

# 3 Performativity Principle

‘The Deed Is Everything’



**Key Theme:** Action

**Problem Question:** How do people deal with uncertainty in intercultural communication?

**Objective:** To help you understand how intercultural communication is performed

**Key Concepts:** Activity, action, artifact, axiology, chronemics, constitutive, culture shock, environment, ethnography, ‘face,’ ‘facework,’ frame, haptics, hermeneutic circle, hospitality, hostipitality, *katajjaq*, kinesics, language, ‘language game,’ monochronic, operation, paralinguistic, pragmatic, proxemics, performativity, polychronic, representational, ritual, semantics, syntactics, *ubuntu*.

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## 1 Introducing the Problem Question

In the previous chapter, we saw how our search for knowledge takes place against the background of uncertainty. At the same time, inherent uncertainty of communication makes it possible for people from different cultures to look for meaning. Now we need to discuss how people find their way out of uncertainty, creating a shared order.

In this chapter, thus, we take up the following Problem Question: ‘How do people deal with uncertainty in intercultural communication?’

## 2 Language as Representation

**Language** is commonly defined as a means of communication; typically, it is identified with verbal language, e.g., the English language. However, nonverbal means can also be viewed as language. So, when discussing intercultural interactions, we’ll take language to be both verbal and nonverbal.

### 2.1 Verbal Language

Verbal language can be spoken or written.

The basic elements of spoken language are distinctive sounds or phonemes. In this respect, “knowing a language means knowing what sounds are in that language and what sounds are not” (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993, p. 4). For instance, for people from some cultures, such as Russian, the English phoneme ‘the’ (as in ‘thing’ or ‘this’) is not a distinct sound because they do not differentiate between ‘th’ and ‘z’ pronouncing both ‘z’ or ‘th’ with an ‘s’ sound. As a result, such words as, for instance, ‘thong’ and ‘song’ are pronounced by people from those cultures the same way, with the sound ‘s’; naturally, this may create problems in communication. Therefore, learning a foreign language as a step toward successful intercultural communication must begin with mastering the sound system of that language, i.e., learning to hear and pronounce new sounds.

The basic elements of written language include distinct graphic characters. Just like sounds or phonemes, they help people to differentiate between meanings; for example, the difference between ‘cat’ and ‘mat’ is only one written character. Written characters, like phonemes, are symbolic creations and can represent sounds as in phonetic writing, e.g., the English language, or ideas associated with objects as in ideographic writing, e.g., the Chinese and Japanese languages. Chinese and Japanese written characters might look strange to people whose language is English, posing a challenge to intercultural communication.

These basic elements of language combine to form morphemes, which allow us to not only differentiate between meanings but express meanings by themselves, e.g., ‘-ed’ has the meaning of past tense in ‘walked,’ while ‘-un’ has the negative meaning in ‘unsuccessful.’ Morphemes are used to form words that form the central element of language. Whenever we learn a new language, we learn new words. Even when two cultures seem to share the

same language, though, different words can refer to the same object as in the U.S. and British variants of English, e.g., ‘French fries’ vs ‘chips.’

## 2.2 *Nonverbal Language*

Nonverbal language is a “silent language” (Hall, 1959) and consists of elements other than verbal (spoken or written) signs.

**Paralanguage** refers to all meaningful sound or graphic characteristics that are not phonemes or graphemes, such as rate, volume, pitch, color, or font; these nonverbal elements are used alongside language. For example, it is noted that “Middle Easterners speak loudly because they associate volume with strength and sincerity” while “Filipinos . . . speak softly: they associate speaking softly with education and good manners” (Martin & Chaney, 2006, p. 59). Such cultural differences in volume of speech may have an impact on intercultural interactions.

**Kinesics** refers to body movements such as gestures and facial expressions. These nonverbal elements seem to be natural; yet, like any language, they are symbolic creations and vary from culture to culture. Based on the research done by Ray Birdwhistell (1970) and Paul Ekman (1957), such types of kinesics are identified as emblems, illustrators, affective displays, regulators, and adaptors, covered in most intercultural communication texts (e.g. Dunn & Goodnight, 2020). For example, the emblem ring gesture (thumb and forefinger in a circle) to people in the United States is an OK gesture. However, “things certainly would not be ‘A-OK’ if the ring gesture were used in cultures that attached other meanings to it” (Knapp & Hall, 1997, p. 258). This gesture “indicates ‘you’re worth zero’ in France and Belgium; ‘money’ in Japan; ‘asshole’ in parts of southern Italy; and in Greece and Turkey it is an insulting or vulgar sexual invitation” (Knapp & Hall, 1997, p. 258).

**Proxemics** refers to the use of space in communication. The basic elements of proxemics are spatial zones—distances between people who communicate with one another. Usually, four main spatial zones are isolated: intimate, personal, social, and public (Hall, 1966). These distances vary in different cultures, with elaborate regularities of practice about how closely people may stand to one another in lines, in elevators, etc. When people from different cultures meet, their spatial zones often clash, for example, Arab men are more accustomed to close face-to-face contact than American men who may find closeness intimidating. A more uncommon, though interesting, example is one of the Amish and Anglo-Saxon cultures that have different ideas about how closely teenagers can stand to powerful equipment. The Anglo-Saxon lawmakers try to prohibit teenagers from working near dangerous machines, e.g., in sawmills or farming, while many Amish groups say that such laws threaten a cornerstone of their culture with its tradition of “learning by doing” (Jordan, 2003).

**Haptics** refers to the use of touch in communication. Different cultures vary as far as who touches whom, where, when, and how. People in the United States, for example, are said to be touch-deprived, with one of the

lowest rates of the use of touch in the world (Jandt, 2001, p. 117). When people from other cultures, e.g., Mediterranean, come to the United States, the way they use touch is sometimes perceived as inappropriate and may even lead to sexual harassment charges. There is a wonderful documentary film entitled *Mystery of Senses—Touch* (1995) in which Diane Ackerman, a series host and naturalist, explores how touch contributes to our physical and psychological well-being. She also discusses cultural perspectives on touch in social taboos, hugging, and kissing.

**Chronemics** refers to the use of time in communication. The basic elements of chronemics are periods or moments of time as conceptualized by people from different cultures. How long something lasts, when something takes place, the relative importance of past, present, or future—all these factors are part of chronemics. For example, many people (often, parents) in India decide on wedding dates after consulting Hindu priests who compare astrological readings and determine compatibility for the prospective bride and groom (Wang, 2003). This practice may pose a challenge to a couple where a bride is from India and a groom is from another culture or vice versa. Two main conceptualizations of time are usually isolated—monochronic and polychronic (Hall, 1959). Cultures with the **monochronic** time orientation emphasize “schedules, the compartmentalization and segmentation of measurable units of time,” while cultures with the **polychronic** orientation see “time as much less tangible” and stress “involvement of people and the completion of tasks” (Neuliep, 2000, p. 122).

