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Intercultural Specialized Communication

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Abstract

In the globalized world of the 2020s, much of the communication in specialized fields is intercultural. Diversity, variations, and differences can be seen as a source of innovation and new ways of thinking or, alternatively, as a source of communication problems that need to be solved. Today, the traditional theorizations of culture as a static and stable system of values, communicative traits, and cognitive patterns typical of nation-states or ethnic groups fail to explain the complexities of specialized communication in professional contexts. Alternative solutions such as cross-cultural comparisons are needed as they may open new perspectives and alternative ways of thinking. In this article, three approaches to intercultural communication research, cross-cultural, intercultural, and inter-discourse approaches, are illustrated by presenting one example study representing each category and discussing the potential of a specialized communication approach in each case. As specialized communication contexts form an important part of the social world, it is crucial that the explanatory power of specialized communication research is taken into consideration when studying intercultural communication in such contexts.

1 Introduction

Intercultural communication may be defined as communication between individuals and groups representing different social, ethnic, religious, and educational backgrounds (Myers 2018: 45). These different affiliations may be seen as potential causes of misunderstandings in communication, which is why a strong problem orientation has prevailed in intercultural communication research. The focus has been on how to prevent misunderstandings resulting from differences in background knowledge, values, communicative traits, and cognitive patterns. However, this approach is not the only one with relevance to *specialized communication*, which here refers broadly to the field-internal and field-external communication of experts representing a special field (see, e.g., Heidrich and Schubert 2020).

Professional communities consist of people whose cultural identities have been shaped by a large variety of factors, not only by national, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds. Varying memberships of different groupings enabled by global interconnectedness may affect how people communicate and understand each other.

In this context, the traditional essentialist theorizations of culture (according to Piller [2017 (2011)], e.g., by Hall and Hofstede) as a static and stable system of values, communicative traits, and

cognitive patterns typical of nation-states or ethnic groups fail to explain the complexities of everyday communication situations. In other words, it cannot be said that culture would *determine* the understandings of professionals who have a substantial amount of shared knowledge of their field, including concept systems, genre repertoires, and discourses. These comprise the shared knowledge of the representatives of the field irrespective of their cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds. The shared conceptual foundation of the specialized field provides a basis for mutual understanding in situations where professionals from different backgrounds meet even though the extent and scope of the “common ground” may vary and depends on the field in question.

The knowledge of what types of institutional and societal differences there are between countries and parts of the world concerning a specific field is a part of the shared knowledge of professionals in international contexts. Even though these differences may cause problems for mutual understanding, an awareness of their existence is an important part of professional knowledge. Thus, in a complex, globalized world, professionals within special fields form an important in-group, where intercultural communication is not initially seen as a problem to be overcome but as an essential part of self-understanding and identity formation.

2 Defining intercultural communication

Above, the term *intercultural communication* was used as an umbrella term for all types of situations where culture and differences are seen as relevant. Scollon, Scollon, and Jones (2012: 17; see also Piller 2017: 4), however, differentiate between cross-cultural communication, intercultural communication, and inter-discourse communication as approaches to research. The two first mentioned approaches are based on the assumption that there are cultural differences between groups of people. The difference is that *cross-cultural* approaches tend to study communicative practices comparatively, or even in an abstract fashion, without direct connection to social interaction, while *intercultural communication* focuses on practices where people are in social interaction with each other. The *inter-discourse approach*, for its part, does not presume any cultural differences but focuses on how culture is made relevant in specific contexts (see also Rathmayr 2017). These distinctions will be relevant when considering the potential for a specialized communication approach to intercultural communication below, because they cover both traditional approaches and newer approaches to culture and difference. Another label used for the *inter-discourse approach* is *interculturality*, which refers to all non-essentialist approaches studying how cultural identities and practices are negotiated. However, interculturality is also used in a broader sense, seeing identity as a fluid and changing concept (Baker 2022: 286). Because of this polysemy, the term used in this article is *inter-discourse approach*.

