Communicating Across Cultures

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Mindful Intercultural Communication: An Identity Negotiation Perspective

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There are numerous approaches to the study of intercultural communication. For example, three approaches are anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory (Gudykunst, 1993, 1995), expectancy violations (EV) theory (Burgoon, 1992, 1995), and systems theory (Y. Y. Kim, 1988, 1995). Each of these approaches emphasizes the different facets of intercultural communication. For example, the AUM approach emphasizes the importance of information seeking in reducing anxiety and uncertainty. The EV approach accentuates the importance of understanding our own and others' expectancies in crossing interpersonal or cultural boundaries. Lastly, the systems approach highlights the interface between factors of the host culture and factors of the newcomers' adaptation to the new culture. Each approach is supported by a body of theoretical and empirical work substantiating its ideas (see also, Wiseman, 1995).

The perspective that guides the development of this book is labeled the *identity negotiation theory*. The identity negotiation theory focuses on the

motif of identity security–vulnerability as the base that affects intercultural encounters. Understanding the motif of identity security–vulnerability in any intercultural encounter is critical for the following reasons:

First, individuals bring their sense of "self-image" or "identity" to any type of communicative encounter. The meaning of "self-image," or our view of ourselves, is profoundly influenced by cultural, personal, situational, and relational factors. In this book, we propose that culture plays the primary shaping role in our view of ourselves. It is through core cultural values and practices that the meanings of identities such as ethnicity, gender, and age are defined and differentially valued.

Second, individuals acquire their identities via interaction with others in their culture. Whether we perform an identity role effectively or ineffectively, appropriately or inappropriately, is defined by the consensual norms and scripts developed by people in the culture. What constitutes competent interaction (e.g., verbal assertiveness) may be viewed as incompetent in another culture. What may be perceived as incompetent interaction (e.g., conflict avoidance) may be perceived as competent in another culture. Thus, understanding how various cultural norms endorse and mold communication ideals in a culture is critical to any effective intercultural communication.

Third, individuals tend to feel secure when communicating with people whom they view as supportive and with a high sense of familiarity. They tend to experience identity vulnerability when interacting with people whom they view as unfamiliar. With similar others, individuals tend to share common set of values, norms, and scripts. With dissimilar others, individuals' habits of norms and routines are constantly being questioned or contested. Thus, the theme of identity security and vulnerability is viewed as a springboard from which other facets of intercultural communication are affected.

This chapter will explore these three reasons that surround the motif of identity security and vulnerability in some depth. The chapter is organized in three main sections. First, the theoretical background and the identity domains of the identity negotiation theory are addressed. Second, the theoretical assumptions of the identity negotiation perspective are explained. Third, mindful intercultural communication from the identity negotiation model is discussed.

THE IDENTITY NEGOTIATION PERSPECTIVE

The identity negotiation perspective emphasizes the linkage between cultural values and self-conception. It explains how one's self-conception profoundly influences one's cognitions, emotions, and interactions. It explains why and how people draw intergroup boundaries. It illustrates the different needs and wants of individuals in desiring inclusion–differentiation and

connection–autonomy in their relationships. It also maps out the factors that contribute to identity shock—as when individuals move from a familiar cultural milieu to an unfamiliar one.

The identity negotiation perspective is an integrative theory that draws from the work of social identity theory (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Brewer & Miller, 1996), symbolic interactionism (e.g., McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1981, 1991), identity negotiation (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1988, 1989a, 1993), and relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Social identity theorists derive their ideas from the social psychological discipline. Symbolic interactionists draw their ideas from the sociological arena. The identity negotiation and dialectical approaches reflect theoretical and research work in the communication discipline.

In sum, the identity negotiation perspective is an integrative theory that draws inspirations from three major scholarly disciplines. Integrating many of the empirical research studies conducted in the three academic spheres, the theoretical ideas of the identity negotiation perspective are formed. This section is organized in three parts: (1) the theoretical background; (2) primary identity domains; and (3) situational identity domains.

The Theoretical Background

The fundamental basis of the identity negotiation theory posits that individuals in all cultures desire to be competent communicators in a diverse range of interactive situations. They learn to be competent communicators within their own cultures through repeated practice. They also learn to deal with others appropriately and effectively through habitual routines. Two sources of identity typically influence an individual's everyday interaction: group-based identity and person-based identity.

Our awareness of our group membership identity and personal identity stems primarily from the internalization of the viewpoints of others around us (Mead, 1934). For example, when significant others consistently regard us in a favorable light, we tend to develop positive conceptions of ourselves. Conversely, when relevant others consistently view us in an unfavorable light, we tend to develop negative conceptions of ourselves.

The core processes of individuals' reflective self-conceptions are formed via symbolic communication with others (McCall & Simmons, 1978). It is through communication that we acquire our generalized views of ourselves and others. It is also through communication with others that we acquire particular ways of thinking about ourselves and others in different situations.

In developing the social identity theory, Tajfel and his associates (Tajfel, 1981, 1982; J. C. Turner, 1985, 1987) propose that *social identities* refer to an individual's conceptualizations of the self that derive from memberships in emotionally significant categories or groups (Brewer & Miller, 1996).

Personal identities, on the other hand, refer to an individual's self-conceptions that "define the individual in relation to (or in comparison to) other individuals" (Brewer & Miller, 1996, p. 24).

Social identities can include cultural or ethnic membership identity, gender identity, sexual orientation identity, social class identity, age identity, disability identity, or professional identity. Personal identities, on the other hand, can include any unique attributes that we associate with our individuated self in comparison to those of others. In collectivistic group-oriented cultures, for example, people may be more concerned with group membership-based issues (Marsella, De Vos, & Hsu, 1985). In individualistic cultures, however, people may be more concerned with individuated-based identity issues.

The social identity theory further assumes that we typically relate to others via two types of perception: intergroup-based versus interpersonal-based perceptions (Tajfel, 1981). In intergroup-based relationships we pay exclusive attention to the group membership attributes of the individuals. In interpersonal-based relationships we pay selective attention to the idiosyncratic attributes of the individuals.

In actual intercultural encounters, however, both types of relatedness are present. Intergroup-based perceptions are salient, for example, when we experience in-group/out-group membership distinctions that arise from the social categorization process (e.g., Black and White racial group memberships). Interpersonal-based perceptions are salient when we get a chance to share or find out more unique information about the person in the encountering process. Both types of perception can contribute to an either effective or ineffective interaction outcome, depending on how we use the group-based or person-based information (see the "Mindful Intercultural Communication" section below).

Finally, both the social identity and the symbolic interaction theories make it clear that the process of defining a personal self is inevitably a social process. No individual person develops a sense of self in a vacuum. Personal identity is developed in conjunction with social identity, and vice versa. Both social identity and personal identity are acquired and developed within the larger webs of our culture (Rosaldo, 1984). Thus, culture is the prime regulator in influencing how we attach meanings, develop labels, and draw boundaries in constructing others' and our own social and personal selves.

Primary Identity Domains

The term *identity* is used in the identity negotiation perspective as the reflective self-conception or self-image that we each derive from our cultural, ethnic, and gender socialization processes. It is acquired via our interaction with others in particular situations. It thus basically refers to our reflective views of ourselves—at both the social identity and the personal identity

levels. Regardless of whether we may or may not be conscious of these identities, they influence our everyday behaviors in a generalized and particularized manner.

The identity negotiation perspective emphasizes eight identity domains in influencing our everyday interactions. They are discussed as cultural identity, ethnic identity, gender identity, personal identity, role identity, relational identity, facework identity, and symbolic interaction identity (see Figure 2.1). The first four identity or self-image domains (i.e., cultural, ethnic, gender, and personal identities) are viewed as primary identities that exert an important, ongoing impact throughout our lives. The other four identity domains (i.e., role, relational, facework, and symbolic interaction identities) are situational dependent, that is, changeable from one situation to the next.

Both primary and situational identities mutually influence one another. For example, our gender identities and gender-linked expectations influence our evaluations of how females or males "should" or "should not" behave in a given situation. Our ethnic identities may influence the choice of a particular language or dialect we use in a particular interethnic scene, as well as the nonverbal style that pairs with the language or dialect usage.