**Environment** refers to such natural elements of environment as physical landscape, temperature, or humidity that affect the way people communicate. People do not actually use the natural elements of environment; rather, people are affected by such elements, and one can only try and adjust to them. For example, a person born and raised in Hawaii may find it difficult adapting to a culture with a cold climate, e.g., Finland. As a result, s/he may find people there more cold and reserved, with a low level of self-disclosure.

**Artifacts** refer to any objects created and used by people for a specific purpose, such as clothing, vehicles, tools, or burial objects (Figure 3.1).

As the name suggests, artifacts are artificial creations with symbolic meaning. Obviously, “like any other kinds of nonverbal communication, artifacts’ meanings vary across cultures” (Wood, 2000, p. 103) and play an important role in intercultural interactions. For example, in Egypt, tensions between the Coptic minority and Muslim majority found their manifestation in two competing bumper stickers. Those who identified with the Coptic identity used the fish as a symbol of their Christianity; the Muslims responded with the shark (Michael, 2003).

Both verbal and nonverbal languages can be conceptualized as codes—systems of signs that represent meaning. Codes “provide the rules which generate signs as concrete occurrences in communicative intercourse” (Eco, 1979, p. 49); in this light, a sign in any language cannot mean anything unless embedded in a recognized and commonly practiced code.

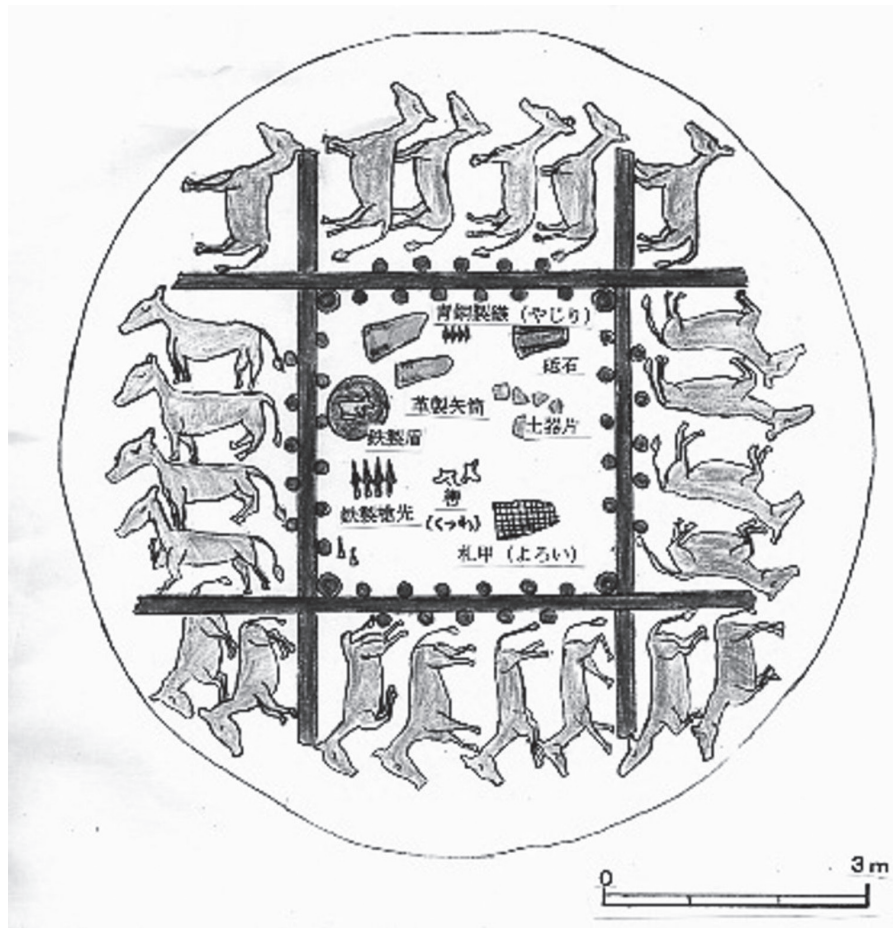


Figure 3.1 Horse burials and artifacts of Kostromskaya, Russia Source: Public domain

When viewed as code, language is understood as representing a clear picture of reality. The **representational** view of language in the western European tradition goes back to Aristotle who stated: “the letters are signs of sounds, the sounds are signs of mental experiences, and these are signs of things” (*De Interpretatione* 1, 16a3–8). This view is manifested in the works of many linguists. For instance, Ferdinand de Saussure, a famous Swiss linguist, wrote that language “in its essential principle, is a nomenclature, that is, a list of terms corresponding to things” (Saussure, 1986, p. 65); here, by ‘terms’ we understand any signs—verbal and nonverbal, and by ‘things’—objects, events, situations, ideas, or states of affairs. It is such language that the members of the British Royal Society had in mind when they envisioned “a world where people would speak of things as they really were . . . in plain language as clear as glass—so many words for so many things” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 795).

As code, spoken language at the basic level is made up of sounds; language of gestures is made up of elementary movements of various body parts; language of music is made up of notes, and so on. The list of such basic elements is finite. However, we are able to create an infinite number of combinations



of these basic elements, using them for various purposes: for instance, we can chat with our friends or write a poem, we can send a message of attraction with our eyes, or we can compose a symphony. We do this by putting words together into sentences, and sentences form texts and discourse: it is the ‘appositions’ of differences between and among words in the sentence that are the primary drivers of expressed meaning.

Communication, therefore, involves more than just language elements and what they stand for: we shouldn’t forget those who actually use such elements in various situations of interaction. For instance, the word ‘dog’ (that appears in other languages in the form of different sounds or written characters) designates “a domesticated carnivorous mammal, *Canis familiaris*, raised in a wide variety of breeds and probably originally derived from several wild species” (Morris, 1982, p. 388). When actually used by people from different cultures, though, the word ‘dog’ may be interpreted as a faithful companion (in most cultures) or as part of cuisine (in some cultures) or metaphorically in English as “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” (age has its privileges), “the tail that wags the dog” (misplaced priorities), and so on. Such common metaphorical references are interesting and perhaps the most difficult to learn and appropriately apply when studying a foreign language. Language as a means of communication requires not only the knowledge of *what* elements designate and *how* they are combined, but also *why* they are used by people in particular contexts.

Thus, whereas the view of language as representation is focused on **semantics**, or correspondences between language signs and what they stand for, and **syntactics**, or the formal arrangements of language signs, the view of language as game highlights its **pragmatic** aspect focusing on “how to do things with words” (Austin, 1975)—and nonverbals.

### 3 How to do Things with Words—and Nonverbals

We see, then, that we cannot fully understand the nature of language expressions if we only view them as supposedly objective pictures of reality. Language is not simply an abstract system of ‘terms’ that refer to ‘things,’ and meaning is not an objective property of language. The meaning of language (whether verbal or nonverbal) can never be limited to its fixed definition, as if it were a picture reflecting reality; language must be examined in a specific context of use. We use language to engage in various practical activities with others.

