Intercultural Ethics

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Within the field of intercultural communication, as originally conceived, people from different national cultures have conventionally been regarded as communicating on the basis of different sets of attitudes, beliefs, and values (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). When a person from one culture starts to speak with a person from another culture, often—but not always—by means of a foreign language which both share, they have to position themselves with regard to that person's set of values, or "cultural frame of reference" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 39). It is in this context that interest in intercultural ethics has arisen, not only because people from different cultures are considered to think and behave in different ways, but also because the way in which one orients oneself towards the attitudes, beliefs, and values of a person from another culture demands an ethically informed position. Intercultural ethics have often been understood as relating to "principles of conduct that help govern the behaviour of individuals or groups" (Paige & Martin, 1996, p. 36). This remains a widely held perception, but it is also a particular, regulatory idea of ethics which, while useful as a general referential frame, is perhaps not well suited to conceptualizing the complexity of ethics as they are lived out in intercultural relations. As the field of intercultural communication has matured, this conception has been placed under greater scrutiny, leading to ethics being retheorized ~~in intercultural communication~~ and to proposals being made for a new understanding of ethics to be incorporated within the field.

Principles of behavior

It is often assumed in the field of intercultural communication that people from different cultures should make the effort to communicate with one another, whoever and wherever they are. However, both the desire to communicate and the act of communicating with a person from another culture are things that cannot just be taken for granted, but are themselves ethically informed positions. For example, while the desire to communicate and reach understanding is often commonplace within educational contexts, it remains more problematic within political contexts, particularly in the international sphere, where the unspoken promise of international political relations has always been that of having to deal with a culturally "foreign" other with whom communication is not straightforward, and entails a certain negotiation of cultural expectations and assumptions. Furthermore, there may be grounds for withholding communication completely

from a person or group whose beliefs and actions appear to transgress certain human values which are perceived as universal. To communicate with some person or political group that departs from the normative political and ethical codes to which one subscribes as a member of one's own culture is seen to entail a certain "openness," "flexibility," and "fluidity"; not to communicate on the other hand entails a certain "closure," "rigidity," and "sedimentation."

Yet, even within educational contexts such as the school, the college, and the university, the act of communicating with someone from another culture requires adopting an ethical position. Not least, this relates to ownership of the language in which the act of communication takes place. For at least 30 years after the end of World War II, the default understanding of communication across cultures was of one person who was a native speaker being in communication with an interlocutor who was not a native speaker. The idea of the native speaker itself was based on a privileging of the linguistic competence of an imaginary, ideal speaker of a particular nationality. The recent popularity of the idea that English has become the global lingua franca has only served to perpetuate this ideal. On this model the native speaker (so conceived) has a surplus of power and ownership of the language, while the nonnative speaker (who by comparison with the native speaker of English, for example, may be a speaker of several different languages) is conceived as being in deficit. The idea of the "intercultural speaker" was introduced principally to challenge the notion that there is some superior competence which is maintained by a hypostatized first language speaker (Kramsch, 1998). The conception of the intercultural speaker has now become commonplace in the field, but it also implies that interaction between people who speak different languages is not just a matter of exchanging information effectively, but also of establishing and maintaining human relationships in much the same way as one would with someone speaking one's own language. This then opens up the possibility that intercultural communication involves creating and maintaining a principled, interhuman relationship with one's interlocutor. The implications of this position led to proposals for new competences according to which the ethical aspect of the relationship between intercultural speakers might be performed and assessed. For example, one competence which seems relevant to an intercultural ethics is Byram's (1997) "savoir être," which he sets out as one of a number of "savoirs"—or competences—in intercultural communication for describing the attitudes of the intercultural speaker. The competence of savoir être leads to the ethical position of "relativizing one's self and valuing the other" (Byram, 1997, p. 32). However, while the savoirs incorporate an ethically informed stance towards intercultural communication, they are based on the idea of a rational, autonomous and self-governing speaker, and therefore lie in some tension with more recent arguments for an intercultural ethics in which the autonomy and self-government of the intercultural speaker are contested. These various positions are set out below.

