

## 11

### BOOK REVIEW

**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION BY L.E. SARBAUGH,  
NEW BRUNSWICK : TRANSACTION BOOKS, 1988, 2ND. ED. VII AND  
150P, DIAGRAMS, TABLES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, APPENDIX AND INDEX  
(ISBN 0887 38-719-5)**

*Latiffah Pawanteh\**

This slim second edition on intercultural communication brings forth new materials as a continuation to the first edition, published a decade earlier. The first edition provides a useful taxonomy of the different levels of interculturalness, the author now emphasises the idea of a continuum of interculturalness. The author draws attention to several situational encounters, variations in world views, and the quest for people typologies. He presents a new approach towards conceptualising of the levels of interculturalness.

This book is divided into eleven chapters; the first four cover theoretical issues which form the basis for a discussion on guidelines for the intercultural communicator in the final chapter. The remaining chapters are reports of case studies on various intercultural contact situations. Sarbaugh devotes considerable space to highlighting the crucial links between communication and culture. He seeks to draw the reader's attention to the interdependence of these elements in communication behaviour.

In Chapter One, the author introduces the labelling of communication into intercultural and intracultural through the use of the concepts of homogeneity and heterogeneity. It brings forth a notion that what exists in interculturalness is a matter of degree or level rather than a dichotomy between intra and intercultural. The concluding part of this chapter seeks to suggest various aspects which can be regarded as universal in human behaviour. Chapter Two and Three identifies seven sets of key variables in communication which are developed into a taxonomy for classifying and identifying events which occur within a given class or

---

\* Latiffah Pawanteh is a lecturer in Intercultural Communication and Development Communication at the Department of Communication, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.

subclass of events. This taxonomy is a useful framework to categorise communication events according to their levels along the homogeneity-heterogeneity continuum. Chapter Four examines the application of this taxonomy in the intercultural context.

It is interesting to note that only two out of the six cases which describe the various levels of interculturalness, that is, from a lower level of intercultural transaction to a highly heterogeneous setting involve communication between different ethnic groups from different countries. The other four cases are either descriptions of situations of different social classes or comments on specific minority-majority relationships in the United States.

In short the entire text is confined to a discussion of the intercultural communication process within the United States and more so, specifically within the White majority American social context. It differs from the mainstream texts on the subject which generally discuss intercultural patterns outside of the boundary of individual ethnic groups (Samovar, 1986; Prosser, 1978; Gudykunst, 1984). A reader in search of pertaining to communication between different ethnic groups may find this text somewhat disappointing. The author however succeeds in identifying the levels of interculturalness that clearly exist as well as in the construction of taxonomy. Further analyses of these two elements will certainly strengthened the arguments Sarbaugh holds and will contribute a measure of insight towards the process of theory-building in the field of intercultural communication. However, the guidelines included in the concluding chapter does offer some suggestions, self analyses and directions that can be applied to any situation and in any intercultural context, be it within or beyond the national boundaries.

Sarbaugh could have generated more meaning to the case studies if there had been more factual and specific details on them. Hypothetical examples offered are less than convincing especially if the reader has been exposed to intercultural studies. Furthermore the repetitive and rather complicated code systems used to explain the application of the taxonomy in intercultural situations can easily cloud the readers' appreciation of the subject.

Despite the flaws mentioned above, this book is clearly a useful and timely contribution to the growing interest in intercultural communication. It is also a break from the framework of conventional wisdom which usually revolves around the theme of intercultural communication; this text looks at the very meaning of intercultural dimension itself. What results is an analysis of the process of interculturalness which naturally adds some refinement towards the understanding of the intercultural phenomenon. It sets a new premise towards a deeper understanding of intercultural communication.

### **Bibliography**

- Gudykunst, W. 1984. *Intercultural Communication Theory Current Perspectives*. Beverly Hills: Sage.  
Samovar, L. (ed). 1985. *Understanding Intercultural Communication*. Belmont: Wadsworth.  
Prosser, M. 1978. *Introduction to Intercultural Dialogue*. Boston : Houghton-Mifflin.