It is crucial to remember, therefore, that “language does not exist by itself in a static system of definitions and syntax, but is intimately caught up in our activities and practices” (Blair, 2006, p. 8). It is in such activities that language comes alive and reveals its nature as a living organism. Ludwig Wittgenstein, an Austrian-born philosopher who is regarded by many as the greatest philosopher of the 20th century, called such activities ‘**language games**’ (1953). The concept of ‘language-game’ was introduced by Wittgenstein to explore the nature of language more fully by going beyond its representational view.

Hence, “‘game’ is not a negative or trivializing term” (Anderson & Ross, 2002, p. 156); instead, language games need to be viewed as dynamic structures created by people for accomplishing various tasks. It is important to emphasize that a language game is not a contest in which one wins and another loses. We do not play language games *against* someone, we play them *with* someone.

Wittgenstein emphasizes that innumerable activities can be considered language games, as long as the contexts of their use are similar, forming ‘family resemblances,’ such as reporting something, telling a story, making a joke, being ironic, criticizing, objecting, guessing, joking, or greeting. There is one crucial thing that language games have in common: “they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all ‘language’” (Wittgenstein, 1953, §65). Therefore, the nature of language is inherently relational: every language game is a result of relations between different people who use language in this or that context. Consider Wittgenstein’s description of a primitive language in which there are only four words and each represents a certain object:

Let us imagine a language . . . meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones . . . in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose, they use a language consisting of the words “block”, “pillar”, “slab”, “beam”. A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learned to bring at such and such a call. Conceive this as a complete primitive language.

(Wittgenstein, 1953, §2)

As we can see, this language game is based not only on each word referring to an object but, more importantly, on a relationship between a builder A and an assistant B, the latter doing something at the call of the former. In other words, language is not simply a unidirectional way in which ‘terms’ correspond to ‘things’ but also a bidirectional way in which one person calls another and that other person responds. While Wittgenstein focused on verbal language, his ideas apply as well to nonverbal language. Consider a simple example of

how a student in class, John, might successfully communicate, by coughing, that he wants the attention of another student, Mary. First, he uses a distinct vocal (but not verbal) sign exhibiting rhythm and intonation . . . semanticised (i.e. the meaning of the cough in this instance) as a sociolinguistic norm (in John’s community, as is elsewhere, coughing is used to attract attention discretely). Moreover, he followed appropriate turn-taking rules (John waited until Mary had finished taking notes to be sure she would hear).

(Boylan, 2002, p. 169)

We can also view dance as a language game: this form of nonverbal communication and social organization has existed since the times of Australopithecines (Hanna, 1987). Music, like dance, goes back in time and, like dance, due to its rhythmic nature, it provided the early humans with an evolutionary advantage (Mithen, 2006). A very interesting example is *katajjaq*—a traditional Inuit throat singing, when two women face each other and perform a duet that sounds like a musical battle. There is a fascinating short film called *Throat Singing Kangirsuk*, screened at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival, that shows this wonderful language game.

### 3.1 *Language Rules*

Whenever we engage in various language games, we do so according to cultural rules or norms that “allow us to organize and coordinate our lives. They create order out of chaos, uncertainty, and confusion. Football, flirting, solitaire, business meetings, and even friendships are guided by different sets of formal or informal rules” (Anderson & Ross, 2002, p. 152). Language rules make it possible for people from one culture to interact “in ways that would be confusing to someone who is just learning the language, or just entering the culture” (Anderson & Ross, 2002, p. 153). The more we are able to act according to such rules, the more coordinated our language games are.

All language rules are followable, prescriptive, and contextual. First, every rule is followable, i.e., understandable and accessible enough for people to adhere to it: “communication scholars associate rules with actions rather than motions, and actions and behaviors that one may choose to perform; hence a rule must be capable of being followed” (Shimanoff, 1980, p. 39). Second, every rule is prescriptive, for it tells us what must be done to follow it or, by the same token, what will happen if you do not follow it. For instance, in Russian Orthodox churches a woman must cover her head with a scarf and everybody must remain standing during service; those who do not follow these prescribed rules may be looked upon with disapproval. Third, every rule is contextual because it can be interpreted only in a particular situation. For example, it is appropriate to tell jokes in certain contexts, e.g., at a party; at a funeral, however, joke-telling is not appropriate and interpreted as insensitive.

People create meanings within certain constraints. For example, every language has a system of basic sounds at people’s disposal, and people engage in language games using those sounds only. People use certain gestures because of the basic shape and size of their body. At this basic level, language constraints seem fixed in place and not subject to any change. However, even these language elements may change if they fail to meet people’s needs. Nothing prevents people from using different sounds or gestures if they decide to play new games that can no longer be performed with the help of the old system of sounds or gestures. Nothing, in principle, prevents people from creating new rules as long as they are followable, prescriptive, and contextual. In this sense, language must be viewed as a constant process of creating and overcoming



constraints or breaking rules creatively. All cultural meanings, therefore, are created based on rules; such “rules are called constitutive because they ‘constitute,’ or make up, people’s inner sense of meaning” (Anderson & Ross, 2002, p. 155). The **constitutive** view of language posits “that the elements of communication, rather than being fixed in advance, are reflexively constituted within the act of communication itself” (Craig, 2001, p.128).

According to the constitutive view,

language does not derive its significance from reporting information about an independent reality and conveying it from one person (encoding it) to another (decoding it). Rather, it is a social phenomenon, embedded in wider contexts of actions or lifeworld(s). Meaning, use, action, life cannot be separated if there is to be any communication and language . . . the content of speech can only be understood in terms of the action which the speech performs. Speech (and writing) are used to effect, produce, achieve, and mean things.

(Ma, 2004, p. 103)

Broadly speaking, communication is all about “how to do things with words” (Austin, 1975)—and nonverbals. It must now be clear that language is not only representational but also constitutive: “it is the way humans construct or bring-into-being the worlds that we inhabit” (Stewart, 1998, p. 34). In this sense, intercultural communication can be viewed as a process of carrying cultural meanings of our identity into effect. It is crucial to understand that “a performative position questions the position that a strategy represents in an already given reality. And instead argues the point that strategy as a concept only comes into existence through the doing of a strategy” (Mathiesen & Abdallah, 2016, p. 42).

You may have noticed that we have discussed language in such terms as ‘game,’ ‘doing,’ ‘action,’ and ‘performance.’ Indeed, the overall process of using language is performance, and “performance is an important way of both knowing and being. In other words, performances are a means to knowing about experiences and they are also ways that we define our personal, social, and cultural identities” (Wood, 2000, p. 122). It is through performing actions that people deal with uncertainty in intercultural communication.

