Fred Dervin

# Interculturologies: Moving Forward with Interculturality in Research and Education

Springer

# Encounters between East and West

Intercultural Perspectives

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This book series publishes volumes problematizing the issue of East versus West. The topics covered in the series represent past, current and future trends in intercultural encounters and communication between the East and West, including: - The role of language in such encounters, for example plurilingualism and English as a global language. - The impact of digital technologies in East/West interactions. - The construction of the East/West in different kinds of discourses, such as in media, fiction, educational products and services, marketing and tourism. - Diachronic examinations of encounters between the East/West. - The impact of mobility/migration. - Comparison of different but similar populations in the East/West (e.g. migrants, teachers, etc.). - Redefinitions of the East/West, in terms of changing frontiers, political terms. The series also demonstrates innovative ways of conducting intercultural research. It has now become a cliché to say that intercultural encounters have increased over recent decades. Interculturality is not new – far from it! Encounters between people from different backgrounds speaking different languages have always taken place, but the difference today is the speed and ease with which they occur. Research on interculturality and intercultural communication dates back to the 1950s with different paradigms emerging over the years. However, we have now reached a mature stage of scientific development and discussions on this topic. While initially a simple understanding of 'national culture' was used to explain what happened when people from different countries met, today analyses of interculturality are more complex and also take into account elements such as gender, religion, social class and age. The last decade has seen major changes in the way interculturality is studied, with a shift from an overemphasis on culture to a focus on identity. Global politics has also changed since the 1950s and some countries that used to be colonies or 'closed' societies have (re-)emerged and in some cases taken on economic, political and symbolic positions. The dichotomy of the East vs. West has also reappeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This largely imaginary and political characterization of our world now deserves more attention, especially in relation to intercultural encounters and communication between these two spheres.

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# Interculturologies: Moving Forward with Interculturality in Research and Education

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*These interculturologies are dedicated to Kaija Saariaho (1952–2023), whose dazzling palette of musical colours, taught me how to listen imperfectly for the past 30 years.*

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# About the Author

**Fred Dervin** is a Professor of Multicultural Education at the University of Helsinki (Finland) and an Art Curator. He specializes in intercultural communication education, the sociology of multiculturalism and the internationalization of education. His latest books include (2022) *Fragments in Interculturality: A Reflexive Approach* (Springer); (2023) *Communicating around Interculturality in Research and Education* (Routledge). He has made extensive contributions to revising the politics of interculturality within and beyond the 'canon' of intercultural communication education research.

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# Chapter 1
# Interculturality Beyond Divisions

**Abstract**  This chapter introduces both the rationale and the objectives of this ambitious book. The author explains how it is embedded in his 25-year-old engagement with the notion of interculturality and in 'constructions' and 'destructions' of intercultural relations and encounters in the 2020s. The neologism of interculturologies is problematized and defined, examining the importance of *mythologies* and *ideologies* in research and education and their consequences on what we say about and do with interculturality. Finally, the author explains the book's working principles of *criticality of criticality* and *de-re-languaging* to review the 100 entries (100 interculturologies) included in the book.

**Keywords**  Mythologies · Ideologies · Interculturality · Method · Encounters

– Friend: 'Where is the way for interculturality?'
– Fred: 'There is no way'.
– Friend: 'Since there is no way, why continue working on it?'

Looking at the world dissolve into wars and all kinds of incomprehensible crises and conflicts in recent months, I have often found myself in moments of desperation, wondering why I continue writing and researching interculturality. Mind you, these calamities are neither new nor unexpected. Every morning when I go to my computer, my mind cannot really focus. I feel hopeless and useless. I replay the awful images that my mind has been presented with by the media: *children being slaughtered; hospitals and schools bombed; people argueing and fighting with each other, wishing the other had been 'burnt alive' and 'raped'*… I rage at 'our' hypocrisy whereby 'we' accept some of these disgusting disasters and condemn others. *Are we all humans?*

I am then reminded of Bradbury (2015: 4), who in *Zen in the Art of Writing*, tells us: 'Writing is supposed to be difficult, agonizing, a dreadful exercise, a terrible occupation'.

I take a deep breath and try to write. But it all seems pointless, sitting comfortably in my study in a small village in Finland…

The short opening dialogue was between a friend from China and myself. *Why continue working on interculturality* in terribly upsetting times like ourselves where there does not seem to be 'a way'?