Coming from a different conceptual background, the concepts of *multiculturalism* and *transculturalism* are also used for studying interactions across cultures, especially in sociology and anthropology. While multiculturalism tends to refer to the co-existence of different ethnic groups in a geographic area (e.g., Clayton 2020: 211), transculturalism challenges the idea of “discrete” cultures and focuses on how mutual influence from different cultures continuously creates new cultural forms and practices (e.g., Welsch 1999; Kath 2015: 29). Thereby, *transculturality* is described as “going beyond culture” (Monceri 2019: 78). Moreover, the idea of the *transcultural* not only challenges the boundaries between traditional cultures, but also other boundaries, including the ones between academic disciplines (König and Rakow 2016: 99). From a specialized communication research point of view, this may offer new avenues for understanding our current forms of knowledge production.

In addition to the conceptualizations mentioned above, the concept of *superdiversity* addresses questions related to diversity in geographic areas. The concept builds on multiculturalism and transculturalism but it can be seen as a response to the criticism that multiculturalism tends to oversimplify difference (see, e.g., Vertovec 2022: 5; Blommaert 2013). As a result of migration, when people from highly diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds come together, superdiversity forms a context where previous communication patterns, styles and norms are challenged and new ones emerge. Furthermore, complex social configurations arise as social, cultural, religious and linguistic phenomena intersect with others such as age, gender or professional status (see, e.g., Vertovec 2022). Thus, the communicative consequences of superdiversity offer multiple research topics where a special communication point of view could be one among many others. Questions such as how superdiversity impacts communication in organizations or how experts navigate communication challenges in a superdiversity context are highly important in today's globalizing world. However, the concept of superdiversity is a much broader project to understand social complexity and would require an article of its own. Therefore, it is not discussed in more detail here.

Even though challenged by new perspectives, the concept of culture is still at the core of most types of intercultural communication research, and it can be considered to be a "pre-theoretical" conception. According to Piller (2017: 9–10), researchers of intercultural communication have interpreted culture as an entity that *people have or belong to* or, alternatively, as a process where culture is something that *people do or perform*. In the context of specialized communication, for the above-mentioned reasons, the latter interpretation seems relevant: for professional communities, culture is something that is (made) relevant through discourse.

According to the traditional view introduced by Hall and Hall (1990: 3), culture is characterized as *a silent language* referring to unconsciously learned underlying concepts and practices that shape the lives of people. Moreover, Hall and Hall (1990: 3–4) compare culture with a computer that guides the actions and responses of humans. In this understanding, culture is seen as a subconscious and invisible control mechanism that operates in the minds of people. There is a great deal of research on cross-cultural communication based on this understanding in different fields. Also, much of the research on intercultural business communication has relied on the idea that culturally acceptable actions are defined by culture and that people conform to that. In the next section, some central concepts of the research on intercultural communication, including the concepts of high- and low-context cultures (see Hall and Hall 1990: 6) and Hofstede's (e.g., 2001) dimensions of culture, are briefly presented.

3 Theories and concepts of intercultural communication research

According to Hall (1976; Hall and Hall 1990), cultures can be categorized into high-context and low-context cultures corresponding to communication style and cultural issues. Hall and Hall (1990: 6) define context as "information that surrounds an event" connected with the meaning of the event. The type of context is reflected in how much information needs to be coded explicitly: in a high-context culture, information is shared to a degree that very little needs to be explicit. In a low-context culture, on the contrary, as much as possible is explicitly expressed. From a special communication point of view, it is interesting that Hall and Hall (1990: 6) categorize specialized communication situations, such as lawyers in the courtroom, mathematicians in a programming context, politicians discussing laws, and administrators writing a legislation, as low-context. This has to do with the role of non-verbal communication, which is seen as crucial in high-context cultures and less so in low-context cultures. However, it does not consider the amount of shared

information, which enables the participants to rely on implicit meaning-making, which is typical of professionals in a special field.

Context is a relevant factor in any communication situation: it is what defines specialized communication. However, what makes the idea of low- and high-context problematic is that it is applied in a straightforward way to nation-states without problematizing the connection. Hall (1976) does this as does Hofstede (2001), the latter of whom is perhaps the most influential scholar focusing on cultural differences based on nations.