#### **4 Introducing the Performativity Principle**

Let’s now formulate, based on the discussion above, the third principle of intercultural communication—the Performativity Principle. We will isolate three parts that make up this principle. Each deals with creating and enacting meaning in intercultural communication. First, we will discuss the dramaturgy of intercultural performativity, or how people move from rules to roles; next, we will present intercultural communication as a reiterative process; finally, we will discuss the relationship between performativity and

hospitality. We will discuss each part separately and then formulate the Performativity Principle, as a whole.

#### **4.1 *The Dramaturgy of Performativity: From Rules to Roles***

Every act of communication is performance as people face one another—either literally or in a mediated fashion, e.g., via the phone or the Internet. This way, people present themselves—their very identities—to one another.

The dramaturgical view of communication does not suggest that when they perform actions, people are insincere or deceitful. The premise of this view is that “people are not, originally and in some factlike way, ‘mothers,’ ‘surgeons,’ or ‘crazy.’ Instead, they are cast into these roles by themselves and by others” (Brown, 1977, p. 199). In other words, all such roles are created by people themselves in the process of communication. No matter how mundane a situation of interaction might be, such as a casual conversation with a friend, it is performance—a process of playing a certain role and presenting one’s ‘face’ to create a certain impression of oneself.

The concept of ‘**face**’ refers to any aspects of our cultural identity presented to others: “insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” (Goffman, 1959, p. 13). Our cultural ‘face’ includes all meanings with which we identify and want to present it accordingly. Naturally, people from other cultures want to present their ‘face’ according to their goals. Hence, intercultural communication can be seen as ‘**face-work**’ an elaborate process of people from different cultures presenting their identities to one another. Many iterations of facework strategies have been noted, “including: *face-negotiating, face-constituting, face-compensating, face-honoring, face-saving, face-threatening, face-building, face-protecting, face-depreciating, face-giving, face-restoring, and face-neutral*” (Fletcher, 2016; original emphasis). Through all these strategies, roles are enacted and impressions of identities managed. There is a special theory—Identity Management Theory—that discusses how cultural identities are revealed through the presentation of ‘face’ and how “intercultural communication competence involves successfully managing face” (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 120). For instance, when managing embarrassing situations, people from Hong Kong and Japan are more likely to use harmonious facework strategies, while people from the United States are more likely to use aggressive facework strategies (Merkin, 2006). Obviously, if an embarrassing situation involved people from Hong Kong and the United States, facework is likely to be more difficult and may be unsuccessful.

It is important to note that every intercultural encounter is framed; a **frame** is a definition or an interpretation of what a certain situation means (Goffman, 1974). For example, people from various cultures have their own frames for such interactions as a wedding, a job interview, a lecture, and so on. Naturally, an intercultural encounter cannot be successful unless the

situation in which the encounter takes place is interpreted correctly by those engaged in the interaction. If one and the same situation is framed differently by people from different cultures, different rules will be followed and different language games played; a result, an intercultural interaction as performance will not be effective. For example, a person from Saudi Arabia may offer you coffee and you may say “Thank you, but I have already had breakfast.” You interpret the offer as a mere offer of a beverage rather than as an expression of hospitality; the implicit rule in such a situation is to be gracious and say ‘yes’ (Neuliep, 1996, pp. 247–248). Sometimes, cultural frames may be difficult to understand. For instance, Keith Basso, an American cultural and linguistic anthropologist, in his ethnographic descriptions of the Western Apache culture, tells about a young Apache woman who, while attending a girl’s puberty ceremony, had her hair done in pink plastic curlers. Here is how Basso describes what happened to that girl at a birthday party two weeks later:

When the meal was over casual conversation began to flow, and the young woman seated herself on the ground next to her younger sister. And then—quietly, deftly, and totally without warning—her grandmother narrated a version of the historical tale about the forgetful Apache policeman who behaved too much like a white man. Shortly after the story was finished, the young woman stood up, turned away wordlessly, and walked off in the direction of her home. Uncertain of what had happened, I asked her grandmother why she had departed. Had the young woman suddenly become ill? “No,” her grandmother replied. “I shot her with an arrow.”

(Basso, 1990, p. 122)

Basso found out that the girl’s grandmother had told her a moralistic story (‘arrow’) to teach her a lesson and remind her that, at puberty ceremonies, the hair should be worn loose to show respect for the Apache customs; in the Western Apache culture, this is known as ‘stalking with stories.’

#### **4.2 *Levels of Performance***

In some situations,

two people can be doing the same things . . . that is, they may be performing virtually the same physical motions and saying virtually the same things but performing different actions. One person may be performing it as a self-contained activity that is intrinsically valuable, the other as a process structured and motivated by external goals.

(Rorty, 1980, p. 380)

Clearly, these two people are performing actions at different levels. Let’s look at the levels of intercultural performance using the ideas of the Activity

Theory developed in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s (for more information see: Leont'ev, 1978; Wertsch, 1998). A simple example will help us to understand how any activity is performed. Suppose you are visiting the United States, and your American friends invite you to attend a football game. Their friendship is important to you, and you are determined to show them you enjoy this entertainment experience as much as they do. Having formulated for yourself the cultural frame ('sports entertainment') and the motive ('enjoying the game together with one's friends'), you must successfully attain a variety of specific goals. Some of the actions you must take to achieve those goals include purchasing your ticket, handing it to a gatekeeper, following the score, visiting concessions stands, etc.

Suppose your friends are willing and even happy to introduce you to the game and teach you as much as possible about this popular American pastime. They do their best to explain the rules of the game, how to keep score, and provide a lot of other useful information about the overall performance. What impact will all this have on your future interactions in a similar intercultural situation? Obviously, you will feel much more comfortable performing all the necessary actions. Even more importantly, you will think less about how to, say, purchase a ticket or hand it to a gatekeeper. Thus, the activity of attending a football game will have flown through actions to operations; in other words, the activity will have become operationalized. As a result, you start performing this activity almost automatically.

Performance, therefore, can be analyzed at three levels. At the level of **activity**, performance is driven by a certain motive. This level focuses on a certain culturally defined context; the activity in our example can be framed as 'sports entertainment' and the motive—as 'enjoying the game together with one's friends' (someone else might have a different motive for performing this activity, e.g., attending the game out of obligation, to please a boyfriend/spouse, while not really enjoying this type of entertainment). Every activity can be carried out only through **actions**—the second level of behavior. Actions are performances directed toward specific goals. In our example, you must purchase your ticket, hand it to a gatekeeper, etc. Finally, every activity can be performed as different **operations**, routine processes that depend upon certain conditions and cause adjustments of actions. In our example, you may bring along an umbrella if it is a rainy day, or binoculars if your seats are too far.

Overall, performance can be understood as an activity carried out through actions and resulting in the formations of operationalized skills (Figure 3.2).