This book was written as many of the aforementioned horrors were unfolding. With it, I wanted to take a break and review what had been done in the large field of interculturality in education and research for the past decades. Having selected 100 entries, i.e., 100 concepts, ideologemes ('pieces of ideologies'), 'ready-to-think' elements that I consider to have been very popular in the field, this ambitious book represents one of my temporary and explorative ways into futures of interculturality. There is a need to take a break at moments like these and to reflect critically on what we have done and achieved so that we may (or not) move forward in research and education, and, hopefully, beyond… It is not about triggering some kind of revolution of interculturality but to look at ourselves looking at interculturality and unrethinking what we have done and said.

The proposed neologism *interculturologies* refers to the enmeshment of both *mythologies* and *ideologies* of interculturality in research and education and to their consequences on what we say about and do with the notion.

The word *mythologies* is from Latin and Greek for *speech, thought, word, discourse, conversation* but also *story, saga, tale, myth and anything delivered by word of mouth.* In languages like English, mythologies also refer to *untrue stories, rumors* and *imaginaries.* Interculturologies are understood to be all of these at the same time in the book. Although we locate ourselves within the realm of research and education, which are often thought of as 'rational', 'objective', 'down-to-earth', etc., it is not uncommon for a complex and polysemous notion like interculturality to be treated by means of imaginaries, myths, tales and lies…

When I asked some of my students what they make of the idea of mythologies, here is how some of them tried to circumscribe it:

> In my opinion, this notion largely means **stereotype about cultures**. People imagine that people from a specific culture will have some **fixed features**, and they may keep these features in mind when they interact with people from other cultures.
>
> Mythologies about interculturality refers to **baseless imaginations about the action by which people from a given culture interact with people from other cultures**. In short, it's imaginations about people from other cultures.
>
> Mythologies about interculturality is that **you understand and explain other cultures based on your own culture and life experience.**
>
> Deeply engrained in **official practice and research discourses** on interculturality, these mythologies **deserve to be defused and replaced with alternative perspectives to alter the ways we talk about intercultural encounters in education and other disciplines.**

A Chinese student even refers to a term from Chinese that they made up to explain mythologies: 跨文化的想象, which can translate as 'intercultural imagination'. She explains: 'In these Chinese words, it also indicated that imaginaries are not real (the Chinese character "虚" is kind of false or empty) and is a production of human mind. (the word "想象" can be understood as "in the scale of thoughts")'.

[Everyone has mythologies about self-other and any aspect of the world around them (Barthes, 1972). Mythologies help us make sense of the complexities of these

elements, which we can never grasp fully. Mythologies are thus necessary. They are also 'good' and 'bad' and *something else*. Researchers and educators alike have built up their own mythologies about interculturality, often without realizing. For instance, making use of a given term such as *tolerance, intercultural competence* or *democracy* throws us straight into the realm of mythologies since they force us to think about a reality in specific (and often unstable) ways.]

[In the book, I understand mythologies to occur when we make use of ideologies while either pretending to be un-ideological or being unaware of the ideological (economic-political) content of ideologies. For example, the now popular ideologeme of *intercultural citizenship* is used, abused, and overused in many parts of the world, without making reference to its 'uber-European' political background (see Kong & Spenader, 2023). It is often 'cleansed' of these localized economic-political elements and thus becomes a mythology disseminated to the rest of the world.]

[Mythologies and ideologies often create a divide between what we have been made to think and imagine for interculturality and the ways we experience it.]

In the book, the word *ideologies* is not necessarily a negative construct. It refers to what we *all* do as soon as we engage with any aspect of interculturality in research and education since the notion cannot but be *political*. Ideologies occur through the words we utter in relation to interculturality, which means that we do not necessarily endorse (understand?) them fully or put them into action when we 'act' interculturally (Dervin, 2023; Roucek, 1944). It is important to remember this oft-found gap between discourse and action. *What we say we do and say does not always correspond to what we do and say elsewhere…* When we use other languages to discuss interculturality, we may not be fully aware of the (economic-political) 'flavours' of the words that we employ to do so.