Communication between people from different cultures—understood in the geopolitical sense—also takes place when a person is staying for a period of time in a different country or region. This happens, for example, when a student is studying abroad either on an exchange scheme or for the purposes of completing a study program delivered in another country—often in a language which is not their mother tongue; when a person

is working overseas for a multinational corporation; or when a person moves more permanently, or migrates, to another country or region either to earn a living or to avoid danger or persecution. All three of these intercultural situations have ethical implications for the "stranger" and the "host." These have been outlined with varying degrees of explicitness in the literature on intercultural communication, and are again necessitated by some of the competences which Byram proposes in his savoirs. Certainly, the student on a study abroad program has some obligation to be curious, open, and ready "to suspend disbelief with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours" (Byram, 1997, p. 34). The principle of respectful curiosity is in fact foregrounded in many of the pedagogic activities which take place around a study abroad program. On programs for international students, the expectation of all students to produce academic work which is both "original" and "critical" is also more than simply a set of skills, and entails them developing a certain academic code of ethical behavior in relation to the task at hand.

With respect to working in a different country or region, there are obligations on the parts of both the worker and the manager which exceed the demands of mere productivity-related performance. Examples of these have recently been set out in the UK's *National Occupational Standards for Intercultural Working* (Centre for Information for Language Teachers, 2008). On the part of the intercultural employee, one unit, or set of competences, relates to building and maintaining working relationships with people from different countries or diverse cultures. For example, one of the performance criteria for this unit is to recognize how one's use of language, body language, gestures, and tone of voice may appear to other people from different countries or diverse cultures; another is to take account of key differences and similarities in working practices, values, and attitudes of the countries or cultures involved in intercultural working. There are obligations also for the intercultural employer or manager. In the occupational standards these are set out as performance criteria, but they also entail powerful ethical expectations. For example, with respect to managing an intercultural team, intercultural managers are expected to apply equality of opportunity to all team members and make sure no team members are excluded from any work-based or nonwork-based team activities on grounds of race or cultural background. Furthermore, managers of intercultural teams are obliged to challenge any stereotypes, prejudice, or racism expressed about team members.

While the term intercultural training often refers to the preparation of employees in international corporations or businesses for living and working in a different country, it is used here to refer to the wide range of programs that are developed to prepare people for any of the situations outlined above, whether commercial or educational. The central aspect that has been highlighted with respect to intercultural training is the deep-seated change that it is claimed can take place in the mind or consciousness of the participant as a result of such programs. Through the use of competence-based training, it is argued that trainees can be helped to adapt to communicate effectively across cultures through a transformation which takes place in their ways of thinking, ways of feeling and ways of behaving (Ting-Toomey, 2010, p. 21). Going further than this, engagement with a different culture is said to lead to radical forms of adaptation taking place as the intercultural sojourner encounters people from a different culture. In this process, the boundaries between the diverse participants are broken down so that the sojourner achieves a new,

hybrid identity which is able to incorporate and engage holistically in the aesthetic and emotional experiences of self and other (Kim, 2005, pp. 395–396). Against such a transformational ethics it has been argued that the implicit assumption within intercultural training approaches of wishing to create coherent intercultural identities would seem to imply a movement towards a certain oneness, holism, or shared universal subjecthood within intercultural communication, one which in time would eliminate the diversity which attends people from different cultures. Taken to its logical conclusion, it also acts against the very principle of respect for difference on which the field of intercultural communication was founded and subsists (MacDonald & O'Regan, 2013).

The ethical issues surrounding the figures of the refugee and migrant have also been keenly contested, particularly in Europe and North America in the light of global events in the past two decades. On the one hand, the migrant is increasingly expected to adopt the civic values of the host country, and also to obey the legal framework which applies. Like the peripatetic intercultural worker, the migrant may also undergo a process of challenge and change as he or she engages in becoming an "intercultural citizen," as can occur when people from different cultures engage in social and political activity together—particularly where such activity is founded on democratic practices and values. On the other hand, within any liberal democratic society, the host nation is also obligated to respect and even protect the rights of migrants to maintain their own language(s), practice their own religion, and follow their own customs and mores. However, it is here that certain practices—such as female genital mutilation, wearing of the niqab, arranged marriages, and overt displays of religious affiliation (e.g., wearing a "burkini" on the beach, or displaying religious symbols in the workplace)—have clashed prominently in recent times with the normative ethical precepts of the liberal nation state.

The a priori ethical relation

In the contexts of intercultural communication outlined above, the aims of the intercultural refugee, the intercultural sojourner, the intercultural trainee, and the transcultural migrant have been set out mainly in terms of a series of skills or competences, which have ethical implications with regard to the principles underlying their execution. However, an alternative perspective on intercultural ethics has been put forward more recently which challenges this view on a number of fronts.