Successful communication as performance requires the knowledge of *why* an encounter takes place, *what* goals must be attained through what actions, and *how* it can be accomplished under specific conditions. Every performance is seen, therefore, as an activity at the highest level; as a series of actions at the intermediate level; and as concrete operations at the lowest level. It is important to emphasize that these three levels can be isolated only for the sake of analysis; in real life, every intercultural encounter is one whole performance comprising all these levels at the same time. The flow of every performance is

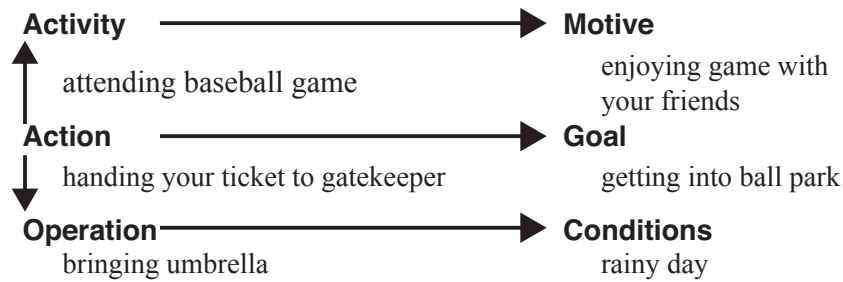


Figure 3.2 Levels of performance Source: Author

from activity through actions to operations and back to activity. In this flow, roles of intercultural performance are constantly enacted and recreated.

Why is it important for our performances to become operationalized? The simple answer is: ‘So we could focus on more important things.’ You can hardly enjoy a football game if you constantly think of how to keep score, how to purchase a beverage at a concession stand, etc. However, if we start performing our intercultural interactions only as operations, then we as actors become no different from robots, simply going through the motions. We must never forget about our other role—that of spectators. We must be able to evaluate our performance and, if we feel that we’re simply going through the motions, create new meanings that are more in line with our identity and motives.

So, cultural meanings are enacted when our performance is operationalized. How long or how much effort it may take depends on the complexity of performance. If it is a simple greeting, such as saying Hi! to your fellow students, this meaning can be enacted fairly quickly. If, however, you need to play the role of a chief negotiator working with people from another culture on a joint business project, the enactment of a greeting in that role will take much more time and effort. Overall, though, intercultural communication is a process in which people present their identities and move from rules to roles, enacting mutually understood meanings.

### 4.3 Performativity as Reiterative Process

When we speak of performance in intercultural communication, we must remember that “performance is the manifestation of performativity. This is to say, *performativity* refers to the reiteration process of becoming, while performance refers to the materialization of that process—the individual acts by human players in the world” (Warren, 2001, p. 106; emphasis added). In other words, while appearing to be an individual act performed in a certain situation, it is part of a reiteration process within which meanings are enacted. Let’s look at this process in terms of ethnographic encounter and cultural shock.



**Ethnography** is “a method of interpreting actions in a manner that generates understanding in the terms of those performing the actions” (Wood, 2000, p. 130). This method is said to have been developed by Westerners seeking to gain knowledge about foreign cultures, previously thought impenetrable to understanding. Traders, explorers, and missionaries collected data during their travels and then provided that information to scholars upon their return home who would analyze it and write it up. Later, the roles of fieldworkers and theorists/writers were unified into a single role of the ethnographer. Ethnographers “study the diversity and unity of cultural performance as a universal human resource for deepening and clarifying the meaningfulness of life” (Conquergood, 1985, p. 1). However, interpretation of different cultural experiences is not only the province of trained ethnographers; this is what we all do when meeting people from other cultures. With each step, you come closer to Other, moving from simply using your own frame of reference to passively looking at the situation to setting up a situation and validating your guess to asking questions. As a result of this ethnographic encounter, you gain important knowledge about other cultures.

The same encounter can also be discussed in terms of culture shock. Kalervo Oberg, a Canadian anthropologist, generally credited with introducing the concept of **culture shock**, described it as “the anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). This definition, though, focuses on but one aspect of culture shock, rather than viewing in the broader context of “transition shock”—a process in which one experiences “profound learning, self-understanding and change” (Adler, 1987, p. 29). This way, one undergoes acculturation, which refers to changes that take place as a result of contact with people from other cultural groups (Schwartz et al., 2010). Acculturation is a well-recognized and important area of intercultural communication study (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Culture shock, therefore, is not just one state of anxiety due to a loss of familiar frame of reference; rather, it transitions from one stage to another. Usually, the following stages of culture shock are isolated: (a) preliminary stage of introspection and preparation; (b) ‘honeymoon’ stage, when everything about a different culture is new and exciting; (c) crisis stage, when one considers leaving due to lack of trust, isolation, and misunderstandings; (d) adaptation stage, which involves gradually adjusting to a new culture; and (e) return stage, when the formerly familiar about your own culture becomes strange. The last stage is also known as ‘reverse culture shock,’ understood not as the opposite of culture shock but as its inherent part, manifested in all situations of cultural re-entry—from student exchanges (van der Velden, 2012) to various international service-learning engagements (Frazier & Kasten, 2015) to war veterans returning to universities in their home country (Howe & Shpeer, 2019).

What is common between viewing intercultural communication as an ethnographic encounter and culture shock? Both views show how Self

constantly goes through certain stages in order to understand how to interact with Other. In both cases, Self moves closer and closer to understanding Other and then goes back to square one, i.e., one's own frame of reference. In this complex process, Self operates between two extremes—identifying with Other and keeping distant from Other. This process of understanding meaning is sometimes described as a **hermeneutic circle** where distance-experiences and near-experiences constantly change (Geertz, 1983). First, Self looks at Other from a distance (distance-experience). Then, Self gets closer to Other, trying to understand its meaning from within (near-experiences). These meanings, however, can be understood only if Self steps back and checks how these new experiences fit one's own frame of reference (distance-experiences). But then Self must again move back closer to Other (near-experiences), and so the cycle continues on; “intercultural competence therefore is performance, oscillating between feelings of closeness and remoteness” (Rohr, 2006, pp. 29–30).

In this process, Self has to balance two roles—those of an insider and an outsider, or an actor and a spectator. If Self completely identifies with people from another culture, and becomes only an actor, Self stops seeing how one is different from Other and loses the framework from which to approach Other; as a result, Self can no longer be a spectator of the language game being played and no longer able to evaluate the intercultural experience, deciding what meanings should be enacted. Of course, if Self chooses to completely distance him/herself from the contact with Other, no intercultural communication takes place. Then, Self is merely a spectator, unable to act together with Other and gain knowledge of another system of meanings (Figure 3.3).

The hermeneutic circle can be viewed as the stage where all intercultural performances take place. It is important to remember that, on that stage, people simultaneously are both actors and spectators. As actors, people produce and perform their script together, creating and recreating their world. As spectators, people watch the results of their creations. But, they still exist on the same stage, in the same world. Remember Shakespeare? ‘All the world's a stage.’