Much work in intercultural communication has built on Hall's ideas. Notably, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's (1988) study of verbal communication styles continue along the same lines. They suggest that there are four dimensions along which verbal communication may differ in different cultures: direct–indirect, instrumental–affective, personal–contextual, and succinct–elaborate. Related to high-context and low-context cultures, the dimensions lead to the proposal that in a high-context culture, communication tends to be indirect, understated, reserved, ambiguous, and harmonious.

In low-context cultures, alternatively, communication tends to be direct, open, precise, dramatic, and based on feelings or true intentions (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988; Gudykunst 2000). Categorizations such as these are theoretical abstractions, which can be easily applied in empirical analysis, but their problem is that they tend to lead to a deterministic view of culture as they do not account for people's or professional communities' own agency but often reduce them to stereotypes.

Along with Hall's theories, Hofstede (2001) has been pivotal to the development of intercultural communication study in business contexts. Based on an international questionnaire directed to the employees of IBM, Hofstede started developing a quantitative tool for calculating scores for countries on four cultural dimensions of “power distance (from small to large), collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance (from weak to strong)” (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010 [1994]: 31). Later they added long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010: 38, 45). Hofstede's dimensions were intended for business communication training, but they have also been frequently used for academic research. Hofstede's work has been criticized for nationalism, the equation of culture to six value orientations, and for quantification (e.g., Piller 2017: 123). For especially Western practitioners looking for simple answers for doing business outside their own countries, Hofstede's calculations have been appealing and easy to access. However, simple answers come with risks. Assuming that the role of the nation-state is the same all over the world and focusing on stereotypes rather than real people may lead to overlooking difference and diversity as factors that need to be understood and explained. Therefore, researchers should be very careful when drawing from all types of clear-cut categorizations. Simultaneously, it must be recognized that the dimensions introduced may be relevant to look at in more detail in certain contexts.

At the center of applied intercultural communication research is *intercultural communication competence* (ICC). Introduced in the early work of Hall, the competence perspective has been embraced by those planning trainings and education to prepare students and professionals for intercultural interactions such as working or studying abroad. However, ICC has been defined, named, and described in various ways depending on how intercultural communication has been viewed and what is understood by competence (see, e.g., Myers 2018: 53–54). The idea of a “competent intercultural communicator” is abstract and varies according to the research goals. A basic, general definition of ICC is that it is “the ability to both *appropriately* establish common ground and to *effectively* achieve desired outcomes” (Al-Sumait et al. 2022: 64). Another definition

is presented by Ting-Toomey (1993: 73), who, based on an identity negotiation view, states that ICC is “the effective negotiation process between two interactants in a novel communication episode”.

There are several scales for quantitatively measuring ICC for different purposes, such as education, business, and industry. Many of them include the following three dimensions: a cognitive dimension (knowledge), an affective dimension (attitudes), and an operational dimension (behavior) (e.g., Byram 1994).

From a specialized communication perspective, the concept of ICC seems to be generic and concentrated on an individual’s competences. The variable specialized communication contexts set their own requirements as to how competence should be understood and what it may consist of in different fields. However, the ideal of effective communication is shared between ICC and some branches of research in specialized communication.

Another perspective is offered by the concept of *transcultural competence*, which abandons the idea of efficiency in favor of understanding and respecting the interconnectedness of all cultures. Instead, it builds on the ability of people to see similarities and critically self-reflect on one’s own understandings, simultaneously being open to learning from other cultures (Trenchs-Parera and Pastena 2021). This approach seems particularly valid for specialized communication contexts where professionals need to respect the ideas of others in order to learn from them. Moreover, their shared knowledge of the field gives the professionals confidence to interact with people with different backgrounds.

However, Baker (2022: 285) points out that transculturality has not yet had much impact on intercultural communication research. In part, this has to do with the fact that there are several definitions of the concept depending on the goal of the study (König and Rakow 2016: 94–95). While some applied fields of study, such as transcultural nursing or management, tend to see the transcultural in terms of *anthropological universals* (i.e., features shared by all people) that need to be understood to be able to facilitate intercultural communication between cultural groups, other, more theoretically oriented humanistic fields seek to completely deconstruct concepts like culture, society, or nation and concentrate on analyzing phenomena that question such boundaries (König and Rakow 2016: 94–95). In the latter sense, transcultural is rather used as a method or approach than an analytical concept. However, since the complexity of the transcultural approach is beyond the scope of this article, it focuses on other approaches, of which especially critical intercultural communication and the inter-discourse approach increasingly have recently challenged the idea of cultures as closed systems, much like the transcultural approach is doing.