First of all, approaches to intercultural communication from a competence-based approach tend to assume that cultures and cultural groups are clearly delineated. These have conventionally been based on sets of characteristics which are ascribed to societies homologous with certain nation states, or they might attribute sets of attitudes and behaviors to more loosely defined cultural groups such as indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, or refugees from a particular conflict zone. This one-size-fits-all view of intercultural communication is problematic since it ignores the specifically situated nature of all forms of communication. Second, this approach is based on a rather schematic view of the ways in which communication—and relationships—take place between human beings. It prioritizes the separateness, individuality, and rationality of

human beings to which it subordinates the ethical dimension of human experience. More contemporary accounts draw on continental philosophy to argue that the ethical relationship between human beings is prior, and that it is this ethical relation that gives rise to the communication which takes place between human beings, rather than the techniques and strategies by which it is carried out. In other words, the ethical relation between self and other—and realized principally by language—is always already prior to one's being: it underwrites the interhuman relation, and is not simultaneous with an individual, autonomous, and rational self that articulates "principles of conduct" for communication and human behavior "in the moment". The proposal that intercultural communication be viewed as derived from a fundamentally a priori ethical relationship between self and other has given rise more recently to a focus on the ethical precepts of tolerance, hospitality, and responsibility.

Tolerance is a concept which is used within the field of both intercultural communication and multiculturalism not only as an ethical precept, but also as a cognitive attribute or a criterion of performance. The idea of tolerance emerged from the Enlightenment in 17th-century Europe as a moral virtue associated with the idea of cosmopolitanism. For people of different races to live side by side, it was necessary for them to be able to recognize each other's distinctive attitudes, beliefs, and values as well as their behaviors, and regard them with respect. From this conception, tolerance has been developed in intercultural communication studies as a widely mentioned characteristic of a person who can communicate effectively across cultures. In this respect, tolerance is not just an aspect of ethical behavior, but also a criterion of effectiveness in intercultural communication. However, tolerance also has its limitations (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). First of all, tolerance emanates from an imbalance of power between the person, or society, who is doing the tolerating and the person or population who is being tolerated. It is often the sovereign state, representing the dominant national group, which offers a position of tolerance, or regulated acceptance, towards a minority population. In this situation, the act of tolerance serves to maintain the exercise of power by the state over the minority group. In this respect, tolerance can also be seen as a form of sufferance, or charity, towards the foreigner or stranger, in which tolerance is realized as a constrained and circumscribed relationship with the other, whose difference remains under surveillance and scrutiny (Ferri, 2014).

Rather like tolerance, at its most straightforward the concept of responsibility has been proposed as an aspect of intercultural ethics which entails respecting the point of view, values and behaviors of other people who are different from oneself. The notion of responsibility within the field of intercultural communication was initially introduced within the context of a project which aimed at developing a set of competences for professional mobility within Europe and further afield (ICOPROMO, in Guilherme, Keating, & Hoppe, 2010). In so doing, the project attempted to go beyond the purely communicative aspects of intercultural competence in order to address the nature of the relationships which are formed between people from different cultures who are working together in professional contexts. To this end they articulated a vision of competence which was based on the notion of intercultural responsibility. This conception starts with coworkers becoming aware of the respect which the members of team or group coming from different ethnic backgrounds should have for each other and the

mutual responsibility which this entails. In other words, participants in intercultural working are responsible for maintaining the coherence of their intercultural practice and exchange. Within this context of intercultural working, coherence thus emerges as a key factor in the development of intercultural responsibility, and associated traits such as empathy and solidarity. However, while this account of responsibility exhibits a welcome concern for the ethical aspects of intercultural working, in absolute terms the concept remains constrained by a certain practical functionality issuing from the demands of workplace-based applications.

In contrast to the concept of responsibility, the ethical relation between self and other is critically reconfigured in intercultural communication through the notion of the *praxis of hospitality* (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). In this account, hospitality is used as a metaphorical description of the relationship between self and other, derived from the way in which one can traditionally welcome the traveller or foreigner into one's home and give him or her shelter and sustenance. However, hospitality also applies literally and very presently to the figure of the migrant, who once again is featuring prominently within the European and global landscape; as well as to the host family, or the "internationalized" university. There are two orders of hospitality which are in tension with each other: conditional hospitality and absolute hospitality. The first order conventionally takes place when the host places restrictions on what the guest can do within their home, and insists that they reveal their name, or identity. One example of conditional hospitality has been evidenced in the surge in migration from the 2011 Syrian conflict into a Europe gripped with a fear of terrorist outrage. By contrast, absolute hospitality occurs when the host lets the guest into his or her home without expecting anything in return and, crucially, without even asking their name. In this respect, the host welcomes the guest without reducing the distance, or separation, that is maintained between the self and other. While absolute hospitality remains unachievable, on this argument both orders of hospitality remain potentially realizable, and their possibility creates a tension—with the guest or stranger being positioned between freedom and restraint.