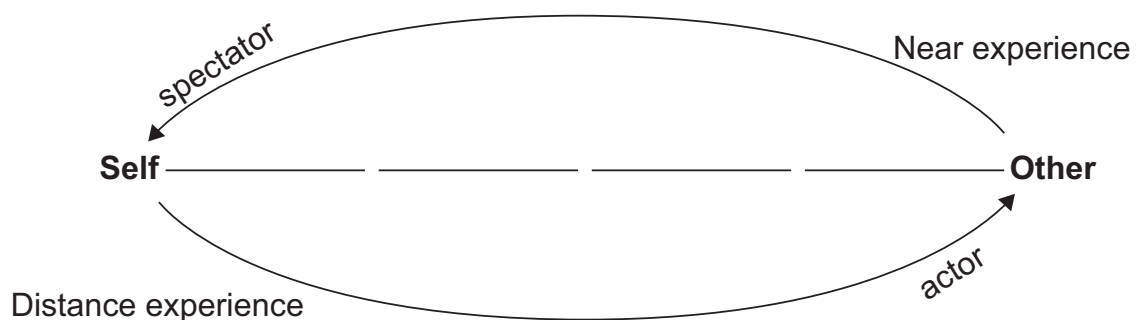


Figure 3.3 Hermeneutic circle Source: Author

Overall, intercultural performances can be seen as a continuous journey through the hermeneutical circle. It is important to note that this “journey may imaginatively originate at any point on the hermeneutical circle” (Paparella, 2012, p. 11). It is also important to emphasize that one eventually comes back to where one started, making a full circle. True understanding is not simply going in circles; it is making full circles in space and time. When one goes in circles, nothing changes. When one makes a full circle, one makes a journey, completing a cycle of transition from one lived-experience to a different one. Or, putting it poetically, “we shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time” (T. S. Eliot). In this process, both Self and Other change, affected by the interaction with each other. Intercultural communication is successful only when you start looking at the world with different eyes, learning something not only about Other but yourself, as well.

Enactment of meanings that constitute cultural identity, therefore, is a reiterative process. We all want to belong to a certain culture; however, belonging is not simply a matter of be-ing, but longing, hence “be-longing” (Bell, 1999, p. 1). Belonging is an achievement—an effect performatively produced. Cultural identity can never be achieved once and for all; in this sense, we can never simply ‘be.’ We can only repeatedly work on the construction of cultural identities, i.e., we can only ‘long for’ cultural identities. In this sense,

performativity denies, in some fundamental ways, the stability of identity, moving toward a notion of repetition as a way of understanding that those markers used to describe one’s identity (i.e., gender, class, race, sexuality) get *constructed through the continual performance* of those markers. (Warren, 2001, p. 95; emphasis added)

The view of performativity as a reiterative process is not pessimistic at all; on the contrary, it is liberating. It suggests that any identity can be constructed as long as Self and Other keep going through the hermeneutic circle and enacting meanings.

Earlier, we noted that the flow of intercultural communication as enactment of meaning goes from activity through actions to operations; however, we shouldn’t forget that this process at the same time goes back from operations to actions to activity. Intercultural communication as performance is a loop—a reiterative process of enactment of meaning. It is a journey that never ends.

#### **4.4 Hospitality**

Intercultural communication cannot be successful without **hospitality**—welcoming with goodwill people from other cultures because practices of hospitality intersect with those of performativity (Gürsoy, 2019).

When institutionalized, hospitality is viewed as service. The so-called ‘hospitality studies’ (Lashley, 2017) that deal with strategic communication and effective organizational structure include intercultural studies of workplaces in the hospitality and tourism industry (Ng, 2017). The main goal of such studies is to identify culture-oriented practices that can be used “to create competitive advantages based on different people (employees) whose performance significantly influences the guests’ hospitality experience” (Grobelna, 2015, p. 113).

Hospitality, however, can also be conceptualized in less businesslike and managerial, and more theoretical and philosophical terms—as the absolute obligation to accept Other. It must be emphasized that

without at least the thought of this pure and unconditional hospitality, of hospitality itself, we would have no concept of hospitality in general . . . Without this thought of pure hospitality . . . we would not even have the idea of the other, of the alterity of the other, that is, of someone who enters into our lives without having been invited. We would not even have the idea of love or of “living together (*vivre ensemble*)” with the other.

(Borradori, 2003, p. 129)

This conceptualization of hospitality has an axiological orientation, addressing the issues of value and value judgments. In the words of Jacques Derrida, a famous Algerian-born French philosopher, “what would an ‘ethics’ be without hospitality?” (Derrida, 2000, p. 129). As we move from ontology and epistemology (discussed in the previous chapters) to **axiology** (the study of values), we come to realize the importance of the ethical foundations of performativity in intercultural interactions. Hospitality, therefore, goes beyond the service standards and managerial practices established in a certain industrial area such as tourism. Authentic hospitality is human intersubjective experience when one is inherently open to interacting with Other, including anything that can be involved in such interactions. In this sense, “authentic hospitality is a performance constituted of risk-taking and vulnerability” (Shepherd, 2014, p. 80) (Figure 3.4).

The nature of hospitality is complex and ambivalent. As pointed out by Émile Benveniste, a famous French structural linguist, ‘hospitality’ and ‘hostility’ come from the same Indo-European root and can mean either ‘enemy’ or ‘friend,’ either ‘host’ or ‘guest’ (1969). With that in mind, Jacques Derrida coined the term ‘**hostipitality**’ (2000) because it can go either way (see: O’Rourke, 2018, p. 28). In this light, we can have a genuine and successful intercultural experience only if we take the risk of opening ourselves to the Other.

The spirit of authentic hospitality can be best experienced in the situations where communication reveals its spiritual nature, for example, in religious communication. Here, one cannot really feel Other unless there is a sense of mutual involvement in some kind of language game, which often





*Figure 3.4 Hospitality of Barbarians to Pilgrims, by Gustave Doré (around 1883) Source: Harold B. Lee Library*

has a mostly nonverbal character; this way, one can come closer to Other without really saying much or anything at all. For instance, Jan-Albert van den Berg and Arnold Smit (2006) discuss such intercultural experiences in their travel journal of pastoral involvement in a South African multi-faith community. They show how their approach to intercultural communication is guided by the proposition “‘I perform, therefore I am,’ rather than



the rationalist stance: ‘I think, therefore I am’” (Aldridge, 2000, p. 13). They also emphasize why this approach is especially important in interacting with South African communities characterized “by a spiritual world and a communal awareness of co-humanity (*ubuntu*)” (Louw, 2004, p. 32).