In the book, ideologies refer to:

**1.** what we have been made to *believe in* by all kinds of 'authorities' (governments, teachers, parents, media…) concerning the notion and realities of interculturality without necessarily agreeing entirely with them, merely rehearsing them strategically ('parrot-like');

**2.** how we have been urged, trained, pushed *to speak about* interculturality, even if we don't necessarily understand what we say or reflect on the words that we use;

**3.** Ideologies also include the knowledge, beliefs, dreams and ideologemes that are sub-/consciously *silenced about* interculturality;

**4.** The strong belief built in us that our own ideological take *is the only valid one* and that other takes are ideologically negative and 'wrong'*,* although we may misunderstand and be ignorant of other perspectives on interculturality;

**5.** In a neoliberal capitalistic world like ours, where economic exploitation, political domination and submission are omnipresent, intimidating, pressuring and enslaving ideologies of interculturality pushed forward by powerful 'Western' figures *influence us* in the way we speak about and (often) wish to do interculturality.

[**Keywords**: *believe in, (have been made to) speak about, silenced about, the only valid ideology, influence.*]

Ideologies and mythologies of interculturality have been with us since the broad field of intercultural communication education emerged in Western and then global academias. They have been revised, removed, erased, banished, criticized, (pseudo-)

modified, often following dominating local and global economic-political 'orders'. I must admit that delineating mythologies (imaginaries) and ideologies is not an easy task since we can never really be sure of the intentions of those who use them— strategic, economic-political, pseudo-scientific motivations… *In any case, we are all in this together.* We are all ideological and mythological even when we think or claim we are not. We cannot experience and discuss such an economic-political notion of our times without being so.

## 1.1  What's in a Label?

[Like music and fragrance, interculturality is an invisible, untangeable phenomenon. It is there but it is not there. We can talk about it *imperfectly* but we cannot 'grab' it, touch 'it'.]

[According to etymonline.com (2023), the Latin preposition, adverb and prefix *inter* refers to *among, between, betwixt, in the midst of*. *Inter* most likely relates to Proto-Indo-European, Sanskrit and Old Persian for *among* and *between.* First, in the English language, it was spelt like French (*entre-*) and shifted to *inter* in the sixteenth century, except in words like *entertain* and *enterprise.* In general, the prefix *inter-* in English can refer to 1. intervals, space between; 2. reciprocity, relations; 3. obstacles, separation. Interculturality can be any of these and/or all of these, depending on the utterer. In many languages, there is no direct equivalent for the prefix (Chinese, Finnish…).]

Nearly every week someone asks me why I stick to the word *interculturality* in my research. *27 years of interculturality.* Last week, a colleague suggested that I could call it *interculturation* (as in *acculturation*). Half-jokingly I explained to them that I could call the notion 'intertability' (-table), 'superspoonity' (-spoon) or 'transwindity' (-wind). A label is just a label. A label does not guarantee *clarity, collegiality, agreement, like-mindedness…* A label that we do not change, whose meanings and flavours we do not renegotiate with others in English and other languages is just a label. What is more, as soon as we try to circumscribe a phenomenon like interculturality in words, it cannot but become ideological, especially if it leads to 'orders' as to how to speak about and 'do' it.

*If I told you what interculturality was it would be a hoax. Since I come from one small corner of this world, my own views and orders on the notion are mine to keep.*

Interculturality is in fact a *Harlequin's coat* (in reference to the coat with contrasting colours organized in diamond patterns, worn by a famous stock comic character from the comedia dell'arte). It is a manifold notion that can be understood, discussed and used in many diverse ways in different corners of the world. Interculturality encompasses an uncountable number of Weltanschauungen (badly translated as 'worldviews', diverse apprehensions of the world). It is thus impossible to *speak about* interculturality in ways that would *speak to* the whole world, especially in a global language like English. This should motivate us to unthink the notion as something complete. This should urge us to ask interculturality to free ourselves

from interculturality. A contradiction. *Interculturality-beyond-(our)-interculturality. Interculturality beyond the magic mushroom illusion. Meta-interculturality, beyond interculturality. Interculturality that unites all possibilities beyond divisions.*

When asked what interculturality is, one of my students provided what I consider to be the 'best' non-definition of interculturality. She said: 'interculturality is something I can feel but I cannot describe or define it'. I would add that interculturality is something that we do and undo ad infinitum while we engage with others and the world. There is no (real) beginning no (real) end. Hungarian composer György Ligeti (1923–2006) explained that 'On ne parle pas d'amour, on fait l'amour. On ne parle pas de musique, on fait la musique' (*We can't speak about love, we make love. We can't speak about music, we make music*, my translation). In a similar vein, I am tempted to write that *we can't speak about interculturality, we (just) do interculturality*. As a scholar and an educator, this is a big paradox since I spend most of my time speaking and writing about the notion. And yet, there is some interesting 'truth' in this assertion which could hint at the impossibility to be 'complete' about it in research and education.