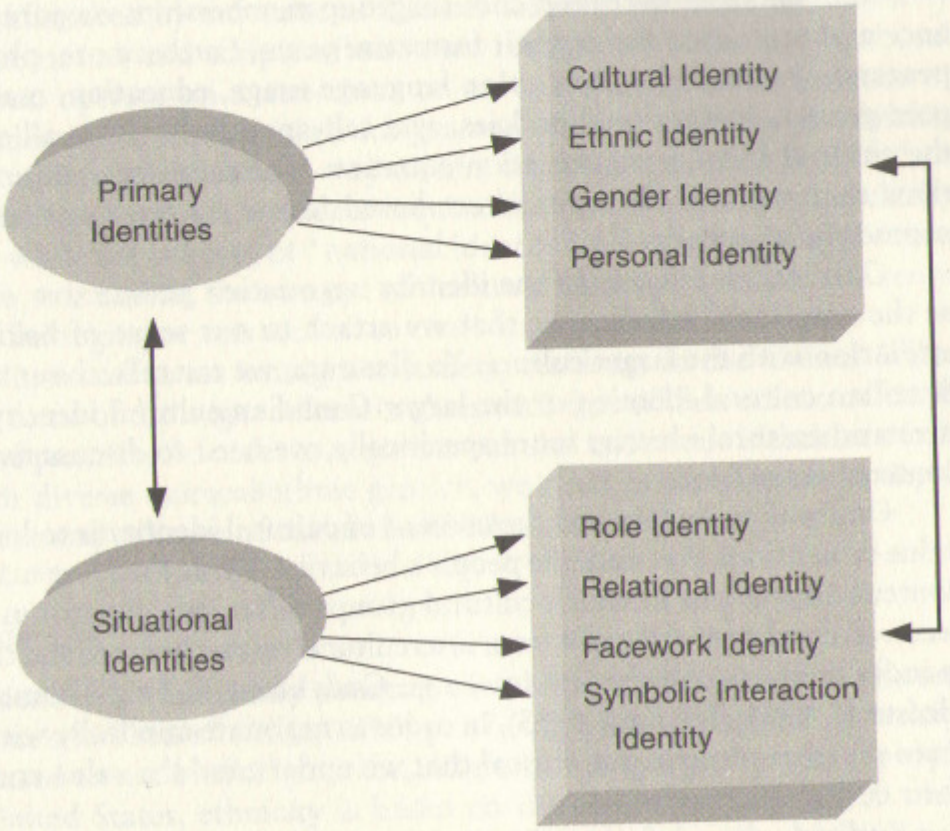

FIGURE 2.1. Identity negotiation perspective: Eight identity domains.

Both language and nonverbal styles represent part of our symbolic identity. The four primary identities definitely influence the other situational identities in an interaction scene. Additionally, situational identities (e.g., through competent or incompetent communication skills) can also influence the way we view ourselves—in a positive or negative direction.

Taken together, these eight identity domains are viewed as a "composite self-conception" of individuals of any culture. In being aware of this composite self-conception, we can begin to mindfully listen to the concerns and issues that surround a person's identity-related stories in a communication episode. We can also learn to reflect back and affirm some of the desired identities of the speaker from another membership group or culture. We begin our discussion with cultural identity.

Cultural Identity

All individuals are socialized within a larger cultural membership group. For example, everyone born and/or raised in the United States has a sense of being an "American" (in this book, to avoid ambiguity, we shall use the term "U.S. American"). Our cultural identities can be so impregnated that unless we encounter major cultural differences, we may not even notice the importance of our cultural membership badges.

Individuals acquire their cultural group memberships via parental guidance and responses during their formative years. Furthermore, physical appearance, racial traits, skin color, language usage, education, mass media, peer groups, institutional policies, and self-appraisal factors all enter into the cultural identity construction equation. The meanings and interpretations that we hold for our culture-based identity groups are learned via contacts with others.

Cultural identity, from the identity negotiation perspective, is defined as the emotional significance that we attach to our sense of belonging or affiliation with the larger culture. To illustrate, we can talk about the larger Brazilian cultural identity, or the larger Canadian cultural identity. To understand cultural identity more specifically, we need to discuss two issues: content and salience.

One way to understand the content of cultural identity is to look at the value dimensions that underlie people's behavior. While there are many value content dimensions in which cultural groups differ, one dimension that has received consistent attention from intercultural researchers around the world is individualism–collectivism (see, e.g., Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1995). In order to negotiate mindfully with people from diverse cultures, it is critical that we understand the value contents of their cultural identities.

Individualism refers to the broad value tendencies of a group in emphasizing the importance of individual identity over group identity, indi-

vidual rights over group rights, and individual interests over group interests. Australia, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States have been identified as prototypical individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1995). In comparison, *collectivism* refers to the broad value tendencies of a group in emphasizing the importance of the "we" identity over the "I" identity, in-group obligations over personal rights, and in-group needs over individual desires. China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Ghana, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico have been identified as prototypical collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 1995).

Understanding the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies of various cultures provides one means for examining the value contents of cultural identity. The knowledge can lead us to understand the social behavior of diverse people from a broad range of cultures. The extent to which our culture influences our behavior is dependent in part on how strongly we identify with that culture.

Salience of cultural identity refers to the strength of affiliation we have with our larger culture. Strong associations of membership affiliation reflect high cultural identity salience. Weak associations of membership affiliation reflect low cultural identity salience. The stronger our self-image is influenced by our cultural identity salience, the more we are likely to practice the norms and interaction scripts of our culture. The weaker our self-image is influenced by our cultural identity salience, the more we are likely to practice norms and scripts of our own inventions. Salience of cultural identity can operate on a conscious or an unconscious level. Salience of cultural identity is often a taken-for-granted phenomenon: we live within our own culture as a habitual way of life; we do not need to "justify" or explain its impact unless outsiders inquire about it. We should also clarify here that while the concept of "national identity" refers to one's legal status in relation to a nation, the concept of "cultural identity" refers to the sentiments of belonging or connection to one's larger culture.

To illustrate, as an immigrant society, residents in the United States may mix some of the larger cultural values with that of their ethnic-oriented values and practices. In order to negotiate cultural and ethnic identities mindfully with diverse cultural/ethnic groups, we need to understand in depth the content and salience of cultural *and* ethnic identity issues.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is "inherently a matter of *ancestry,* of beliefs about the origins of one's forebears" (Alba, 1990, p. 37; emphasis in original). Ethnicity can be based on national origin, race, religion, or language. For many people in the United States, ethnicity is based on the countries from which their ancestors came (e.g., those who can trace their ethnic heritage to an Asian or a Latin American country).

Most Native Americans—descendants of people who settled in the Western Hemisphere long before Columbus, sometime between 25,000 and 40,000 years ago—can trace their ethnic heritage based on distinctive linguistic or religious practices. However, most African Americans may not be able to trace their precise ethnic origins because of the pernicious slavery codes (e.g., a slave could not marry or meet with an ex-slave; it was forbidden for anyone, including Whites, to teach slaves to read or write) and the uprootedness coerced upon them by slaveholders beginning in the 1600s (Schaefer, 1990, p. 207). Lastly, many European Americans may not be able to trace their ethnic origins precisely because of their mixed ancestral heritage. This phenomenon stems from generations of intergroup marriages (say, Irish American and French American marriages, or mixed Irish/French American and Polish American marriages, and the like) starting with the great grandparents or grandparents.

Ethnicity, of course, derives from more than the country of origin. It involves a subjective sense of belonging to or identification with an ethnic group across time. In order to understand the significance of someone's ethnicity, we also need to understand the content and the salience of that person's ethnic identity in particular. For example, with knowledge of the individualism–collectivism value tendencies of the originating countries, we can infer the value contents of specific ethnic groups. Most Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latino/a Americans, for example, who identify strongly with their traditional ethnic values, would tend to be group oriented. Those European Americans who identify strongly with European values and norms (albeit on an unconscious level) would tend to be oriented toward individualism. African Americans might well subscribe to both collectivistic and individualistic values—in blending both ethnic African values and assimilated U.S. values—for purposes of survival and adaptation.