4 The potential of a specialized communication approach

Current research in intercultural communication is highly multidisciplinary as a field, and there is a wide variety of approaches and specific journals dedicated to these. Contexts such as family life, schools, education, language teaching, business, and workplaces are approached from different perspectives. Even though many studies rely on specialized communication data, a specialized communication approach is not necessarily acknowledged. Figure 7.1 summarizes how a specialized communication approach may be related to Hall’s (1976) iceberg model of culture. According to the iceberg model, the tip of the iceberg is what we can see and discern of a given culture in practice, including language use, artifacts, and practices. Beyond the surface, however, is a large part of the culture formed by underlying beliefs, values, and patterns of thought. In order to

become familiar with the culture, a newcomer needs to engage in interaction with people and participate in their everyday lives.

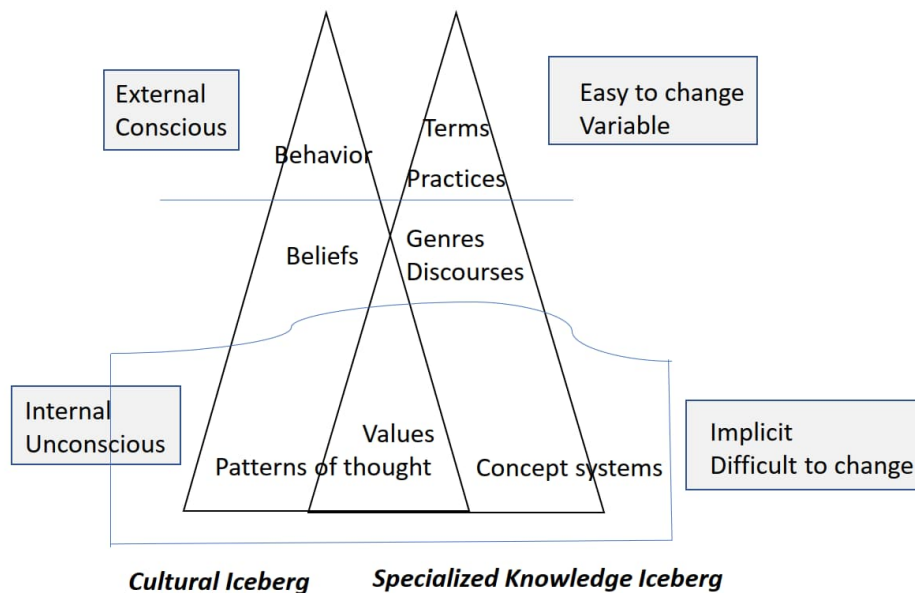


Figure 7.1. Special knowledge model of the cultural iceberg metaphor.

On the right side of Figure 7.1, a comparison with specialized knowledge is offered. Similar to culture in general, there is a visible part in specialized knowledge. Most obviously, specialized communication is recognized by the use of terms and practices related to certain special fields and, on a deeper level, of genres and discourses used (e.g., Gotti 2018). However, there is also the internal, often unconscious level of knowledge (a cognitive level) comprising values and concept systems that underlies and enables the communication at the surface level. This level guides how reality is seen in a professionally relevant way and how different aspects of the world are highlighted. Simultaneously, this level interacts with language use “at the surface” since language is crucial for constructing professional knowledge. The special communication approach to intercultural communication can focus on professional communities and the way they make cultural issues relevant in their interactions, but it can also consider specialized knowledge as a contextual factor when the focus is on other issues.

In the next sections, selected examples of studies applying cross-cultural, intercultural, and inter-discourse approaches in studying intercultural communication will be presented, and the potential for a specialized communication approach for them will be discussed. The studies have been chosen according to the following criteria: each has been published in a journal representing a certain approach to intercultural communication, each is new at the time of writing, and the context of each study is representative of some field of specialized communication. The selection is the result of a random sampling rather than careful consideration or evaluation of quality. However, the purpose of these descriptions is to discuss and evaluate the potential of a specialized communication point of view for the research in question. That is, the focus is not on specialized communication itself but on its potential for intercultural communication research.