So, what do I do with this label? Recently a colleague tried to summarize my current views on interculturality. Since I did not feel entirely comfortable with what they tried to make me say, I wrote:

> What I am exploring is how we should [could] think of the notion in relation to the economic, political and ideological. The usual focus on *culture* (whatever this old and tired concept means) is a diversion from what matters when we meet interculturally [as individuals but also scholars and educators]. Because economically, politically and ideologically, we are ALL both divided locally and linked up by neoliberalism and cannibalistic capitalism that eat us ALL, interculturality is indeed something unstable as a notion. And yet in global research in English, it is dominated by western (economic political) takes often pretending to be *scientific, humanistic, objective*, enlightened... I have been working on Chinese and EU discourses of interculturality for a while now and I can see similarities and differences as influenced by what politicians, economists, scholars and educators want us to spread ideologically—which rarely corresponds to our personal experiences of intercultural encounters. This makes interculturality not an easy recipe to apply but something we need to engage *life-long* critically and reflexively, beyond the 'taken-for-granted'.

While reviewing the 100 interculturologies in the book, these are some of the basic guiding principles that I put into practice.

## 1.2 'Why Do I Get the Feeling That I Am Talking to Myself?'

In an episode from the 1970s, US TV series called *Eight is Enough*, one of the characters hosts a Chinese visitor who cannot speak English. Using drawings and exaggerated non-verbality to explain what he would want to do in the USA (i.e., go see the film *Saturday Night Fever*, which the American host misunderstands as going clubbing), the Chinese man fails to make himself understood, leading to the American who keeps speaking English to him, to wonder aloud: 'Why do I get the feeling

that I am talking to myself?'. Talking about interculturality with other scholars and educators in English and other languages, one might often have the feeling that we are also 'talking to ourselves' since we don't necessarily share the same words, discourses, ideologies, mythologies, imaginaries, etc., as well as the same emotions in front of specific words and arguments. For example, I am sure that the short paragraph that I inserted at the end of the previous section, which was a response to a colleague's message, will most likely be misunderstood by many colleagues and students for all kinds of reasons (disagreement, irritation, surprise, disruption…). This is bound to happen and we must accept it.

Over the past 3 years, I have often felt that making use of metaphors is an imperfect, changeable and re-negotiable way to try to share one's views on interculturality as a notion. As figures of speech, metaphors allow us to use a word or a phrase to denote, e.g., an object or an idea in place of another to suggest a potential correspondence between them. Metaphors about interculturality can also help us express how we 'feel' in front of the notion without having to attempt to define it. Engaging with others around these metaphors, which might require looking at a piece of art or listening to music together, could enhance our feeling that *we are not talking just to ourselves.*

In my *Interculturality in Fragments* book (Dervin, 2022), I share many such metaphors to urge us to think about the notion in bits and pieces. Just to give you a taste of how 'my' interculturality feels like at the time of writing, which represents both a continuation and a departure from the ways I have engaged with the notion in the past, I take a short detour via musical metaphors in what follows.

a. One of the most eye-opening concerts I ever attended was by pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard who had mixed György Ligeti's piano music from the twentieth century with older works by Beethoven (1770–1827), Chopin (1810–1849) and Debussy (1862–1918). The pieces from these composers switched back and forth. Instead of following the list of pieces on the concert programme as the pianist was playing, I let go and tried to guess whose piece was being played and when. Although I could recognize specific characteristics of some of these composers (e.g., Debussy), after five pieces (there were around 30 in total), I could not make sense of their differences and felt that the pianist had managed to create a form of *interculturality* whereby similarities and differences, complementarities of emotions and tones took over the individuality of the composers and their pieces. To me this was what interculturality could be about in this extraordinary new rendition, recreation and balancing of different yet similar music pieces. *Each piece stood with and against other pieces.*

b. The orchestral piece titled *Métaboles* by Henri Dutilleux (1916–2013), was composed in 1963–64. In the piece, the composer developed new structures that changed according to the inner logic of the five different but overlapping movements of the piece, played without pause. The composer explains (BSO, 2023):

> The rhetorical term Métaboles, applied to a musical form, reveals my intention: to present one or several ideas in a different order and from different angles, until, by successive stages, they are made to change character completely.
>
> In other words, throughout the work, various melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic ideas are presented and then gradually modified to the point that they transform into something radically different and undergo a complete change of nature. This new idea then serves as the basis for the next series of metamorphosis.