Beyond ethnic identity content, we should address the issue of ethnic identity salience. The role of ethnic identity salience is linked closely with the intergroup boundary maintenance issue across generations (e.g., third-generation Cuban Americans in the United States). *Ethnic identity salience* is defined as the subjective allegiance to a group—"large or small, socially dominant or subordinate—with which one has ancestral links. There is no necessity for a continuation, over generations, of the same socialization or cultural patterns, but some sense of a group boundary must persist. This can be sustained by shared objective characteristics (language, religion, etc.), or by more subjective contributions to a sense of 'groupness,' or by some combination of both" (Edwards, 1994, p. 128). Thus, ethnic identity has both objective and subjective layers. The objective layers can include racial classifications, shared religion, or shared language. From such a layered outlook, ethnicity is an inheritance and an immutable historical fact.

The subjective layers, on the other hand, imply that an ethnic group consists of people who conceive of themselves as being a distinctive group and are united by common historical, emotional, or symbolic (e.g., language) ties. On the individual identification level, members who identify strongly with an ethnic group believe that they share a common history, heritage, and descent.

Ethnicity is, overall, more a subjective experience rather than an objective classification. While a political boundary (e.g., delimiting Chechnya—formerly the Chechno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic—from Russia) can change over generations, the continuation of ethnic boundaries (i.e., an identity inclusion/differentiation issue) is an enduring, long-standing phenomenon that lasts in the hearts and minds of its members. Ethnic minority group members, in the context of intergroup relations, tend to be keenly aware and sensitive to the intersecting issues of ethnicity and culture. For ethnic minority members, the perceived imbalanced power dimension and power inaccessibility dimension within a society lead them to draw clear boundaries between the dominant "powerholder" group and the nondominant "fringe" group (Orbe, 1998; Yinger, 1994).

While individuals often use social identity to address in-group/out-group boundary issues (e.g., my turf vs. your turf), they tend to use personal identity to differentiate their unique attributes from the other's unique qualities (e.g., "I'm hardworking, and he is always tardy"). By understanding how others define themselves ethnically and on a personal identity level, we can communicate with them with more sensitivity and understanding. We can learn to lend appropriate self-conception support in terms of ethnic identity issues. Uncovering and supporting others' self-conceptions requires mindful identity negotiation work.

Gender Identity

The meanings of gender terms such as "feminine" and "masculine" are reflective of how the larger culture or ethnic group constructs the images of females and males. While sex is a biological attribute that is determined by genetics and hormones, gender is a learned phenomenon via our primary cultural socialization process (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Wood, 1996, 1997). While sex is a static concept, gender is a dynamic construct. We can learn and unlearn gender role expectations.

Gender identity, in short, refers to the meanings and interpretations we hold concerning our self-images and expected other-images of "femaleness" and "maleness." For example, females in many cultures are expected to act in a nurturing manner, to be more affective, and to play the primary caregiver role. Males in many cultures are expected to act in a competitive manner, to be more emotionally reserved, and to play the breadwinner role. The orientations toward femaleness and maleness are grounded and learned

via our own cultural and ethnic practices. Gender identity is a culturally constructed phenomenon that consists of the meanings "culture attributes to men and women and the personal and social effects of those meanings on individuals' concrete lives. . . . As we interact with family members, friends, intimates, and work associates, we participate in the cultural creation of gender" (Wood, 1996, p. 14).

To illustrate, in traditional Mexican culture, child-rearing practices differ significantly in socializing girls and boys. At the onset of adolescence, the difference between girls and boys becomes even more markedly apparent. The female is likely to remain much closer to home and to be "protected and guarded in her contact with others beyond the family. . . . The adolescent male, following the model of his father, is given much more freedom to come and go as he chooses and is encouraged to gain much worldly knowledge and experience outside the home" (Locke, 1992, p. 137). Gender identity and cultural/ethnic identity intersect and form part of an individual's composite self-conception.

Although gender difference is pervasive in our everyday lives, it is difficult to pinpoint its effect. As Wood (1996) observes insightfully, "Just as we seldom notice air and fish are unaware of water, for the most part we do not realize the myriad ways in which gender infuses our everyday lives as individuals and our collective life as a culture. This is because the meanings of gender that our [U.S.] society has constructed are normalized, making them a constant taken-for-granted background that can easily escape notice" (pp. 8–9).

Our gender identities are created, in part, via our communication with others. They are also supported and reinforced by the existing cultural structures and practices. The gender identities we learned as children affect our communication with others. They affect how we define ourselves, how we encode and decode messages, and how we develop expectations of what constitute sex role appropriate or inappropriate behavior. We are not, however, prisoners of our gender identities. We can choose to behave differently or to reframe our evaluations in viewing gender-based identity performance. As indicated in the identity negotiation theory, every human being has a diverse range of identities, and she or he can choose to communicate mindfully and flexibly in different cultural situations. To engage in flexible communication behaviors, we need a conceptual compass or working model such as the identity negotiation perspective to guide our diverse actions. A conceptual perspective can add more depth to our understanding of a complex process such as the interface among culture, ethnicity, and gender.

Personal Identity

Beyond group membership identities, individuals develop distinctive personal identities due to unique life histories, experiences, and personality

traits. We develop our personal identities—our conceptions of a "unique self"—via our observations of role models around us and our own drives and reinventions.

Personal identity is defined as the sentiments and information an individual has regarding her or his personal self-images. These personal self-images are linked to her or his unique personalities, drives, goals, and values. Personal identity can have two facets: actual personal identity and desired personal identity.

The term *actual personal identity* refers to those unique attributes that an individual exhibits frequently and that are also perceived by others (e.g., traits such as assertiveness, talkativeness, decisiveness). However, the labeling of such attributes may vary markedly between one's own perception and that of others (e.g., the self-perception of being "decisive" can be labeled by others as being "pushy"). The term *desired personal identity,* on the other hand, refers to the preferred attributes that an individual considers to be assets in an interaction (Cahn, 1987). The more others affirm such desired identities in the interaction, the more the person feels that he or she is being understood, respected, and supported. The premise of the identity negotiation approach rests on the importance of supporting others' desired, salient identities more than their actual identities.

Beyond actual and desired personal identity facets, we should also consider specific personality trait factors in the identity negotiation process. To differentiate trait-level analysis versus culture-level analysis, Markus and Kitayama (1991) coined the terms "independent construal of self" and "interdependent construal of self" (see Chapter 3).

"Independent-self" individuals tend to be motivated by personal goal achievements, personal assertion, and personal fairness and rewards. Comparatively, "interdependent-self" members tend to be motivated by group-oriented goal achievements, collective consensus, and in-group harmony and rewards. According to past research, the independent-self pattern tends to predominate in individualistic cultures and the interdependent-self pattern tends to predominate in collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 1995). Thus, on a desired identity level, independent-self individuals tend to strive for personal self-esteem validation such as by someone acknowledging their personal attributes and competence. On the other hand, interdependent-self members strive for collective self-esteem validation such as through their team effort and collective group success.

Overall, individuals may change their conceptions of composite identities at different age brackets, at different life stages, and with different life experiences. When one facet of our self-conception encounters stress (e.g., initial cultural identity shock in an overseas assignment), other facets of our composite identity can also experience the vibrations. A threat to our cultural identity can be perceived as a threat to our personal self-esteem level. For example, when someone says to a nonnative speaker, "I don't

understand your heavy accent. How did you ever get this job in the first place?" the hearer's cultural identity can be threatened and simultaneously her or his personal self-esteem level can plummet. Likewise, a perceived threat directed to our personal identity level can also evoke defensive alarms in our other identity domains. For example, when someone says in a belittling tone, "Are you sure you're competent enough to handle this job yourself?" the hearer's personal self-esteem level can suffer and he or she may also wonder whether the speaker is acting out of his or her racist or sexist bias.

We have completed the discussion of the four primary identity domains—cultural, ethnic, gender, and personal identities. We now turn to a discussion of situational identities.