Hospitality, of course, is present not only in religious or spiritual communication but in any interactions, especially those that display their ritual nature. The ritual nature of communication goes back to the ancient times; for instance, in Homeric poetry, myths were activated and enacted through oral performance and from memory (Nagy, 1996). Rituals are not some obsolete and meaningless forms of simply going through the motions. **Ritual** is “a structured sequence of actions the correct performance of which pays homage to a sacred object” (Philipsen, 1993, p. 108). In other words, the repeated nature of rituals only emphasizes their importance. Since every ritual is considered sacred, the naturalness of its meanings is not questioned: “in any given cultural community, the sacred is whatever it treated as unquestionable, ‘beyond interdiction,’ as Durkheim puts it” (Rothenbuhler, 1998, p. 24). Every ritual is a liminal space where communication is performed and meaning constantly re-enacted.

We open ourselves up to communication and welcome Other through “a variety of rituals, from simple rituals such as gift presentations to complex ones such as toasting” (Kotthoff, 2007). It is important to remember that every ritual, no matter how seemingly mundane, is the most intimate and revered form of communication. For example, the tea ceremony in Japan is a ritual where homage is paid to such sacred objects as purity, reverence of nature, and uniqueness of every human encounter. Because rituals are so engrained in one’s culture’s fabric, it is easy for people from another culture to fail to carry out a certain sequence of actions correctly; if you, as a guest taking part in the tea ceremony, make a wrong movement or eye-contact, the interaction falters.

Earlier, intercultural communication was discussed in terms of ‘facework.’ Indeed, “the main principle of the ritual order is . . . face . . . what will sustain for the moment . . . the interaction” (Goffman, 2005, p. 44). As was mentioned, ‘face’ refers to any aspects of our cultural identity and cannot be equated with the literal face. This, however, does in no way mean that ‘face’ is completely detached from us as real living beings. In every intercultural encounter, people present themselves to others, either in a mediated fashion, such as in online interactions, or literally face-to-face. When it is carried out and theorized as performance, we should never forget that it is always interaction. Ultimately, communication is “the art of guiding one’s body into discourse . . . the struggle involved in the insertion of agency—wound and bow, death and life—into discourse” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 184). In this sense, although such terms as ‘face’ or ‘language game’ might suggest the meaning of something immaterial, intercultural communication must be conceptualized as something physical and corporeal—embodied performance including face as a part of the body and language as tangible symbols produced by the body. It is crucial to remember that the body must be “treated as a point

of entry into Other cultures . . . because culture is manifest in embodied performance” (Cargile & Rich, 2017, p. 2). The body is especially manifest in many intercultural rituals associated with eating, drinking, birth, or death. In all such situations, while involved in elaborate ‘facework’ and playing complex language games, our very bodies are presented to one another as “the last frontier of authenticity” (Peters, 1999, p. 221). Only this way can intercultural communication be truly performed as authentic hospitality.

## 5 The Performativity Principle Defined

Let’s give a concise formulation of the Performativity Principle, based on the above discussion of its three parts.

First, intercultural communication is a process of playing out our identities and moving from rules to roles. In every intercultural encounter, people from one culture present a certain image of themselves and act in such ways that this image is understood by people from another culture. This is done by engaging in various language games (both verbal and nonverbal). The structure of intercultural communication as performance is as follows: from activity through actions to operations, and then back to activity.

Second, intercultural communication as performance can be analyzed at three levels—activity (driven by a certain motive), actions (directed toward specific goals), and operations (routine processes dependent upon certain conditions and causing adjustments of actions).

Third, enactment of meaning that constitute cultural identity is a reiterative process. In this process, Self and Other go through the hermeneutic circle as many times as it is necessary for meaning to be enacted.

And, fourth, intercultural communication can be viewed in terms of hospitality as the absolute obligation to welcome Other. Such authentic hospitality as performance involves risk-taking and vulnerability.

In a nutshell, the Performativity Principle can be formulated as follows:

*Intercultural communication is a reiterative process whereby people from different groups enact meanings in order to accomplish their tasks.*

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## 6 Case Study: ‘Translation zone(s): A stuttering’

The case study is based on the article entitled ‘Translation zone(s): A stuttering: An experiential approach to linguistic hospitality’ (Connelly, 2018). It is recommended that you read the article in its entirety; below, you find its summary. Be ready to identify and then discuss the following topics:

1. Why did the researcher decide to use language stripped to its basic units as her empirical material?
2. Can translation zone(s) be viewed as the space of ‘hospitality’?

3. As performative and embodied activity, how can intercultural communication be seen as a mutually beneficial act?

‘Translation zone(s): A stuttering’ was a six-week research project conducted by Heather Connelly in 2016 at Birmingham City University. The premise for the project was that, when we rely on translated texts (mediated and already interpreted by someone else), we may miss out on nuances that exist in the original language. In that light, Connelly invited ten strangers from different linguistic communities to explore their relationships with language through performance.

The researcher saw her own role as a host facilitating interactions. The participants were to play the role of a host to the language of Other that has been stripped to its basic units—letters, symbols, and sounds. Before the actual public performances, the participants were asked to reflect on their alphabet and decide which sounds should be articulated to represent the peculiarities of each language system. Most participants explored in-depth the sound system of their language and their special relationships with it, including an emotional connection with the language they spoke. During the performance, the participants were asked to enunciate their own alphabets as well as to listen and attempt to reproduce unfamiliar sounds, rhythms and harmonies. The performance took place at the Library of Birmingham; one digital video still in Connelly’s article shows the participants standing in a circle in the rotunda performing the call and response activity (p. 167). Connelly experimented with individual units and various groups of sounds as well as different formations of the participants, such as duos and trios. The researcher observed how the sounds worked when performed by the participants; she noted how the participants used their bodies and voices in trying to work with one another, both in harmony and discord.

Connelly writes that her project was designed to create ‘contact zones’ as sites that are in-translation and do not belong to any single individual, language, or medium of communication. In such contact zones, new conditions are created and new relations formed. She sees such zones as hospitable places, while not necessarily harmonious ones, where differences are highlighted and alternative perspectives emerge. In this respect, the project was designed to destabilize the dominant English language by providing a space for other languages to be heard. As mentioned earlier, semantic content was (largely) absent in the use of language, which was limited to its basic building blocks in the form of letters and sounds. Such seemingly insignificant practices, though, create points of determinacy and open up the possibility of new modes of thinking and being. We may consider such points to be moments of noise or call them glitches, but they free language from its signifying self. As Connelly puts it,

the Othering of English, the movement between languages, of rearticulation and mispronunciation, make language stutter: they open it up and

create new possibilities. The reduction of language(s) to a collection of sounds draws our attention to the grain of the voice, to the one who speaks.

