with men, could not

walk next to their husbands and had to follow strict clothing rules such as wearing a headscarf even in the home and not wearing shorts in the presence of men.

No indications were however given that male supremacy and female subservience were important symbols in the culture of the Western participants.

### ***Symbols Related to Dress and Bodily Adornments***

Clothes and other bodily garments held distinct, yet different, symbolic value in the two cultures. The wearing of ear studs by males was for instance considered acceptable, even sexy, by the Western group. The Zambian group, on the other hand, considered the wearing of an ear stud as the preserve of women. In Zambia, the wearing of an ear stud by a man was perceived as an indication that a man could be gay.

Furthermore, the short pairs of shorts and short skirts worn by Western women were not acceptable to the Zambians and were even seen as an insult to Zambian men, since women were supposed to be fully covered, not revealing those body parts that could invoke sexual excitement among men. Therefore, should a Western woman wear a short pair of shorts or a short skirt, a Zambian might regard it as disregard of cultural norms.

In addition, elderly Zambian women, particularly married women, were supposed to wear headscarves when carrying out their household duties and even outside their homes. Failing to do so was regarded a disgrace.

Since the symbols above were approached differently by the two cultural groups, communication can only be effective if the differences in interpretation are shared.

### ***Symbols Related to Wealth***

In the discussions, it was heard that in the Zambian culture, a fat person is considered comfortable and rich. Therefore, body size clearly symbolises wealth in the Zambian culture. There was no indication from the Western participants as to whether body weight symbolises wealth in the Western culture.

### **7.5.2 Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory**

The coordinated management of meaning theory holds that human beings co-create a social reality and that information transactions depend very much on personal and interpersonal meaning (Pearce 2005:35–45). Meaning is furthermore not only determined by the actual words being spoken, but also by the cultural context. Various instances were identified by the participants that could result in misinterpretation when Zambians interact with Westerners such as the following:

#### ***Greeting of Visitors***

The greeting styles and the social rules that determine greetings in Zambian and Western cultures could also give rise to misunderstanding. For example, a Zambian person can regard it as rudeness when a Westerner wants to shake his or her hand before first taking a seat. A Westerner, on the other hand, may find it awkward and even confusing not to shake hands first – which is seen in Western culture as a form of greeting – before sitting down. A Zambian man may furthermore feel uncomfortable when a white woman greets him with a handshake.

Handshake is a common way of greeting in both the Zambian and the Western cultures. Greeting through handshake, whatever way it is done in the two cultures, demonstrates respect and connectedness by individuals engaged in a dyadic communication. However, in Zambia, the tendency to hold on a little while longer to another's palm in a greeting handshake makes Westerners uncomfortable, especially when it is a male Zambian and a female Westerner. This difference if not managed well would render intercultural communication ineffective as the apprehension from one party may jeopardise the effective sharing of meaning.

#### ***Offering Food to Visitors***

Zambian hosts are obliged to offer food and drink to visitors without first having to ask them whether they wish to eat or not. This is a demonstration of hospitality. Westerners, in contrast, may not understand why they are not given an opportunity to say whether they wish to eat or not when visiting Zambians. Zambian people, on the other hand, can experience it as a rebuke when Westerners decline food offered to them. They can also see it as a sign of ethnocentrism and stereotyping on the part of Westerners – as if Westerners do not want to eat Zambian food as they look down on Zambians or believe that their food is not clean.

However, Westerners may simply not be hungry or they may not like Zambian food very much. They probably do not view it as a rebuke, but rather as their right to choose if, when and what they want to eat.

Again, in order for intercultural communication to be effective between these two groups, the meaning of such acts must be clarified.

### **7.5.3 Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory**

According to this theory, first-time dyadic, intragroup as well as intergroup encounters are characterised by anxiety and uncertainty if there are marked differences between the people involved. This results in doubt and fear, which compromise the effectiveness of communication.