Situational Identities

As already noted, the situational identities refer to role, relationship, facework, and symbolic identities that are adaptive self-images and highly situational dependent. These identities are changeable—dependent on the configuration of the interaction goals, individual wants and needs, roles, statuses, and activities in the situation. Compared to the four primary identities (above), they are less stable and are driven by external situational features and are subsequently internalized by individuals operating in the society.

Role Identity

Role identities are closely linked to the situational parameters of the intercultural encounter (see Chapters 3 and 4). The concept of "role" is a theatrical metaphor that is shaped by expectancy norms within a particular situation in a particular society (Burke, 1945; Goffman, 1959; Stryker, 1987, 1991).

The term *role* refers to a set of expected behaviors and the values associated with them that a culture or ethnic group defines as proper or acceptable. Norms refer to what "should or should not" happen in an interactive situation. They are prescribed expectations of how things should be accomplished (e.g., how to greet someone politely) in a cultural community. The norms of the situation shape what constitutes proper or improper role enactment. Cultural, ethnic, and gender-related values underlie the reinforcement and interpretation of situational norms and roles.

For example, the norms in some individualistic classrooms (e.g., in the United States) encourage students to take initiatives and express personal opinions freely. Ideally, teachers operating in a U.S. classroom should play the friendly, democratic role. They should elicit questions and generate an open atmosphere in the classroom, while students should ask questions and

express their opinions freely. In contrast, the norms in collectivistic classrooms (e.g., in Japan) often emphasize team cooperations and classroom obedience. Ideally, teachers in collectivistic classrooms should play the authoritarian expert role. They should disseminate expert opinions and facts, and the students should take notes seriously and respectfully without questions. Cultural values such as individualism–collectivism and power distance (see Chapter 3) undergird the interpretations of appropriate role performance of different actors in a given situation. For role performance to be effective, the actors need to internalize their role scripts for different situations and must accept certain situated behaviors as part of who they are.

Relational Identity

People in every culture are born into a network of family relationships. First and foremost, for example, we acquire the beliefs and values of our culture within a family system. The rules that we acquire in relating to our parents, siblings, extended families, peers, and teachers contribute to the initial blueprint of our relational identities or reflective relational images.

For example, through our family socialization process, we learn to deal with boundary issues such as space and time. We also learn to deal with authority issues such as gender-based decision-making activities (e.g., who did what household chores) and power dynamics (e.g., which parents or siblings held what status power). We also acquire the scripts for emotional expressiveness or restraint, as well as for nonverbal eloquence or gestural nuances, from similar others in our own cultural setting.

Beyond forming relational identities within the family, we also develop voluntary relationships with others such as social relationships or friendships. The self-conception support from intimate friends and significant others can be a powerful form of identity approval (Cupach & Metts, 1994). However, the development of an intimate relationship between persons of two contrastive cultures is a complex phenomenon.

Some relational partners may move quickly from culture-based interaction to person-based interaction. Other partners may spend a lifetime negotiating the meanings of cultural identities, on the one hand, and the meanings of relational/personal identities, on the other (see Chapter 7). One of the basic stressors that people often experience in their relational identities revolves around the theme of facework.

Facework Identity

The term *face* refers to identity respect issues and other consideration issues within and beyond the intercultural encounter process (see Chapters 4 and 8). It is tied to a claimed sense of social esteem or regard that a person

wants others to have for him or her. It is therefore a vulnerable identity resource in social interaction because it can be threatened, enhanced, undermined, and bargained over. Face is an identity resource that is manifested and comanaged in communication with others (see Chapter 8 for a detailed discussion).

The term *facework* refers to the specific communication behaviors that we engage in to "save" our own and/or others' face. Individuals, as resourceful communicators, often use creative facework behaviors to protect their vulnerable emotions such as pride and shame, or honor and dishonor. While the concept of face (i.e., identity respect issue) is a universal phenomenon, how we "do" facework differs across cultures (Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1988, 1994a; see also, Brown & Levison, 1987). Face and facework can only be meaningfully interpreted within the communication ideals of the larger cultural system.

In a mindful facework negotiation process, honoring others' face and helping others' to save face may be one way to manage favorable interactive identities across cultures. We should also take into serious consideration intercultural facework competence. For example, in international business negotiations, speaking assertively may be prized in Western cultures and is often viewed as competent facework action. However, from the standpoint of many Asian cultures, speaking tactfully and circumspectly may well be considered a more skillful facework response.

While human beings in all cultures desire identity respect in the communication process, what constitutes the proper way to show respect and consideration for face varies from one culture to the next. Additionally, the emotions (e.g., pride, shame, honor, hurt, anger) that are generated in reaction to different face-saving issues may differ from one person to the next. Different situational contexts and goals call for different rules of facework appropriateness and effectiveness.

Symbolic Interaction Identity

Facework identities are developed and sustained via symbolic interaction. Additionally, all identity domains are implicitly or explicitly expressed via symbolic interaction. Symbolic interaction identity refers to the verbal and nonverbal communication process through which we acquire our reflective self-images and the associated values of our group-based and person-based identities (Blumer, 1969; Blumstein, 1991; Mead, 1934). Through our communication with others and the viewpoints they embody, we develop our composite self-conceptions.

Additionally, in symbolic interaction with others, individuals tend to use certain preferred styles of linguistic and nonverbal codes in relating with others (see Chapters 4 and 5). For example, Francophones in Montréal prefer to use French to converse, whereas Anglophones there prefer to use

English to interact with others. Symbolic interaction consists of the exchange process of verbal and nonverbal messages that constitute the dynamics of communication between people across ethnic groups or cultures.

Verbal and nonverbal symbolic cues serve as the emblems of our composite identities. Individuals in all cultures use culture-based language and nonverbal movements to communicate, to manage impressions, to persuade, to develop relationships, and to elicit and evoke their desired identity badges. These verbal and nonverbal patterns tell others something about ourselves and how we want to be perceived and treated. The language or dialect we engage in reflects our group membership affiliation.

In the first few minutes of interaction with strangers, we form impressions of them, develop attraction or repulsion, and draw in-group/out-group boundaries based on respective symbolic identity assessments. In order to increase the likelihood of positive interaction outcomes with unfamiliar others, we must become mindful of our symbolic interaction process with cultural strangers.

Summary

We have identified eight identity domains that play a critical role in the mindful intercultural communication process. These eight domains are cultural identity, ethnic identity, gender identity, personal identity, role identity, relational identity, facework identity, and symbolic interaction identity.

In order to engage in mindful identity negotiation, we have to increase our knowledge base, our awareness level, and our accuracy in assessing our own group membership and personal identity issues. Concomitantly, we have to understand the content and salience issues of identity domains in direct correspondence with how others view themselves in a variety of situations.

There are many more identities (e.g., social class, sexual orientation, age, disability) that people bring into an interaction. However, for the purposes of this interculturally oriented book, we shall emphasize the above eight identity domains as constituting the nucleus of the identity negotiation framework. The theoretical assumptions we pose in the next section are cast as a set of basic human needs that carry both culture-general and culture-specific meanings.

THE IDENTITY NEGOTIATION THEORY

The identity negotiation theory emphasizes that identity or reflective self-conception is viewed as the explanatory mechanism for the intercultural communication process. Identity is viewed as reflective self-images constructed, experienced, and communicated by the individuals within a culture and in a particular interaction situation.

The concept *negotiation* is defined as a transactional interaction process (see Chapter 1) whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others' desired self-images. Identity negotiation is, at a minimum, a mutual communication activity. At the same time, the communicators attempt to evoke their own desired identities in the interaction; they also attempt to challenge or support the others' identities.

While some individuals are relatively mindless (or act on "automatic pilot") about the identity negotiation process, other individuals are relatively mindful about the dynamics of that process. Mindfulness is, moreover, a learned process of "cognitive focusing" with repeated skillful practice (see the section on "Mindful Intercultural Communication" below). The present section is devoted to (1) the core theoretical assumptions of the identity negotiation theory and (2) an explanation of these key theoretical assumptions.

Core Theoretical Assumptions

In the context of this theory, one of the critical goals of mindful identity negotiation is to explore ways to obtain accurate knowledge of the identity domains of the self and others in the intercultural encounter. In a nutshell, the theory assumes that human beings in all cultures desire both positive group-based and positive person-based identities in any type of communicative situation. How we can enhance intercultural understanding, respect, and mutual support through mindful communication is the essential concern of this approach.