4.1 Example of a study representing a cross-cultural communication approach

Published in the journal *Cross-Cultural Research* in 2022, the article by Bonetto, Pichot, and Adam-Troïan (2022) titled “The Role of Cultural Values in National-Level Innovation: Evidence from 106 Countries” discussed the influence of culture for national-level innovation. Innovation is a broad topic studied among others within the fields of business studies and psychology, but it also forms its own scientific field within social sciences (see, e.g., *International Journal of Innovation Studies* n.d.). The article thus concerns a phenomenon with potential relevance for specialized communication. *Cross-Cultural Research* (2022) is, according to the journal’s own description, dedicated to publishing cross-cultural and comparative studies in human sciences focusing on “research that systematically tests theories about human society and behavior, spanning societies, cultures, and nations” from a global perspective.

The aim of Bonetto, Pichot, and Adam-Troïan’s (2022) article was to study how the cultural dimensions presented by Hofstede are related to national-level innovation. The article builds on earlier research with a similar scope, which is reported to have led to inconsistent results about specific cultural dimensions and factors, affecting the findings. The article seeks to offer alternative explanations for the earlier inconsistent results. Since the theoretical frame of the research consists of Hofstede’s model, culture is understood in terms of national culture. This choice is not questioned but is motivated by “comparability purposes, because of its prior use in studies exploring the impact of culture on innovation” (Bonetto, Pichot, and Adam-Troïan 2022: 308–309).

The researchers formulated six hypotheses concerning the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence, based on earlier studies (Bonetto, Pichot, and Adam-Troïan 2022: 312). To test them, five indexes developed in earlier studies for measuring innovation were applied to data from 106 countries, selected on the basis that data for each variable were available at Hofstede’s consulting website (Hofstede Insights 2022). The results, based on a regression analysis, showed that only the cultural dimensions of long-term orientation and uncertainty avoidance seemed to be associated with national-level innovation (Bonetto, Pichot, and Adam-Troïan 2022: 314). To explain the findings, the researchers returned to the core of the definition of innovation as the implementation of ideas and promotion of change, which indicates the relevance of the special field under scrutiny in regard to the results.

Overall, the article fully embraces the *cross-cultural* approach to studying intercultural differences, where communication and communicative practices are not seen as relevant (see Scollon, Scollon, and Jones 2012). In this approach, culture is seen as nation-level abstraction removed from communicative practice. Therefore, it is challenging to find room for a specialized communication approach to these types of studies even though “the specialized knowledge iceberg” plays a fundamental role in the results. Still, for researchers interested in how national-level innovation comes about in practice in different countries and cultures, the specialized communication approach might offer an avenue for cross-cultural comparison. It might reveal fundamental differences in understanding what constitutes innovation and who has the power (of expertise) to voice and promote it at the national level.

4.2 Example of a study representing an intercultural communication approach

The intercultural approach as described by Scollon, Scollon, and Jones (2012) and Piller (2017) is very broad because it covers all types of research on communicative practices in settings where certain aspects of culture are made relevant. The starting point is the assumption that there are differences between people representing different cultural groups. Consequently, there are many studies in (applied) linguistics that can be counted in this category. Language also plays a central role in the formation of specialized knowledge and consequently professional cultures and identities. As the field is so broad, limitations have been necessary, and only one approach, that of intercultural rhetoric, will be presented in this section. The selection is based on the insight that alongside research in *business communication*, research in *academic writing* is one of the fields where a specialized communication context is frequently combined with cultural considerations, and thus it has relevance to specialized intercultural communication.

In a recent article based on intercultural rhetoric, Moreno (2021) compared how the discussion sections in research articles within social sciences written in English and Spanish promoted the research in question. The article “Selling Research in RA Discussion Sections through English and Spanish: An Intercultural Rhetoric Approach” was published in the journal *English for Specific Purposes*, which, of course, highlights the specialized communication perspective. The journal publishes articles “on topics relevant to the teaching and learning of discourse for specific communities: academic, occupational, or otherwise specialized” (*English for Specific Purposes* 2022).