#### ***Lingering Handshake***

The Zambian habit of holding on to another person's palm when shaking hands makes Western women feel uncomfortable, especially when a Zambian man does this. According to the anxiety/uncertainty management theory, increased verbal and non-verbal communication should resolve some of this discomfort and indications of warmth, prolonged eye contact, a pleasant tone, longer smiles and head nods should gradually occur more often.

#### ***Seating Patterns and Other Forms of Behaviour Indicating Anxiety***

As already mentioned in chapter 6, the participants were apparently relaxed and experienced little anxiety in the intragroup context where they discussed issues with members of their own culture. Laughing and the cracking of jokes and the fact that they offered their viewpoints freely indicated that they actually enjoyed the discussion in the homogeneous group.

In contrast, a much higher degree of anxiety and the avoidance of uncertainty could be detected in the intercultural setting. Participants sought safety by sitting in a bundle with members of their own cultural group. This behaviour is probably indicative of the anxiety that most people experience when they need to interact and communicate with members of another cultural group.

Although the participants were not asked specifically whether the discussion in the mixed group context helped to reduce their anxiety, it can be foreseen that the discussion could have

enhanced understanding of the other culture and could have helped the participants to feel less insecure and anxious when interacting with members of the other group in future.

## **7.6 IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.6.1 Non-verbal Communication Practices**

As already indicated, the various non-verbal communication and cultural practices presented in the preceding sections have implications for intercultural communication between the two cultures under study.

#### ***Handshaking***

As already discussed, it will be confusing and even embarrassing for a Western visitor to extend his or her hand in greeting to a Zambian host, and the Zambian shows hesitance or offers the guest a seat instead. The Westerner may conclude that the host is displeased about the visitor's presence in the home. This situation may create anxiety and uncertainty in the visitor's mind and may compromise intercultural communication effectiveness between the two individuals temporarily.

#### ***Personal Space***

Westerners appear to have a larger personal space when engaged in communication. Personal space could therefore be a cause for anxiety in their intercultural communication.

#### ***Public Display of Affection***

The Westerners accept the public display of affection, whereas the Zambians do not – among them even married couples do not show their affection for one another in public and walk a few inches apart. Indeed, the public display of affection has sexual undertones in the Zambian culture. Therefore, when a male and female Westerner show affection – even if only in a casual manner – to each other in public, Zambians become uncomfortable.

#### ***Eye Contact***

Since the Zambians avoid eye contact, communication may be compromised when they talk to Westerners, who usually maintain eye contact and regard its avoidance as behaviour that estranges them. The opposite is also true. An elderly black Zambian might regard a young Westerner as disrespectful when he or she stares at the Zambian instead of looking down



during a conversation. Misunderstanding and misinterpretation are the natural outflow in both instances and boil down to ineffective intercultural communication.

### **7.6.2 Other Cultural Practices**

#### ***Offering Food to Visitors***

The Westerners expect to be asked whether they would like to eat or not when they visit a Zambian home. If this expectation is not met, they may misconstrue Zambian hospitality and generosity as impolite. Zambians who notice Westerners' hesitation when being offered food before they are offered a seat might lead them to conclude that Westerners are aloof and ungrateful or look down on them. This may compromise the communication.

#### ***Exposing Breasts in Public***

Since the Westerners consider a woman's breasts as a sacred part of the human body, they are opposed to the display of breasts in public. The Zambians have no problem with exposed breasts, hence their acceptance of mothers breastfeeding their babies in public. This is a source of discomfort to the Westerners.

#### ***Nose Picking***

Nose picking in public does not bother the Zambians. In contrast, it is uncommon in the Western culture; hence the Western group find it disgusting. This difference might prompt Westerners to grow aloof especially when shaking hands with Zambians, which in turn might compromise effective intercultural communication.

## **7.7 CULTURAL CHANGE**

There were however indications of changes in the Zambian culture due to Westernisation. Jere-Malanda (2000:16–23) ascribes these changes in Zambian society in particular to the influence of Western media. It was, for example, no longer completely unacceptable for a couple or older and younger people to walk next to one another rather than the one behind the other. The act of washing one's hands had also lost its traditional symbolic significance due to cleanliness practices propagated by Western science. These findings indicate that culture is never stagnant and cast in stone. It is rather the case that cultures change and adapt due to changes in the social context and new environmental influences.