The above theory assumes that while the efforts of both communicators are needed to ensure competent identity negotiation, the effort of one individual can set competent communication in motion. The theory consists of the following *10 core assumptions,* which explain the antecedent, process, and outcome components of intercultural communication:

1. The core dynamics of people's group membership identities (e.g., cultural and ethnic memberships) and personal identities (e.g., unique attributes) are formed via symbolic communication with others.
2. Individuals in all cultures or ethnic groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, trust, inclusion, connection, and stability on both group-based and person-based identity levels.
3. Individuals tend to experience identity security in a culturally familiar environment and experience identity vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment.
4. Individuals tend to experience identity trust when communicating with culturally similar others and identity distrust when communi-

cating with culturally dissimilar others; identity familiarity leads to trust, and identity unfamiliarity leads to distrust.

5. Individuals tend to feel included when their desired group membership identities are positively endorsed (e.g., in positive in-group contact situations) and experience differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized (e.g., in hostile out-group contact situations).
6. Individuals tend to desire interpersonal connection via meaningful close relationships (e.g., in close friendship support situations) and experience identity autonomy when they experience relationship separations.
7. Individuals perceive identity stability in predictable cultural situations and detect identity change or chaos in unpredictable cultural situations.
8. Cultural, personal, and situational variability dimensions influence the meanings, interpretations, and evaluations of these identity-related themes.
9. Satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes include the feeling of being understood, respected, and supported.
10. Mindful intercultural communication emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural knowledge, motivations, and skills to communicate satisfactorily, appropriately, and effectively.

Drawing from the core assumptions of the identity negotiation theory, the following themes underscore the development of the discussions that follow: identity security–vulnerability, familiarity–unfamiliarity, inclusion–differentiation, connection–autonomy, and stability–change. We turn now in the following subsections to a summary discussion of Assumptions 1–4, then Assumptions 5 and 6, Assumption 7, Assumption 8, and Assumptions 9 and 10. All assumptions are explained and developed in more detail in the rest of the book.

Assumptions 1–4

Assumption 1 has been discussed in the "Primary Identity Domains" section above. The basic idea concerning Assumption 1 is that people in all cultures form their reflective self-images such as cultural identity and ethnic identity via their enculturation process. Through the content of their cultural and ethnic socialization experiences, they acquire the values, norms, and core symbols of their cultural and ethnic groups. Through their identity content and salience levels, their respective group-based and person-based identities influence and shape their thinking, emotions, and communication patterns when interacting with culturally dissimilar others.

Thus, in order to understand the person with whom you are communi-

cating, you need to understand the identity domains that she or he deems as salient. For example, if she strongly values her cultural membership identity and gender membership identity, you need to find ways to validate and be responsive to her cultural and gender identities; or if he strongly values his personal identity above and beyond his cultural or gender group membership, you need to uncover ways to affirm his positively desired personal identity. Through mindful communication, we can discover salient identity issues that are desirable to the individuals in our everyday intercultural encounters.

The identity negotiation perspective posits that individuals in all cultures have similar basic human needs for identity security, trust, inclusion, connection, and stability in their communication with others (J. H. Turner, 1987, 1988). The thematic pairs of the respective needs include identity vulnerability, unfamiliarity, differentiation, autonomy, and change. Since Assumptions 3 and 4 are extensions of Assumption 2, we also discuss these two assumptions here in relationship to Assumption 2.

According to Assumption 3, we often experience insecurity or identity vulnerability because of a perceived threat or fear in a culturally estranged environment. On the other hand, we experience identity security in a culturally familiar environment. Identity security refers to the degree of emotional safety concerning one's sense of both group-based membership and person-based identities in a particular cultural setting. Identity vulnerability refers to the degree of anxiousness or ambivalence in regard to group-based and person-based identity issues.

According to Assumption 4, to the extent that an individual experiences identity trust when interacting with similar others, a predictable or reliable interaction climate is developed. Additionally, when individuals confront a common challenge, say, a group of international students arriving in a new country to study, a sense of shared fate can be cultivated. To the extent that an individual experiences identity distrust when communicating with dissimilar others, an unpredictable or defensive interaction climate is established. While Assumption 3 focuses on emotional security and vulnerability issues, Assumption 4 emphasizes cognitive predictability and unpredictability issues.

We experience identity trust (or a sense of reliability) in interacting with similar others because expected norms and routines occur with a high degree of frequency. Comparatively, we experience identity awkwardness in interacting with dissimilar others because unexpected behaviors (e.g., nonverbal violations behavior) and practices occur frequently and intrusively.

Assumptions 5 and 6

Assumptions 5 and 6 are about intergroup and interpersonal boundary regulation issues. Assumption 5 is about the theme of in-group/out-group-based boundary maintenance issues (see Brewer & Miller, 1996). Assumption 6 is

about the theme of relational boundary regulation issues of autonomy and connection in significant close relationships (see Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Assumption 5, the identity inclusion and differentiation assumption, refers to membership-based boundary maintenance issues. Identity inclusion is conceptualized as the degree of perceived nearness (i.e., emotional, psychological, and spatial proximity) to our in-groups and out-groups. Identity inclusion is an in-group/out-group boundary maintenance issue in which our self-image is attached with some emotionally significant group membership categories (e.g., racial or ethnic identification). Identity differentiation is defined as the degree of remoteness (i.e., emotional, psychological, and spatial distance) we perceive in regulating our group-based boundary with either in-group or out-group members.

Mindful boundary regulation helps to satisfy ingroup inclusion and intergroup differentiation needs (Brewer, 1991; Brewer & Miller, 1996). To the extent that one's salient in-group (e.g., one's ethnic group) compares favorably with other relevant social/cultural groups, one may consider one's membership group positively. Conversely, to the extent that one's salient in-group compares unfavorably, one would choose different options. Such options can include changing one's identity group (if possible), changing the comparative criteria dimensions, reaffirming one's own group value, or downgrading the comparative group.

Drawing from the social identity theory, Brewer (1991) argues that "social identity derives from a fundamental tension between human needs for validation and similarity to others (on the one hand) and a countervailing need for uniqueness and individuation (on the other)" (p. 477). The identity needs for both appropriate inclusion and differentiation exist as dualistic motivations to the intergroup communication process. Too much group-based inclusion may cause us to ponder the significance and meanings of our person-based identity. Too much group-based differentiation, however, may cause us to feel unwelcome or excluded.

Assumption 6 concerns the thematic pair of identity autonomy and identity connection. Identity autonomy–connection is defined as an interpersonal relationship boundary regulation issue (e.g., from an autonomy–privacy lens to a relational connection lens) (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Cultural values such as individualism and collectivism influence our interpretations and evaluations of concepts such as "autonomy" and "connection."

For example, in an intercultural romantic relationship, an individualistic partner (e.g., an Australian boyfriend) may emphasize personal autonomy or privacy issues, while a collectivistic partner (e.g., a Vietnamese girlfriend) may invest more energy in regulating connection issues with the surrounding family network issues (see Chapter 7).

Furthermore, the theme of identity autonomy–connection is clearly

manifested through a culture's language usage (e.g., the frequent mentions of "I" messages in individualistic cultures vs. "we" messages in group-oriented cultures). It can also be observed in nonverbal actions and architectures that emphasize household privacy or household/communal plaza connectedness (see Chapters 4 and 5).

In order to understand more in depth the relational theme of autonomy–connection, we need to have a strong grasp of the value orientations that frame the motif of autonomy and connection (see Chapter 3). We also need to pay mindful attention to the verbal and nonverbal message styles of people in different individualistic and collectivistic communities.

Assumption 7

Assumption 7 is concerned with identity stability and change issues over time. Identity stability refers to a sense of identity continuation or consistency through time—whether it is through cultural, ethnic, gender, or personal identity preservation or rituals. Identity change refers to a sense of identity dislocation or transformation in the intercultural contact journey (see Chapter 9).