In other words, *Métaboles* changes as it moves forward, avoiding repeating tunes and styles. Here again, I feel that this is a great metaphor for the *-ity* of interculturality: metamorphoses, *Métaboles* as we engage with each other. *We move forward in novel ways. We create and balance together, in the dissonance of life. We resist. We accept. We change. We un-change. We understand. We dislike. We appreciate. We harmonize…*

c.  The third musical reference is to Luigi Nono (1924–1990) whose compositional work has often been misunderstood as highly political, shadowing his very original musical elements. In his later works, the composer wanted to highlight the importance of the act of listening, confronting us with our own in/capacity to listen, re-balancing, re-arranging and re-distributing it in the process. For Nono, *to listen* is a synonym for *silence*—a process that he deems difficult to see impossible today. Silence should allow us to listen to other thoughts, sounds, ideas, noises, silences… so that we can rediscover ourselves in others. He writes: 'Perhaps one can change the rituals; perhaps it is possible to try to wake up the ear. To wake up the ear, the eyes, human thinking, intelligence, the most exposed inwardness. This is now what is crucial' (Nono, 2001: 522). In his music, Nono thus tries to create uncertainty, unpredictability and confusion through sound combinations. For example, the composer makes use of similar sounds coming from, e.g., a piano or a tape, fusing them while confusing the listener, especially during live concerts. Here again, this could serve as an important metaphor for what interculturality could be about confusion, fusion, silence to listen to others.

[Temporary positions on interculturality through metaphors must be unpacked, discussed, added to, discarded, clarified…].

## 1.3  Criticality of Criticality

> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.
>
> Nietzsche (1959: 46–47)

[Truth. *Such a big word.* Such a treacherous word for interculturality. Such an unstable invention. Such a changeable and strategic device when we write about interculturality. Such an illusionary tool when we meet the so-called other.]

On the wall in front of my desk at home, I have pinned the following letter written by Louis Althusser (1918–1990) in 1978, in response to a reader's critique of Marxism and communism:

> Although your letter does not call, in the strict sense of the term, for an answer, since it is confined to strong conditions, I would like to draw your attention to a small book titled 'The Assembly Line' by R. Linhart, published by Editions de Minuit. If you want to read it and take it seriously, you will convince yourself that, in addition to the ills you lament in foreign countries over which I do not know that we can have any real control, there is in our own country [France], practically unknown to the majority of French people, something that could be labelled as our own 'gulag' and that do not owe anything to Marxism. I trust your good faith to read this book, which has received very positive and unanimous reviews from the press.

The book that Althusser refers to is a firsthand account of the upsetting experience of industrial work. This letter reminds us of the importance of a principle that I have put forward in research on interculturality in recent years: *criticality of criticality.* This is a central concept in dealing with interculturologies.

Criticality is an omnipresent and omnipotent guiding light in intercultural research and education today. It is the *new moral black* in intercultural communication education. But there is a risk that, if everything is critical, then nothing might be critical in the end—whatever we make of the idea of criticality.

[Criticality of criticality forces us to unrethink our own critique as 'superior', used to 'put the other down'.

Criticality of criticality urges us to continue thinking critically without stopping, being self-sufficient with what we say and do about interculturality.

Criticality of criticality serves the purpose of destabilizing, disrupting our own thinking ad infinitum.

Criticality of criticality reminds us that claims of criticality do not necessarily lead to criticality.

Criticality of criticality tells us to not adopt some form of *anticonformist conformism*, i.e., rehearsing well-recycled critiques that would deserve to be unpacked further.

Criticality of criticality asks from us to consider how much we are affected by all kinds of biases and centrisms: partisan bias, affinity bias, commitment bias, familiarity bias; ethnocentrism, adultcentrism, ideologicentrism, guru-centrism… (Dervin, 2023).]

As soon as I observe, comment upon and analyse the criticality of another I need to apply that lens to myself using it as a mirror. Interculturologies are not mere critiques of what others do but also self-critiques of our engagement with interculturality in research and education.