Moreno’s (2021) article represents the field of *intercultural rhetoric*, which is a sub-field of academic writing research. As a reaction to the criticism against Robert Kaplan’s (1966) idea of using contrastive rhetoric to help overseas students to acclimate to the discourse conventions of US universities, Connor (2008) suggested that the term *intercultural rhetoric* should be used instead to emphasize that there are both similarities and differences between rhetorical styles across cultures. As a field of research, intercultural rhetoric has focused on comparing how the academic writing of non-native speakers of English relates to native English speakers’ writing and understanding the differences and explaining them. The results have been applied in second language writing pedagogy with the aim of helping students to acclimate to the rhetorical norms of the English language.

Moreno’s (2021) article focused on the academic genre of the research article as the most influential medium of the academy and studied how authors representing the field of social sciences explicitly promoted their research in the discussion sections of their articles. Both English language and Spanish language articles were analyzed. The study thus applied a comparative perspective on the promotional passages in the articles. The article is problem-oriented in that it seeks to shed light on why Spanish social scientists tend not to promote their research explicitly in the ways expected in English-medium academic journals. The hypothesis was that the Spanish texts are less promotional than the English ones (and thus do not get published). The corpus consisted of ten pairs of comparable exemplary texts (i.e., 20 texts) published in English and Spanish in the fields of pedagogy, psychology, sociology, and (applied) economics. The method of the study was based on categorizing the communicative functions used to advance the text and to achieve its purpose along the lines of an earlier study by the author. The research promotion strategies were divided into direct (five) and indirect (three) strategies, the occurrence of which were analyzed statistically in both parts of the corpus. In addition, an online survey given to the authors of the texts was carried

out to explore the reasons for potential differences (seven answers were received, two of which were from authors of English texts).

The results of the analysis as a whole supported the hypothesis: explicitly promotional text segments were more common in the English language data, while non-promotional text prevailed in the Spanish texts. However, when it came to articles in business and economics, the result was the opposite, but the difference was not found to be statistically significant. In addition, the preference of promotional strategies differed between the parts of the corpus. While the English texts preferred to highlight the positive features of the study and the applicability of the outcomes, the Spanish texts more often mentioned the contributions of the study and relevance of the topic and a positive evaluation of the state of knowledge (Moreno 2021: 13). Only one of the direct promotional strategies, the contribution of the study, was found to be obligatory (used in 90% of the English texts and 80% of the Spanish texts), leading the author to suggest that the discussion sections of English language research articles are becoming promotional sections par excellence in comparison with earlier studies. This, again, would make the authors aware of the importance of the discussion sections in social sciences. The contributions strategy overall was more common in Spanish than in English, and indeed, the Spanish journal had been requesting the authors to state their contributions clearly in the discussion section (Moreno 2021: 13). According to Moreno (2021: 13), this could be part of a general trend of the standardization of contemporary scientific rhetoric.

From a specialized intercultural communication point of view, Moreno's conclusion (2021: 15) that different levels of culture may explain the results is particularly relevant. According to the author, different levels of culture affect the results. While there are general communication principles such as "academic modesty" at play, each discipline has its own conventions and processes of socialization to academic writing, which also play a role. Moreno (2021: 16) also warns against essentialist interpretations of the results by stating that rather than witnessing monolithic cultural traditions of writing, the results show how the authors seem to actively change their rhetoric to meet the new communication needs brought about not only by publishing in English but also by the new Spanish research assessment policy. To conclude, Moreno (2021: 16) also emphasizes that it is vital to recognize the importance of the Spanish academic writing conventions in social sciences and not impose the Anglo-American norms as superior to the Spanish ones.