The more an individual experiences or cultivates an optimal level of identity security and stability, the more she or he is likely to be open to constructive identity change. The more an individual experiences identity threats (e.g., identity differentiation and disconnection), the more he or she is likely to cling to identity stability. Overall, there exists a tolerable range of identity stability (or rootedness) and identity change (or rootlessness) in an intercultural transformation process.

Too much identity rootedness will turn a person into a highly ethnocentric being. Too much identity change will turn a person into a highly marginal type with no moral center. However, a self-system without change will also stagnate. A balanced pendulum-like oscillation between identity stability and change will help to promote healthy professional and personal growth. Likewise, a complementary perspective in viewing the identity thematic pairs—security–vulnerability, familiarity–unfamiliarity, inclusion-differentiation, connection–autonomy, and stability–change—will help us to be mindful of the complex identity diversity within ourselves and others.

Overall, J. H. Turner (1987) asserts that failure to meet the basic human needs of security, predictability/trust, and inclusion can lead to diffuse anxiety and frustration in our everyday life. He concludes that our efforts to sustain a coherent self-conception are directly fueled by the three following motivation dimensions of group-based and person-based identity communication process: (1) the need to feel secure that things are as they appear; (2) the need to sense predictability or trust the responses of others; and (3) the need to feel included.

However, how we go about establishing security, trust, inclusion, con-

nection, and stability in ourselves and others depends heavily on culture-sensitive knowledge and competent communication skills. Mindful intercultural communication is achieved via a joint function of both communicators successfully meeting the needs for identity security, trust, inclusion, connection, and stability in the identity negotiation process.

Assumption 8

Cultural beliefs and values provide the implicit standards for evaluating and enacting different identity-related practices. Cultural membership and hence its cultural values direct how we think about our "identities," how we construct the identities of others, and how these interactive identities play out in verbal and nonverbal symbolic interaction.

Situational norms and rules influence the appropriate delivery of identity lines or role enactments (Collier & Thomas, 1988). In "loose" cultures (e.g., Australia and the United States), deviation from situational norms (e.g., crossing against red lights and jaywalking) and proper role performance is tolerated. In "tight" cultures (e.g., Greece and Japan), people are expected to follow closely the situational norms and interaction scripts of the larger culture (Triandis, 1994a). Deviation from appropriate role performance often evokes disapproval and sanctions from others. Factors such as cultural heterogeneity/homogeneity, low/high population density, and geographic mobility shape the "looseness" or "tightness" of a cultural situation.

For example, a sparsely populated society (e.g., New Zealand) has only "loose" norms and rules to regulate the behavior of the people. In comparison, in a densely populated society (e.g., India), the culture has developed many norms, rules, rituals, and an elaborate bureaucracy to "tightly control" the behavior of the people and to reduce conflicts within the society.

Finally, personality factors such as tolerance for ambiguity and personal flexibility also help to promote identity security and inclusion of the self and others. Individuals who have higher degrees of tolerance for ambiguity or risk taking, for example, have less fear in approaching cultural strangers than individuals with lower degrees of tolerance for ambiguity (Ward, 1996). Individuals with personal flexibility are more ready to experiment with new knowledge and new skills in culturally diverse situations.

MINDFUL INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

This section covers the outcomes, criteria, and components of mindful intercultural communication. While the outcomes are listed in *Assumption 9* of the identity negotiation model, the criteria and the components of mindful intercultural communication are presented in *Assumption 10*.

Langer's (1989, 1997) concept of mindfulness encourages individuals to tune in conscientiously to their habituated mental scripts and preconceived expectations. *Mindfulness* means the readiness to shift one's frame of reference, the motivation to use new categories to understand cultural or ethnic differences, and the preparedness to experiment with creative avenues of decision making and problem solving. The concept of mindfulness can serve as the first effective step in integrating our theoretical knowledge with the identity-based outcome dimensions.

Mindlessness, on the other hand, is the heavy reliance on familiar frame of reference, old routinized designs or categories, and customary ways of doing things. It means we are operating on "automatic pilot" without conscious thinking or reflection. It means we are at the "reactive" stage rather than the reflective "proactive" stage. To engage in a state of mindfulness in competent intercultural communication, individuals need to be aware that both differences and similarities exist between the membership groups and the communicators as unique individuals.

To be mindful communicators, individuals need to learn the value systems that influence others' self-conceptions. They need to be open to a new way of identity construction. They need to be prepared to perceive and understand a behavior or a problem from others' cultural and personal standpoints. Mindful communicators need to be on the alert that multiple perspectives typically exist in interpreting a basic phenomenon (Langer, 1989, 1997).

Threefold Outcomes of Mindful Intercultural Communication

According to the identity negotiation theory, satisfactory outcomes include the feeling of being understood, the feeling of being respected, and the feeling of being supported. Together, they serve as the identity outcome dimensions. The accomplishment of a satisfactory identity negotiation process is contingent on the perceptions of the communicators in the interaction scene. It also depends on our willingness to practice mindfulness in our interactions with dissimilar others.

To the extent that communicators perceive desired identities have been mindfully understood, accorded with due respect, and are supported, the involved parties should experience a high sense of identity satisfaction. To the extent that the communicators perceive that desired identities have been mindlessly bypassed, misunderstood, and/or insulted, the involved parties should experience a low sense of identity satisfaction. Thus, the construct of identity satisfaction acts as an essential criterion of intercultural communication competence.

Drawing from the discussion of the identity negotiation theory, the *feel-*

ing of being understood is one of the most powerful means of being validated (Cahn, 1987). The feeling of being understood connotes an echoing voice out there that empathizes with one's thinking, feeling, and behaving. The echoing voice does not necessary have to agree, but it has to have empathetic (i.e., "I know where you're coming from") impact. Identity understanding begins with gathering accurate identity-based information and being culturally sensitive in probing identity-based details in the intergroup negotiation process. It also means the willingness to share facets of our own self-conceptions with others in a culturally sensitive manner.

The *feeling of being respected* connotes that our desirable identity-based behaviors and practices are being deemed as legitimate, credible, and on a equal footing with members of other groups. Identity respect connotes the mindful monitoring of one's verbal and nonverbal attitudes in interacting with dissimilar others. It also means treating others' salient group-based and person-based identities with courteousness, consideration, and dignity.

The *feeling of being supported* refers to our sense of being positively valued or endorsed as "worthwhile" individuals despite having different group-based or idiosyncratic identities. When a person perceives authentic and positive identity endorsement, she or he also tends to view self-images positively. When a person perceives negative identity endorsement, she or he also tends to view self-images negatively.

Positive identity endorsement is typically expressed through verbal and nonverbal confirming messages. *Confirmation* is the "process through which individuals are recognized, acknowledged, and endorsed" (Laing, 1961, p. 83). Confirming communication involves recognizing others with important group-based and person-based identities, responding sensitively to other people's affective states, and accepting other people's experiences as real. *Disconfirmation,* on the other hand, is the process through which individuals do not recognize others, do not respond sensitively to dissimilar others, and do not accept others' experiences as valid (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981). In confirming others on an authentic basis, we use identity-support messages to affirm others' alternative lifestyles, feelings, and experiences. In disconfirming others, we use indifferent messages (e.g., verbally and nonverbally ignoring others) or disqualifying messages (e.g., patronizing language, evaluative language, racist and sexist language) to discount the others' feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

We affirm others by the words and nonverbal actions we use in our communication with them. In communicating mindfully, our messages convey our understanding, respect, and support for dissimilar others on a holistic level. In interacting mindlessly, our messages convey evaluative attitudes, doubts, and mistrust. The positive or negative consequences of the identity negotiation process, ultimately, affect the development of quality intergroup and interpersonal relationships.

Mindful Intercultural Communication: Criteria and Components

Mindful intercultural communication involves the appropriate management of shared meanings and effective achievement of desired goals. Shared meanings involve an acute awareness of meaning encoding and decoding on the content, identity, and relational level during the communication process itself. Interpersonal goals refer to anticipated consequences or outcomes that people desire to achieve. Goals can include instrumental goals, self-presentation goals, and relationship goals (Cupach & Canary, 1997). Instrumental goals are concerned with substantive outcomes or resources that people want to achieve in an interaction (e.g., changing another's attitude, gaining compliance, or asking for help). Self-presentation goals or identity goals refer to the personal or public images we want to sustain (e.g., as intelligent, credible, or powerful) and want others to respect as a consequence of our interaction. Lastly, relationship goals pertain to the relationship status (e.g., more intimate or less intimate) we desire to maintain with another person.

