

REVIEW OF “IDENTITY AND COMMUNICATION”

By Bernard Saint-Jacques. *Intercultural Communication Studies* vol.5. Aichi, Japan: Aichi Shukutoku University. 2002. pp.13-21. ISBN-13440837

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The author proposes that the traditional conceptualization of identity is no longer clear in a new world dominated by globalization. He writes: “In this new world, individual identity, group identity, social identity, cultural and ethnic identity as well as national identity are no longer clearly defined concepts to which individuals and groups can relate and find their own identification. Identification is no longer conceptualized...” (p.13). However, he tries to define “identity” from a variety of viewpoints and provides the idea that “self-concept” is one of the most important aspects of personal and social identity.

Saint-Jacques quotes a wide selection of books and journals in the fields of culture, communication, psychology, anthropology, applied linguistics, etc. and discusses the relationship between identity and communication.

The author stresses that every act of communication is intercultural. He states: “Intercultural communication is one aspect of interpersonal communication because every individual has different personal backgrounds (age, culture, language, sex, education, race, work, social group, family, etc...)” (p. 14).

The author concludes that identity and communication are interdependent. Personal and social identity develop through the process of communication, but the nature of the identity and the self-concept will have a decisive influence on communication. The world is shrinking at an alarming rate and there is a greater degree of mutual understanding needed in an international society. The author's conclusion suggests that intercultural communication exists in our own homes and it is most important for every individual to have a broad mind to admit individual differences.

The paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, the author's discussion confronts identity. He examines the concept of identity from the standpoint of individual and social (cultural) identities. In the second section, he discusses communication, which is shorter in length (2 pages out of 8) but more important than the first section. The second section clearly explains the relationship between identity and communication.

The reviewers shall now look more carefully at the first section: 1) Identity. First,

the author illustrates three kinds of identities: "human identity," "personal identity," and "social identity." According to the author, "human identity" is the "similarity to all men" and indicates a specific characteristic of homo sapiens: the ability to talk, thus distinguishing them from other species. "Personal identity" is the "similarity to no other," which shows that personality is unique to a specific individual, including character or behavior. "Social identity" is the "similarity to several others," which asserts that every individual does not exist alone, but has come into existence within a given group of human beings who share the same society, language, culture, and so on. In this sense, "social identity could in many cases include - or be related to - group identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity and national identity" (p.15). As far as social identity is concerned, he points out the difficulty and impossibility of the search for the common assumptions and rules of behavior, because every human being has a unique experience within his/her respective culture. Every human being behaves depending on his/her own beliefs and values, and no two humans behave in the same way even if they share the same society or culture.

Culture is a social phenomenon which comprehends the habits, the customs, and the traits of a wide variety of members regarding to age, gender, education, occupation, and so on. The author's argument is expressed best when he says:

One could readily answer that nobody would claim that the common traits, assumptions and rules of behavior underlying the particular culture of a society will precisely fit any one individual of this society, but simply offer convenient guideposts for better understanding of a nation and the individuals in it (p.15).

Then, the author proceeds to develop his conceptualization of personal and social (cultural) identities. He emphasizes two significant points. One is that "it is impossible to dissociate personal and social identities" (p.15). Personal identity is not inherent, but developed through the interaction with others in a society. Individuals constitute or shape their personal identities within social relationships. The other point is that "identity is a dynamic and evolving process" (p. 16). Individual identity as well as cultural identity is not a fixed and pre-determined reality but constantly transforming. Therefore individual's behaviors changed in the past, are changing at the present, and will change in the future depending on the circumstances where individuals are involved. He claims as follows:

From these reflections on the constant changes of personal and social identity, it is clear that the traditional concept of "personality" - that each of us has certain characteristics, fairly stable over time, characteristics which influence our behavior and our communication - has lost some

support as a component of identity (p.16).

Finally, in this section the author mentions "self-concept" and writes: "Identity is defined as self-conception, one's theory of oneself" (p.16). Human beings can think about their own actions and reactions. In other words, they can look at themselves objectively and evaluate them. He goes on to say: "Identity is the individual's self-evaluation or self-appraisal" (p.16). In addition he indicates again that self-concept also develops through communication. That is to say, the self-concept is not a pre-determined and fixed reality. Furthermore, he notices that identity is very complex and has several corresponding aspects. In this sense every individual must have several identities or "multiple identities." It is relevant when he says: "Self-esteem is the evaluative component of the self-concept" (p.17). He considers that self-esteem is closely related to the individual's behavior and the degree of self-esteem will have a considerable influence on his/her behavior.

