

Liu, S., Volcic, Z., & Gallois, C. (2011). *Introducing intercultural communication: Global cultures and contexts*. London: Sage.

Reviewed by: [John Hannon](#)

How do the Cronulla riots link to the mass movements of people arising from globalisation? Are mass media and communication technologies subsuming the world into one global culture, or are they producing new forms of cultural fragmentation? What is culturally universal in language and human communication? This textbook raises such questions by introducing intercultural communication through the dynamic interplay of cultures in a global, local, and political context. This global scope explicitly avoids the Anglo-American perspectives of many existing textbooks on this topic, and the book offers constructive guidance and rich resources that bring theory to practice using examples from pressing national and international issues.

The authors, Shuang Liu, Zala Volcic and Cindy Gallois, bring an interdisciplinary focus to intercultural communication from the Schools of Journalism and Communication, Cultural and Critical Studies, and Psychology at the University of Queensland. Intercultural issues are presented on a world stage? global change through migration and refugees' movements, increasing cultural diversity in nations, intercultural conflict, acculturation, and the local and global effects of technologies. Rather than answer questions or offer definitive critical analyses, the authors present an array of theoretical perspectives and actual contexts that will enable readers - teachers and students - to relate key issues to their own experiences. An eclectic audience is anticipated, encompassing students of sociology, psychology, journalism, media and communication, international studies, politics, business and public relations.

The organisation of the book makes it a potential godsend for a first year lecturer who is introducing intercultural communication to a hypermediated student audience. The structure of each chapter reflects a pattern: a core topic is addressed, interspersed with a Theory corner, Case study, questions for discussion, references and further readings, offering plentiful options for in-depth exploration. This makes the book suited to selective application of one or more chapters to a unit of study. There is a need for this type of internationalised treatment of intercultural communication: the book avoids a narrow, interpersonal focus and an Anglo-centric frame of reference, and extends to global cultural contexts of Europe, Asia and Oceania, presenting issues with their social, historical, sub-cultural and political dimensions. This approach particularly makes sense from an Australian cultural habitus, making the book well-suited to readers comprising one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse societies in the world. The goal of the book is to apply theory to practice: from foundational knowledge to an impetus for action, to enable the reader to become a critical participant in the field and an effective intercultural communicator. With this goal, the authors take up the conundrum of the pervasiveness and relativity of culture: we all view the world through culturally tinted lenses and we rarely take off these cultural glasses (p. 56).

Intercultural communication is developed systematically, with an interdisciplinary focus, and in a theoretically grounded way. The book is structured in three stages: Chapters 1 ? 7 address foundational theory and historical perspectives on culture, communication and identity. From this point, the book shifts to a more pro-active approach, providing analytical tools to complex intercultural issues. Chapters 8 and 9 take up identity formation and interaction between and within groups, and Chapters 10 ? 13 apply understandings from earlier chapters to issues arising from global contexts of conflict, cultural change, and migration, and locate the reader in a context of effective communicative responses to such issues. Besides case studies and references, the chapters offer rich illustrative examples of global intercultural experience. For example, the instability of social identity is illustrated by the Indian-born woman who recounts growing up as a foreigner in Nigeria, being categorised as black in the UK, Asian in the US, and finally as a resident alien in the post-Sept 11 climate.

This systematic and succinct approach to complex subject matter is exemplified in Chapter 6, *Verbal Communication and Culture*. The vast domain of language is introduced through descriptions of linguistic features and differences that are related to issues that have interdisciplinary relevance, including: an exploration of language acquisition through contrasting opposing perspectives of nativist (Chomsky) and constructivist (Piaget); the extent to which language shapes identity and reality; and cultural differences in communication styles, including gender (Lakoff, Tannen). The theory corner segments include Saussure and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

From Chapter 9, the book applies the earlier theoretical foundation to a proactive orientation and the development of analytical skills: developing intercultural relations and managing intercultural conflict, understanding the effects of technology and cultural change, and becoming an effective intercultural communicator. Case studies include: the influence of mass media and new technologies on cultural change through the rise of citizen journalism, conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and the impact of migration in the emergence of a culturally diverse Australia.

There is a risk, in a broad presentation of foundational theoretical perspectives on language, culture and communication that the reader is left with the task of critically resolving loose ends. The risk arises from the presentation of theoretical paradigms in isolation. For example, the reader is left with the implicit essentialism in Hofstede's dimensions of culture in Chapter 5. While the inclusion of Hofstede is important in a foundational treatment of intercultural relations, there is the possibility that the student reader will adopt uncritically Hofstede's understanding of cultures through a set of dualisms. Particular cultures may then be viewed as expressing fixed,

encoded attributes - for example, Asian" cultures are collectivist. In a global perspective on intercultural communication, there is a need for approaches that go beyond Hofstede's east-west binaries. While the book does address issues such as cultural hybridization (p. 268) as a new cultural form of global to local adaptation, it does not foreground a strong theoretical basis for approaching intercultural communication as a hybrid or third space, in which interlocutors negotiate a new, common identity.

Notwithstanding, this book does offer a solid foundation for developing an understanding of intercultural communication, with a practical orientation that aims to equip the reader with skills for analysing and solving intercultural problems arising in local and global contexts. The final case study demonstrates a type of intercultural action in response to globalised conflict and humanitarian crisis. The borderless ethos and strategy of large-scale, organised action adopted by (Doctors without Borders) is an apt expression of the intercultural interdependence of globalised economics and politics. This case study takes intercultural communication beyond the focus on interpersonal encounters and communication breakdowns that comprise much of this literature, and adroitly captures the theme of this book, the dialectic between globalisation and cultural fragmentation.

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