## **7.8 LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY**

The challenges of the study made it more difficult to complete, but did not make the results less conclusive. The key challenges were the following:

### **7.8.1 Time Constraints**

Conducting the focus group discussions required a great deal of time and effort; so did the coding of the video transcripts.

In Monze, a town in the Southern Province of Zambia, where the discussions were held, there were no white Westerners. Therefore, they had to be recruited and transported from Lusaka, a city 200 kilometres away. In addition, the Westerners could only set aside one day for the group discussions. Furthermore, the researcher had to make use of a local supervisor to code the transcripts. It took many hours of watching and reviewing the videotapes to identify the themes discussed in Chapter Six.

### **7.8.2 Limited Financial Resources**

The researcher faced the following challenges of a financial nature:

#### ***Transporting the Westerners***

Since the six white Westerners were resident in Lusaka where they worked as volunteers, they had to be transported to Monze and back. A vehicle was hired for this purpose, although the researcher had financial constraints in this regard.

#### ***Snacks for the Participants***

In order to make the participants comfortable, the researcher arranged for snacks, finger foods and drinks. This was a relatively costly expense for the researcher.

### **7.8.3 Scanty Related Research and Literature in Nonverbal Communication Within and Across Cultures in Africa**

From the literature review conducted, it was discovered that there was very scanty research conducted in Africa in the area of nonverbal communication within or across cultures.

Related research has leaned heavily on the media and other disciplines such as education or linguistics. For instance, the study by Kasanga (2009:253-273) focused on sociolinguistics and academia. Kasanga studied the increase in inter-ethnic and/or inter-racial communication

in South Africa and argued that this scenario warrants concomitant increased attention, through intercultural communication research, to difficulties encountered in face-to-face interaction, such as: pragmatic failure and misunderstanding in same-language different-culture interaction. Pragmatic failure, Kasanga argues, may lead, in the long run, to resentment, which, in turn, may lead to ethnic (cross-group) stereotyping and negative labelling.

Another study by Ramlutchman and Veerasamy (2013:148-156) on Intercultural Communication and Work Integrated Learning: A South African Perspective, focussed on the intercultural communication sensitivity of students during their work integrated learning training, resulting in a discussion on the value for integrating intercultural education at a tertiary curricula level. The study was located at the Durban University of Technology. It was a quantitative and descriptive study of 189 questionnaires by students.

The intercultural sensitivity scale developed by Chen and Starosta was used in the questionnaire to measure the intercultural sensitivity level of these students during their WIL training. The results showed that the students were comfortable engaging with different cultural groups during their WIL training, students also attached a high value to the respect for cultural differences and they found the experience of interacting with people from different cultures uplifting.

Therefore, the lack of related literature on research related to nonverbal communication and other cultural practices within and across cultures in Africa must stimulate future, more descriptive research in order to bridge the knowledge and literature gap and to add to the body of knowledge in the discipline.

## **7.9 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1993:17) state that the delimitations of a study define the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the population. The delimitations of this study were the following:

### **7.9.1 Qualitative Study**

A qualitative study involves the use of non-quantitative methods. It is concerned with the properties or qualities of a phenomenon rather than its quantity. This study engaged a

qualitative design in which the researcher observed or measured objects without changing or controlling the situation (Herzog 1996:103). The study explored non-verbal communication between white Westerners and black Zambians and its implications for effective communication.

Many researchers have condemned the use of qualitative studies because the findings are often not conclusive and therefore may not be generalisable to the populations from which the samples came (Zikmund 1994:33). In addition, the researcher was a member of one of the cultural groups under study and may have imported his subjective opinions into the findings, though unintentionally.