In the first section, the author surveys the notion of identity. His three-fold categorization of identity, "similar to all men (human identity)," "similar to no other (personal identity)," and "similar to several others (social identity)," is remarkable. This categorization gives a good explanation of identity and leads us towards a better understanding of identity. Personal identity develops through social relationships and we should not dissociate personal identity from social identity. Moreover, considering self-concept is essential for the study of personal and social identity. The self-concept is the most significant aspect of identity.

The reviewers shall next examine the second section: 2) Communication. At the very outset of this section, the author claims: "The essential nature of communication for human beings does not have to be demonstrated" (p.18). As has been mentioned before, man cannot live by himself but comes into existence through interaction with others. Communication, therefore, is an indispensable act for human beings. Formerly, intercultural communication was a concern for a nation or a limited number of persons. Nowadays, however, it is a matter for all human beings in this new world of globalization. Moreover, intercultural communication is one aspect of interpersonal communication because every individual is culturally unique.

The author repeatedly states in this paper: "Personal and social identity, self-concept and self-esteem develop through the process of communication" (p.19). In addition he makes it clear that identity also has a great influence on communication with others. He points out such a close relationship between identity and communication as follows:

... it is important to realize that identity and communication maintain a

dual interaction. Not only will identity and self-concept be forged through communication, but the nature of the identity and the self-concept will have a decisive influence on communication (p.19).

To be able to judge one's own actions, one must be able to observe them from outside. Thus the identity and the self-concept evaluate how we are perceived by others and help to produce effective communication.

The author offers his views on globalization:

An important part of the process of globalization has to be understood in terms of a movement of people around the world, creating people with multiple identities, or people who can slip in and out of ethnic identities. However, in the age of global information, one does not need to cross frontiers or migrate to other place to be confronted by ideas, customs, values, fashions of other countries (p.20).

Individuals can be readily surrounded by multiple cultures in this new world, and intercultural communication is becoming a familiar matter for every human being. Therefore, intercultural communication might one day be referred to as interpersonal communication if the distance between nations is reduced and geographic borders become meaningless resulting from a globalizing world. Then, intercultural communication would exist in our own homes.

In conclusion, Saint-Jacques suggests that there is a greater need of mutual understanding in this new society and the society should have the generosity to admit individual differences. Individuals will soon be multi-cultural beings, in other words, people may lead their lives irrespective of race, culture, language, age, gender, education, social class, etc. Broad cultural stereotypes can damage intercultural relations. For example, an argument could start if one were to define Japanese society as a "shame society" like Benedict (1946) and Japanese identity as being based on "dependence" like Doi (1981). Both identity and society are constantly changing and thus these terms do not allow for individual or situational variation.

Saint-Jacques' profound knowledge of sociolinguistics and deep insight into human nature offers readers great insight into interaction between identity and communication. It seems reasonable to expect that this paper will fascinate both those interested in and conducting research in the field of intercultural communication.

To conclude our comments, the reviewers would like to borrow suggestions from the fascinating book *Intercultural Communication* (Furuta ed. 1987). Three basic purposes of the study of intercultural communication should be: (1) to nurture a positive attitude towards a deep understanding of cultural differences and develop the means

to cope with globalization through the process of intercultural communication, (2) to train one to become communicatively competent for the purpose of intercultural communication, and (3) to develop the ability to communicate in a variety of intercultural settings including a school or an office to name a few (Translation from Japanese by the reviewers).

REFERENCES

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In honor of Dr. Saint-Jacques,

This short piece is offered as a token of our gratitude to Dr. Saint-Jacques. He retired from Aichi Shukutoku University last spring and returned home to Vancouver, British Columbia in Canada. We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to him for his endearing kindness and support throughout the years. From the very beginning of our graduate career (1991), he has been our academic advisor, and always supported and encouraged our academic growth.

Dr. Saint-Jacques devoted over 30 years of his life to conducting research in Japan on topics including: second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and accomplished remarkable academic achievements in these fields. His long cross-cultural experience in Japan seems to be very well reflected in this paper on identity and communication as well as in all his papers.

We hope Dr. Saint-Jacques will enjoy good health, continue his academic pursuits, and present his work for the enlightenment of a wider audience.

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