Mindful intercultural communication emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural knowledge, motivations, and skills to manage process-based issues satisfactorily and achieve desired interactive goals appropriately and effectively. The necessary knowledge blocks that are facilitative to mindful intercultural interaction are discussed in Chapters 3 through 10. A mindful intercultural communication model is presented in Figure 2.2.

Assumption 10 of the identity negotiation theory emphasizes two ideas: the first is that mindful intercultural communication has three components—knowledge, motivation, and skills; the second is that mindful intercultural communication refers to the appropriate, effective, and satisfactorily management of desired shared meanings and goals in an intercultural episode. Competent intercultural interaction emphasizes the importance of integrating knowledge and motivational factors and putting them into mindful practice in everyday interactions. Together with the criterion of "satisfaction" discussed earlier, two additional criteria guide the evaluation of mindful intercultural communication: perceived appropriateness and effectiveness.

Criteria

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) propose that communication competence has two criteria: appropriateness and effectiveness. "Appropriateness" refers to the degree to which behaviors are regarded as proper and match the expectations generated by the culture. "Effectiveness" refers to the degree to which communicators achieve shared meanings and desirable outcomes in a given situation. Using these two criteria in evaluating mindful intercultural com-

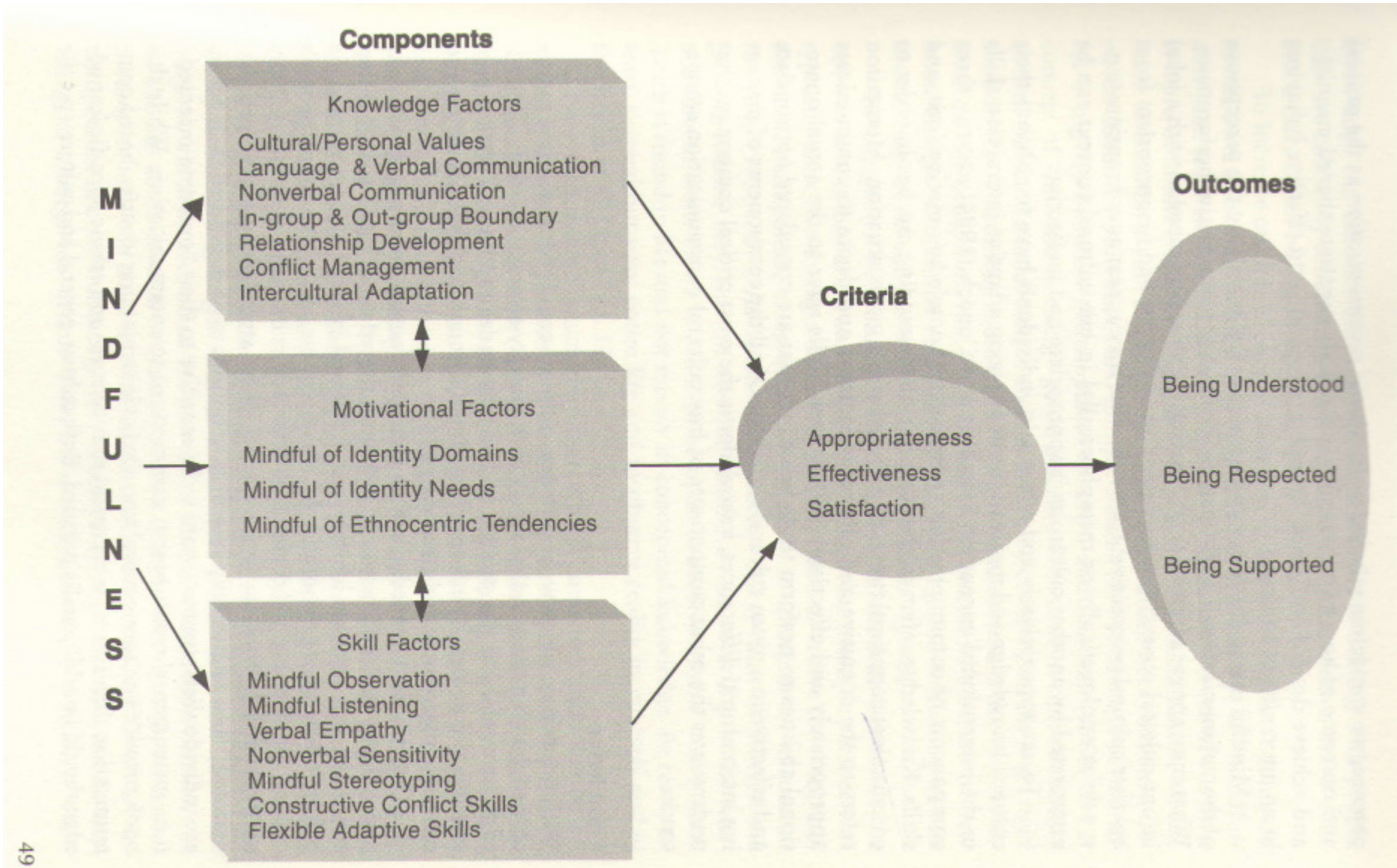

FIGURE 2.2. A mindful intercultural communication model: Components, criteria, and outcomes.

petence, we can define *mindful intercultural communication* as the process and outcome of how two dissimilar individuals negotiate shared meanings and achieve desired outcomes through appropriate and effective behaviors in an intercultural situation.

Mindful intercultural communication relies heavily on the perceptions of the communicators in evaluating each other's communicative performance. What may appear effective (e.g., starting a public presentation with a joke) in one cultural context can be viewed as ineffective and inappropriate from another cultural perspective. Likewise, what may appear as appropriate (e.g., speaking apologetically or metaphorically) in one cultural context can be interpreted by another culture as inappropriate and ineffective.

To act appropriately and effectively, individuals have to enhance their cultural knowledge and motivations in applying adaptive interaction skills in the intercultural encounter. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) identify three components of communication competence: knowledge, motivations, and skills. Knowledge refers to the cognitive understanding one has in order to communicate appropriately and effectively in a given situation. Motivation refers to the cognitive and affective readiness and desire to communicate appropriately and effectively with others. Skills refer to the actual operational abilities to perform those behaviors that are considered appropriate and effective in a given cultural situation. Of all the components of managing intercultural differences, knowledge is the most critical component that underscores the other components of intercultural communication competence.

Knowledge

Without culture-sensitive knowledge, cultural communicators may not be able to match cultural value issues with identity-related behaviors. Knowledge here refers to the process of in-depth understanding of certain phenomena via a range of information gained through conscious learning and personal experiences and observations.

Overall, the knowledge base in this book focuses on how individualists and collectivists (see Chapter 3) negotiate shared meanings, manage different goals, and regulate identity and relational issues. In order to manage cultural differences mindfully, for example, we must take other people's cultural membership and personal identity factors into consideration. If others are collectivists, we may want to pay extra attention to their "process-oriented" (i.e., relationship-based) assumptions to communication. If others are individualists, we may want to be sensitive to their "outcome-oriented" (i.e., instrumental result-based) assumptions to communication. While this book provides culture-general knowledge in explaining identity-based communication differences, it is critical that culture- and ethnic-specific knowledge should be additionally pursued. Both culture-general and culture-specific

knowledge can enhance our motivations and skills in dealing with people who are culturally different. A fuller explanation of the various knowledge block factors can be found in subsequent chapters.

To increase our knowledge, we need to be mindful of what is going on in our own thinking, feelings, and experiencing. The concept of "mindfulness" can serve as the first effective step in raising our awareness of our own systems of thinking and judging. Additionally, through mindfulness, we can learn to be more aware of the commonalities and differences that exist between dissimilar individuals and groups. Thich's (1991) concept of "mindful living" (a Buddhist philosophical concept) and Langer's (1989, 1997) concept of "mindful learning" guide individuals to tune in conscientiously to their habitual mental scripts and preconceived categorizations (e.g., rigid stereotypes). According to Langer (1989), if mindlessness is the "rigid reliance on old categories, mindfulness means the continual creation of new ones. Categorization and recategorization, labeling and relabeling as one masters the world are processes natural to children" (p. 63).