Moreno's article is illustrative of the intricate balancing act necessary in intercultural communication approaches, also applicable in specialized communication contexts other than academic writing. The starting point is that there are cultural differences, for example, in academic writing in different languages. However, these cannot be understood as the result of some abstract cultural characteristics that people have or specificities that the cultures as such have, nor can they be traced back to certain nationalities. From a specialized communication point of view, it is important to recognize the active role of the professional community in promoting certain communicative choices and socializing newcomers to the underlying norms, values, and thought patterns. It is natural that when the context changes, the values also gradually change and develop, and language plays a central role in constructing and negotiating the specialized knowledge in each new context. Thus, a specialized communication approach to intercultural communication needs to apply a dynamic definition of culture when it comes both to "culture" in general and to the subcultures of specialized fields.

4.3 Example of a study representing an inter-discourse communication approach

The inter-discourse communication approach described by Scollon, Scollon, and Jones (2012) abandons the idea of the solidity of culture as the default starting point for research and embraces the intersubjectivity of the intercultural. This means that the research concentrates on studying how the (inter-)cultural is made relevant in interaction in specific contexts. From the point of view of specialized communication, this approach is different from the cross-cultural and intercultural communication approaches discussed above as it strives to take a starting point for studying human interaction other than cultures, languages, or communities. Consequently, this type of research participates in types of discussions other than those focusing on professional communities as entities in their own right. Instead, issues such as those concerning ethnicity, race, diversity, cultural identity, or citizenship are raised. However, this does not mean that these aspects would not be relevant for specialized communication, only that there is a difference in focus. At the core of the inter-discourse approach to intercultural communication is the study of human interaction. Next, a recent research article addressing a highly specialized communication setting, namely oral communication at Swedish construction sites, will be introduced.

Kahlin et al.'s (2022) article "Translanguaging as a Resource for Meaning-Making at Multilingual Construction Sites" has been published in the journal *Multilingua. Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*. The journal describes itself as an interdisciplinary forum for research on linguistic diversity of social life in "hitherto neglected sociolinguistic contexts worldwide". Like the name of the journal indicates, the preferred topics include bi- and multilingualism, inter- and cross-cultural communication, and critical sociolinguistic studies of language and communication in globalization (*Multilingua* 2022).

The article focuses on oral communication at Swedish construction sites. These sites are multilingual as there are workers from Poland, Ukraine, and Estonia. The aim of the research was to investigate the social spaces that the workers construct when they go between or beyond different linguistic structures. Basically, the goal was to study how the workers draw from different languages and mobilize linguistic resources together with embodied resources of meaning-making.

Methodologically, the study draws from linguistic ethnography and conversation analysis. The data of the study were collected from three construction sites through ethnographic observations (in all, about seven days) and video recordings of naturally occurring interactions among workers from Poland, Estonia, Sweden, and Ukraine (in all, 25 hours).

The theoretical framework is based on the concept of translanguaging. Instead of talking about separate languages, translanguaging starts from the idea that when communicating, people select resources from their individual linguistic repertoire that they have acquired during the course of their lives (e.g., Blackledge and Creese 2017: 252). In the context of specialized communication, field-specific specialized knowledge is present and supports the understanding and use of linguistic and other resources from different languages. For example, picking up terms in another language is easy when the context supports the understanding (Kahlin et al. 2022: 267).

In the article, translanguaging is seen as a resource in each worker's professional repertoire. However, the results of the study show that verbal communication across languages, let alone translanguaging, seldom happens among construction workers. On the contrary, the construction sites are organized hierarchically to support a monolingual ideology. However, there are some individuals and specific contexts where translanguaging occurs, namely those working alone and

needing help, but first and foremost the team leaders and managers who work on the boundaries between language groups. The team leaders regularly function as *language brokers*, that is, mediators across language barriers (Kahlin et al. 2022: 267).

For professionals who are familiar with the terminology of their field, it is easy to adopt and use terms from other languages as visible indications of another culture. In terms of a linguistic resource, the professional repertoire increases with intercultural interactions. According to Kahlin et al. (2022: 278), terms in other languages were adopted by all types of workers. In addition, for contexts such as construction sites, an important feature is that verbal language is not the only means of communication. The study shows how workers were able to solve problems in professional tasks through minimal verbal interaction thanks to their professional knowledge and vision.