(p. 172)

It must be emphasized that ‘Translation zone(s): A stuttering’ is not simply a public performance but also a research project. As such, it adopts an experimental approach to language and uses different theoretical frameworks, including epistemology that deals with ways of knowing. The project draws on Paul Ricoeur’s view of translation as both a linguistic paradigm (translation between languages) and also an ontological paradigm (translation between one human self and another). Ricoeur’s theoretical view of translation is embodied in his concept of ‘linguistic hospitality’, ‘contact zones’ created in the project being an example of such hospitality. Connelly also draws parallels between Ricoeur’s work and Emile Benveniste’s cross-cultural etymological analysis as well as Jacques Derrida’s building on those ideas, the term ‘hospitality’ epitomizing the complex nature of intercultural encounters. Connelly argues that her project makes it clear that successful intercultural communication requires everyone to act as both host and guest. The participants kept shifting between these roles as they enunciated their own alphabets and tried to reproduce unfamiliar sounds. The researcher, too, admits that she felt somewhat vulnerable since she had to rely on the participants’ generosity and letting her carry out the research, in the first place; as she says, “without the performers, there was no work, no project, no research output” (p. 168).

In spite of, or rather because of, linguistic hospitality being a risky practice that requires both parties to move towards Other, Connelly sees the performance that takes place in the ‘translation zone’ as an ethical and mutually beneficial act. She notes the importance of considering the ethical valence of researching multilingualism. Lack of language is transformed into a benefit as it fosters attentiveness to nonverbal communication, including paying close attention to the shape of other people’s mouths and lips—an intimate practice usually common between lovers or close family. Overall, translation in the contact zone is seen as a transformative, performative, and embodied activity.

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1. Why did the researcher decide to use stripped to its basic units as her empirical material language?

As you recall, the project’s premise was that we cannot rely only on translated texts because they have been already interpreted by someone else. If we don’t want to miss out on nuances, we must focus on how the language is actually performed. Most monolingual speakers, however,

cannot speak another language and so can focus only on how it sounds. Hence, in the project, language was brought down to phonemes as its basic elements and such paralinguistic features as rhythm and harmony.

It may appear as if such empirical material is quite trivial and may not shed much light on the nature of intercultural communication. After all, phonemes don't mean anything the way words do; phonemes simply serve a distinctive function helping us to differentiate them from other phonemes. And yet, learning a foreign language as a step toward successful intercultural communication must begin with mastering the sound system of that language—learning to hear and pronounce new sounds. More importantly, sounds provide a rupturing of representation by breaking our habit of 'making sense.' Since semantic content was bracketed out, the participants were able to immerse themselves in the experience of the material and sensuous qualities of the sounds, including their emotional connection with the language they speak. This amplified the relational and affective nature of the intercultural encounters.

With semantic content absent, such a seemingly insignificant practice of focusing on the basic units of the language allowed the participants to pay attention to the grain of the voice and the one who speaks. Making language stutter, as it were, opened new possibilities for thinking and being.

2. Can translation zone(s) be viewed as the space of 'hospitality'?

As was shown in the chapter, the nature of hospitality is complex and ambivalent. Obviously, we need to open ourselves to Other; this, however, involves a risk and cultural shock, including self-shock. While observing the sounds performed by the participants, Connelly noted how they used their bodies and voices in trying to work with one another both in harmony and discord.

In every 'translation zone' all participants, including the researcher, acted as both host and guest. The researcher invited the participants and gave them instructions at every stage of the performance. At the same time, she felt vulnerable having to rely on the generosity of the participants who let her carry out the research. The participants shifted between the roles of host and guest, as well: they both enunciated their own alphabets and tried to reproduce unfamiliar sounds. Therefore, in Connelly's words, "to be truly hospitable each person must be willing to leave the safety and certainty of what they know in order to become open to the other—to be altered in this encounter" (p. 169).

3. As performative and embodied activity, how can intercultural communication be seen as a mutually beneficial act?

Connelly shows how our being monolingual can be transformed into a benefit for all parties involved. Because we lack another language, we're motivated to pay more attention to nonverbal communication,



including the shape of other people's mouths and lips. By engaging in such intimate practices that are usually reserved for lovers or close family, we're able to learn something new about Other and ourselves. It must be recalled that the body is "the last frontier of authenticity" (Peters, 1999, p. 221). Only in the contact zone can intercultural communication be truly successful as a performative and embodied activity.

The contact zone can be viewed as the hermeneutic circle within which all the participants kept going through distance-experiences and near-experiences, switching between the roles of spectators and actors. They even literally formed a circle when engaged in these interactions when they performed the call and response activity in the rotunda of the Library of Birmingham. It was only when each participant made the full circle that they were able to fully understand the intercultural experience. As noted in the chapter, genuine understanding occurs only when one comes back to where one started with new meanings and starts looking at the world with different eyes—the way the participants' mother-tongues became estranged. All the participants have been transformed by the experience of this intercultural performance.

## 7 Side Trips

### 7.1 *Free Play of the Saw*

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1977; see also Vilhaue, 2013) uses the example of playing a game as an illustration of reciprocity in communication. The participants adhere to its rules over which no one has any priority: the players relinquish themselves to the act of playing and thus to the game itself. Gadamer depicts this through an image of two men having free play of the saw. Both partners are equally engaged in this activity and neither constitutes its determining factor. This way, both partners feel fulfilled by it, emerging enriched and transformed as a result of free play.

\*\* Do you find this metaphor appropriate for capturing the essence of intercultural communication? Can you think of other metaphors that present intercultural communication in similar ways?

### 7.2 *Intercultural Travel Blogs*

Elizabeth Slattery and Rick Malleus's paper 'Personal travel blogs as texts for studying intercultural interactions: A pilot test case study of an American sojourner's blogs from Zimbabwe' (2014) presents the results of content analysis of an American woman's travel blog written on a sojourn to Zimbabwe. The analysis was performed using four intercultural constructs: culture shock, intercultural communication challenges, cross-cultural comparison,

and intercultural adaptation. The authors of the paper argue that personal travel blogs can be an important source for studying self-reports of face-to-face intercultural interaction.

\*\* Do you agree with their argument? Can you think of other sources that could be used for studying culture shock and intercultural adaptation in intercultural communication?

### 7.3 ‘Whiteness Workshops’

John T. Warren and Deanna L. Fassett—two communication scholars—used the so-called performative pedagogy in conducting their ‘Whiteness Workshops’ (see Paez, 2018; Warren & Fassett, 2004). Understanding identity as an accomplishment of reiterative performative practices, they placed students in a public setting where they engaged in critical exploration of whiteness. That way, the scholars aimed to overcome the tradition of textualism in a classroom that involves relying only on written assignments, activities, and tests. For them:

performative pedagogy . . . can put flesh to the concept of whiteness. It can . . . ask those in positions of power (via sex, race, class, or sexuality) to question their own embodied experiences by demanding that they encounter the “Other,” through the mode of performance.

(Warren & Fassett, 2004, p. 429).

Indeed, many students found performance a better way of learning and reported that it had a profound effect on them.

\*\* Do you find performative pedagogy an effective approach to teaching intercultural communication? Can you think of other activities that could be conducted using this approach?

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