To engage in a mindfulness state, an individual needs to learn to (1) be open to new information and ideas, (2) be aware that multiple perspectives typically exist in viewing a situation, and (3) learn to create (or integrate) different standpoints, categories, and contexts to interpret an encounter (Langer, 1989, 1997). As Thich (1991) notes, "All systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth. . . . Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times" (p. 127).

New information concerning intercultural communication can be acquired through multiple means of learning—attending intercultural classes, readings, interacting more in depth with dissimilar colleagues and classmates, daily mindful observations, and traveling. Being aware that multiple perspectives exist means we come to the realization that there are multiple truths and multiple realities in framing any "bizarre" intercultural situation. Creating or combining different standpoints means we should apply divergent thinking (i.e., looking at things from different angles) and integrative, systems-level thinking (i.e., a creative synthesis of different cultural approaches and resources) in solving an intercultural problem (see Chapter 8).

Lastly, intercultural communication competence can be conceptualized along the following stages: (1) *unconscious incompetence*—the ignorance stage in which an individual is unaware of the communication blunders he or she has committed in interacting with a cultural stranger; (2) *conscious incompetence*—the stage in which an individual is aware of his or her incompetence in communicating with a cultural stranger but does not do anything to change his or her behavior or situation; (3) *conscious com-*

petence—the stage when an individual is aware of his or her intercultural communication "nonfluency" and is committed to integrate the new knowledge, motivations, and skills into effective practice; and (4) *unconscious competence*—the phase when an individual is naturally or spontaneously practicing his or her intercultural knowledge and skills to the extent that the intercultural interaction process flows smoothly and "out-of-conscious awareness" (Howell, 1982) (see Figure 2.3). The third, "conscious competence" stage is the "full mindfulness" phase in which communicators are fully aware of their own systems of thinking, reacting, and experiencing *and simultaneously* attending to the systems of thinking, feelings, and behaviors of their interaction partners. The fourth, "unconscious competence" stage is the "mindlessly mindful" phase in which communicators move in-and-out of spontaneous mindfulness and "*reflective* mindlessness" in communicating with dissimilar others. Competent transcultural communicators often rotate between the conscious competence stage and the unconscious competence stage—for the purpose of refreshening and sharpening their knowledge and motivations in dealing flexibly with dissimilar strangers.

Motivations

Motivations in intercultural communication competence refer to our readiness to learn about and interact with people who are different. Motivations, in the context of the identity negotiation theory, are viewed as identity domain issues and identity needs' issues. From the identity negotiation perspective, we believe that in each intercultural encounter process (e.g., ranging

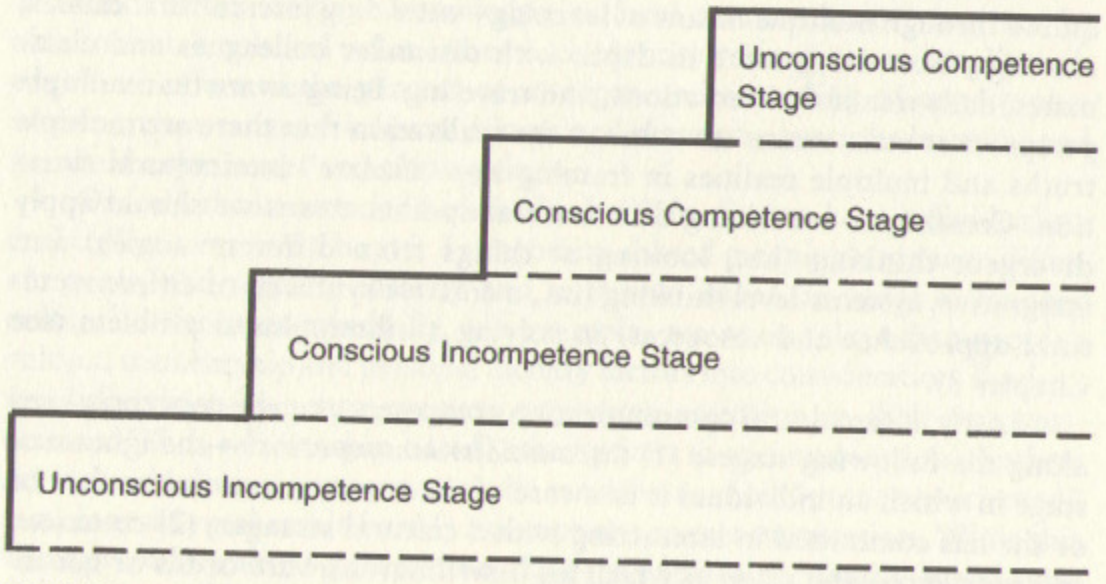

FIGURE 2.3. Four-stage intercultural communication competence: A staircase model.

from a basic greeting ritual of "Hi, how are you?" to a prolonged diplomatic negotiation session) identity dynamics play a critical role in our interaction. A simple "Hi, how are you?"—"Fine!" interaction sequence reflects a cultural greeting ritual. It also evokes a short identity affirmation process: I see you—I greet you—and I affirm your existence.

In order to understand the role of "motivation" in culture-sensitive terms, we need to understand how primary identities and situational identities intersect and affect our intercultural communication process. We also should be mindful that the locus and focus of our different identity needs (e.g., security, inclusion, trust, connection, and stability) are influenced by our cultural membership and personal preference factors. In committing ourselves to deal with culture-based and individual-based differences mindfully, we should have a good grasp of the assumptions presented by the identity negotiation theory.

We need to understand the reasons behind each assumption and be able to apply each flexibly in a diverse range of intercultural situations. We need to analyze systematically our identity needs and those of others in an encounter situation. We need to be attuned to the identity domains and companion values that influence our and others' interactive behavior (see Chapter 3). We need to pay close attention to the identity needs of individuals on both group-based and personal levels. We also should be reflexively aware of our own ethnocentric tendencies that we bring into an intercultural encounter situation. While our primary identities give us guidance and direction in our everyday lives, they also delimit our thinking and behaving. We tend to use our ethnocentric standards in evaluating dissimilar others' performance. A detailed explanation of the various motivational factors can be found in subsequent chapters.

Skills

Skills in this context are our operational abilities to integrate knowledge and motivations with appropriate and effective intercultural practice. Adaptive interaction skills help us to communicate mindfully in an intercultural situation. Many interaction skills are useful in promoting appropriate and effective intercultural communication.

Some of these, for example, are values' clarification skills, mindful observation skills, mindful listening skills, verbal empathy skills, nonverbal sensitivity skills, identity support skills, reframing skills, facework management skills, collaborative dialogue skills, and transcultural competence skills (see the "Recommendations" section at the end of Chapter 3–10). These skills will be discussed as they pertain to the different topics in later chapters.

Of all the operational skills, identity valuation is a major skill to master in mindful intercultural communication. For example, by paying atten-

tion to the cultural stranger and mindfully listening to what she or he has to say, we signal our intention of wanting to understand the identity of the dissimilar stranger. By conveying our respect and acceptance of group-based and person-based differences, we encourage interpersonal trust, inclusion, and connection. Lastly, by verbally and nonverbally confirming the desired identities of the cultural stranger, we reaffirm the intrinsic worthiness of the dissimilar other. Identity valuation skill can be conveyed through a word, a glance, a gesture, or responsive silence.

The feelings of being understood, respected, and intrinsically valued form the outcome dimensions of mindful intercultural communication. Mindful intercultural communication emphasizes the appropriate, effective, and satisfactory negotiation of shared meanings and desired goals between persons of different cultures. Mindful intercultural communicators are resourceful individuals who are attuned to both self-identity and other-identity negotiation issues. They are mindful of the antecedent, process, and outcome factors that shape the dynamic interplay of the intercultural communication process. They are also able to adapt to intercultural differences, flexibly and creatively, in a diverse range of communicative situations.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). Communicating across cultures. New York: The Guilford Press.