### **7.9.2 Sample Size**

A study that involves large populations is best served with a relatively large sample size. This study dealt with white Westerners and black Zambians. Since these two groups represent large populations, subcultures exist within them, for which the study did not make provision. For example, Westerners consist of Irish, English, Germans, Danish, Swedish, Norwegians, Finnish, Canadians, Americans, Scottish, Dutch and so forth. Each of them may engage in certain practices that are different from the practices of the rest.

In a similar fashion, Zambians consist of Tongas, Bembas, Ngonis, Lozis, Kaondes, Lambas, and so on. Therefore, the six participants per group recruited for the purpose of this study were not fully representative of the overall populations.

### **7.10 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the delimitations in respect of the sampling process and the sample size, the findings and conclusions of this study cannot be generalised to the broader population. This is because qualitative research is inconclusive since it is not countable, not complete, not predictive, not generalisable, not value-free and not impersonal.

Therefore, there is always room for follow-up research to clarify certain matters, authenticate others and dispute certain claims. Thus, in essence, qualitative research stimulates further research to arrive at a more detailed, systematic study involving more predictive, value-free approaches, such as statistical research.

Future research on the topic of this study can investigate the consequences of similarities and differences in cultural values and non-verbal behaviour in intercultural communication, based on empirical statistical data.

This may yield more definitive conclusions on the occurrence of misunderstanding between people of different cultures as a result of ineffective communication, as well as means to render intercultural communication effective. Such research naturally calls for a much larger sample and more financial, labour and time resources, and should realise more meaningful, more conclusive and less subjective research results.

Furthermore, as cited in section 7.8.3, there is very limited literature as very scanty research has been conducted in nonverbal communication and cultural practices in Africa. It is therefore recommended that future more descriptive research be conducted in order to close this knowledge and literature gap as well as to add to the body of knowledge in this discipline.

## **7.11 OVERALL CONCLUSION**

The overarching aim of this study was to explore in order to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences in non-verbal communication and other practices in encounters between black Zambians and white Western migrants living in Zambia. The study also sought to understand the implications of these similarities and differences. Research questions investigated in order to achieve these aims are the following:

1. How do the cultures of black Zambians and white Westerners compare and contrast with regard to non-verbal behaviour?
2. What other similarities and differences exist between the cultures of black Zambians and white Westerners?
3. What are the implications of these similarities and differences for intercultural communication, and how can communication between the two groups be improved?

It is evident from the data presented that the cultures of black Zambians and white Westerners have both similarities and differences as far as both verbal and nonverbal communication practices and other practices are concerned. These similarities and

differences influence communication encounters between the people of the two cultures either positively or negatively.

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Student number: **3513-639-1**

I declare that **COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS: THE CASE OF BLACK INDIGENOUS ZAMBIANS AND WHITE WESTERN MIGRANTS LIVING IN ZAMBIA** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Signature

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Date

Student number:

**3513-639-1**

**Title of thesis:**

**COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS: THE CASE OF BLACK INDIGENOUS ZAMBIANS AND WESTERN MIGRANTS LIVING IN ZAMBIA**

**Key terms:**

Communication, nonverbal communication, verbal communication, intercultural communication, culture, globalization, black indigenous Zambians, Western migrants, intercultural communication effectiveness, intercultural communication misunderstanding, symbolic interactionism, coordinated management of meaning, anxiety uncertainty reduction

### **Abbreviated Summary**

The overarching aim of this study was to explore the similarities and differences in communication and other cultural practices in encounters between black indigenous Zambians and white Western migrants living in Zambia and the implications of these similarities and differences.

The research adopted a qualitative research design, and focus group discussions were used as a data collection tool, using a video recorder to capture the discussions. The focus group comprised of 6 black indigenous Zambians and 6 white Westerners. The collected data was then transcribed from the video records and analysed using thematic analysis.

The conclusion to this study is that the culture of black indigenous Zambians and that of white Westerners have both similarities and differences as far as communication practices and other practices are concerned. These similarities and differences influence communication encounters between the people of the two cultures either positively or negatively rendering communication either effective or non-effective.