The team leaders were in a special position between the management and the workers and therefore had and needed a broader repertoire of linguistic resources. These were used in a flexible way to achieve both social and professional aims. The authors conclude that the professional and social space created by the team leaders not only enables them to transcend linguistic boundaries but also offers opportunities for language learning and, finally, may even help with upward mobility at the sites (Kahlin et al. 2022: 277). Even though translanguaging as such does not allow the workers to influence power hierarchies, it is evident that hierarchy and the local social status of the speaker plays a role as to the degree to which the person can make their voice heard.

In terms of specialized intercultural communication, Kahlin et al.'s article illustrates what can be achieved by the inter-discourse approach. A close interactional analysis reveals how intercultural communication is hindered by organizational arrangements but also how linguistic and cultural borders are crossed by means of specialized communication resources as well as by communicative creativity. Thus, the findings have applicability for specialized communication research and education more broadly.

5 Summary and discussion

This article has addressed the question of what a specialized communication approach to intercultural communication looks like in times when internationalization and globalization are an intrinsic feature of the everyday life of professional communities and experts of all fields. The starting point of the discussion was that intercultural communication as a research field is diverse and encompasses different paradigms and directions from cultural studies to linguistics, from management studies to psychology, and from anthropology to education. From the applied and practical aim to prepare individuals for working and studying abroad, the research field has broadened its interests to addressing important societal issues such as migration, diaspora, gender, and ethnicity.

Research in intercultural communication has been criticized for advancing reductive and hegemonic interpretations in which cultures are reduced to nation-states, and non-Western cultural realities are marginalized (e.g., Piller 2017; Holliday 2022; Monceri 2019; Baker 2022). To answer this criticism, new types of research, such as interculturality, transculturality, and superdiversity approaches, seeking to understand intercultural richness rather than categorize people and cultures into clear-cut groups with specific features, are gaining ground. Because specialized communication forms an important part of the social world, it is important that the specialized communication point

of view is taken into consideration in more traditional as well as in these types of studies when relevant.

In this article, three approaches to intercultural communication research – the cross-cultural approach, the intercultural approach, and the inter-discourse approach – have been illustrated by presenting one example study deemed to represent each category and to have a connection with specialized communication. The selection is, of course, limited and highlights certain types of intercultural communication research, theories, and concepts while neglecting others at least as prominent and important. However, the point with the discussions has not been to give an all-encompassing picture of the field but to point out spaces where a specialized communication approach could be useful and enrich our understanding of intercultural phenomena in specialized communication contexts. Accordingly, it seems that there is least space for considering the special communication perspective in cross-cultural approaches because of the strict confinement to ready-made categories and indexes. In spite of this, considerations of specialized communication are not irrelevant to these studies, either. In the type of intercultural communication approach presented in this article, it seems that the specialized communication point of view is easy to include and comes naturally, not least because it is already there. However, this does not mean that it is so for other types of research representing this approach. When it comes to the inter-discourse approach, it seems that many of the contexts included in these studies represent everyday life experiences and do not highlight the specialized communication point of view. Thus, it seems that here is a space where a specialized communication approach could be more actively applied and embraced.

In addition to the three approaches mentioned above, the transcultural approach seeks to challenge the significance of all boundaries, including those between specialized fields and disciplines. This approach prompts fresh inquiries within the realm of specialized communication research. These involve examining the foundations of existing disciplinary knowledge from multiple perspectives and considering the transformative dynamics characteristic of the knowledge. Such a critical assessment has the potential to provide novel insights for specialized communication research, encompassing language use and communicative behaviors.

Similarly, the concept of superdiversity reveals how the “traditional” challenges of specialized communication easily accentuate in contexts of superdiversity. Therefore, special communication research should pay attention to how change in both communication patterns and knowledge production comes about and how professionals can cope with it. This requires a multidisciplinary approach and a deep understanding of the dynamic nature of values and patterns of thought, reflected in the concept systems of specialized fields.

Overall, this discussion shows that multidisciplinary fields of research, such as that of intercultural communication, are in constant movement, and new directions emerge, and even paradigms change (Holliday and MacDonald 2020). This being the case, it is important for specialized communication scholars to follow up the developments and contribute to the scholarship from their own perspectives, thus strengthening intercultural communication studies as a field relevant for specialized communication communities worldwide.

6 References

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