The practice of absolute hospitality, then, entails the host being in an a priori ethical relation to the guest, stranger, or sojourner. This is articulated as being a relationship of responsibility which is of a different order from the form of intercultural responsibility which aims to achieve coherence in the workplace. While the version of responsibility arising from workplace-based models aims to achieve coherence, unity, and uniform practice, this radical account of responsibility maintains a relation of separateness, difference, and alterity as establishing the ethical ground for the relation with the other. It involves going beyond mere tolerance or respect for a person from another culture to engaging with him or her openly as an irreducible other, whose otherness is the condition of the ethical relation (Levinas, 2007). Absolute hospitality precludes laying down a set of rules or a code of conduct for either the host or the guest to follow, but assumes an ethics which is always "to come." The host approaches the guest unconditionally, in an open affirmation of the guest's otherness. A radical relation of responsibility is nonreciprocal. While traditionally the relationship between the host and the guest has been conceived of as one of exchange, in which the guest offers a gift in exchange for the proffered hospitality, on this argument the relationship between the host and the

guest is incalculable. The host welcomes the guest into his or her home and expects nothing in return. Thus, a radical view of responsibility as the cornerstone of an intercultural ethics goes beyond an approach to intercultural communication based on a set of competences derived from empirical research into the attitudes, beliefs, and values which inform the communication strategies of those from another culture, however principled these might be; or which seeks to propose a set of rules to follow for successful intercultural communication to take place, and sets of criteria according to which successful communication might be measured. From a radical perspective, the intercultural encounter entails encountering the other on his or her own terms, without invitation, expectation, or prior knowledge. It is in the openness of the intercultural encounter that the a priori ethical relation is invoked.

We have already seen that the movement to achieve a universal subjecthood through intercultural training carries the implication of breaking down the differences between people, which if achieved or achievable, would result in one, integrated, universal subjecthood, or consciousness—an intercultural holism. A relation of responsibility exercised under the condition of absolute hospitality, in contrast, would maintain the difference between self and other as a fundamental condition of humanness. In this respect, the essence of being human resides, not in an ethically informed ontology which posits a self who engages autonomously in principled behavior towards the other, but in an ethics of being which underwrites human communication by positing a self who is who he or she is through his or her irreducible relationship with the other. At the core of this position is the idea that the essence of being human lies in the difference that lies between us, and that breaking down this difference is neither desirable nor possible.

Two approaches to intercultural ethics

This overview of intercultural ethics suggests that there are two prevalent approaches towards understanding the ethics of intercultural engagement. These are at once ethically informed positions, and positions which are informed by their own version of ethics. On the one hand there is a position which derives from an overarching scientific rationality and methodology. This draws on empirical analyses to suggest that human beings to some degree exhibit commonalities—not just in the language(s) they speak but also in their attitudes, beliefs, and values—which characterize them as being members of a particular "culture." In order to improve communication between members of one culture and members of another culture, it is necessary to develop a range of knowledge and strategies which will guide one's intercultural communicative practice. This range of knowledge and strategies can itself be evaluated and has given rise to the great number of competence frameworks which have been developed. While the techniques, methodologies, and assessment regimes of this polarity themselves have ethical implications, the view of ethics to which this position subscribes is broadly commensurate with that outlined at the beginning of this chapter—ethics as a code of conduct.

The starting point of the other polarity towards intercultural communication is the praxis of being—and speaking—with another person in a particular place at a particular time. On this argument, the relationship with the other person itself is always

already an ethical relationship. This position acknowledges that individuals can have conventionalized relationships with other social groups, or communities of praxis, but that these are multiple—including family, profession, homeland, religion—and that neither the communicative practices of any one person, nor their ways of thinking, can be reducible at any one moment to membership of holistic social constructs such as nationality and faith. This approach views the intercultural speaker in his or her singularity rather than generality, and eschews scientific rationality and associated methodologies. Rather than positing a set of assessable procedures as the basis of acquiring intercultural competence, this approach proposes as its foundation a set of ethical principles for communication with the other such as equality, openness, and the infinite responsibility of unconditional hospitality.

SEE ALSO: Communication, Acculturation, and Cross-Cultural Adaptation; Cosmopolitanism, Critical-Postcolonial Perspective; Critical Approaches to Identity; Cross-Cultural Competence; Discourse of Difference; Identity, Poststructuralist Approaches; Intercultural Communication Training, Overview; Othering and Otherness; Postmodernism; Transculturality

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