This is why I ask a lot of questions in the 100 entries. I do not consider my critiques (and revised ones) to be the end or to finalize some conversation around the entries. I have always believed that we learn much more by asking questions

than providing/listening to one answer. In my career, I have learnt much more by questions asked by my students than by the answers that 'confirmed' researchers and/or 'experienced' educators might have provided to some questions. Listening to questions without wishing to provide ready-made answers is a good way of fighting against potentially false promises of interculturality, whereby we might suffocate under the burden of the (falsely) obvious and taken for granted. *I don't and I can't understand things straight away.* I need to dig below this pulsion of instantaneous understanding, which is often a mere illusion. I want to ask and listen to questions. I want us to enjoy our own hermeneutic freedom as far as interculturality is concerned. A free thinker is someone who can ask questions, without feeling the pressure to have ready-made answers.

Maybe, criticality here is not about finding *a truth, some truth* but about *how not to find one…* criticality could represent the infinite capacity to ask oneself questions without necessarily finding answers. This—again—requires to take the time and to enjoy *silence…* with oneself and with others.

## 1.4  *De-re-Languaging* as a Central Goal

*Subway in Shenzhen, China.* A male voice announces in a very strong American accent: 'It is a traditional virtue to respect the elderly and children. So please leave your seats to them on the train'. *MTR in Hong Kong.* A female voice makes a similar announcement in British English. My impression of the content of the message differs according to how it is said and by whom, linking up different English accents to, e.g., credibility and authenticity.

Language is the main instrument we use to discuss and construct interculturologies. Beckett (2009) puts it nicely when he claims: 'Words are the clothes thoughts wear'. These clothes are many and varied; (un-)suitable, discardable, recyclable, identity constructors, etc. And since languaging (using language to create discourses and experiences of interculturality continuously) is never a complete task but an endless, unstable and complex process, it makes speaking about interculturality always temporary and changeable. 'Perfect' languaging about the notion and the mythologies and ideologies that go with it cannot but be a mirage. *Hence the need to de-re-language.*

[Words are moving molecules. Trying to stop them from shifting positions, meanings, flavours and connotations is a form of fascism that goes against any hint of interculturality.]

De-re-languaging represents an important way to deal with the tyranny of language, with how we are often prevented from speaking in certain ways and forced to say things in ways that we do not necessarily endorse—but feel obliged to speak. De-re-languaging is like a culinary journey; it is about opening up to other tastes and flavours to enrich it with transformative experiences, refraining ourselves from judging too quickly. I note that in Hebrew דבר(*davar*) refers to *a word, to speak* but also, in its feminine form, the word means *a bee* and hints at the idea of *foraging*

(from flower to flower). Interestingly, דבר(*davar*) shares the same root as the verb for *to destroy*. To speak has to do with destroying and thus the process of reconstructing. De-languaging and re-languaging must be the two sides of the same coin.

Wherever we are located in the world, whatever influence we might have on a field of research, however famous we might be, there is always something left to say about interculturality—and in different changing ways.

## 1.5   About the Book

Your work is not easy to read. (anonymous)

For the past 70 years a lot has been written about interculturality in different fields of research such as communication, education and business studies. Globally, conceptual, epistemological and theoretical trends have emerged, remained and disappeared, crossing disciplinary, national and linguistic borders. Specific figures, mostly from the 'West', have dominated and ruled the broad field of interculturality, locally and globally. This has led to certain ideologies ('orders to think and act with', '(hidden) agendas' and 'filters'), anchored in particular economic-political agendas to be openly and/or indirectly applied to intercultural research and education (amongst others). Over the decades, a certain number of mythologies and imaginaries, which represent another facet of *interculturologies*, have been created around and circulated about the notion of interculturality within and across national, linguistic, educational and disciplinary borders. These mythologies often make what we say about and 'do' with interculturality taken-for-granted and accepted but also unfair and uncritical of what they might entail for others (e.g., those being researched). However, keeping a critical and reflexive eye is the key to engaging with interculturality.

This book focuses on a selection of 100 terms, organized as alphabetical entries (500–800 words per entry). The entries were selected based on my extensive knowledge of the field, my frustrations with most of these popular entries as well consultation of recent literature (research articles and books) in the broad field of intercultural communication education. Each entry is presented as follows: etymological and multilingual discussions, scientific origins, content, short reviews of the global literature in English and some myths, imaginaries and ideological orders that they have led to construct. Questions at the beginning and end of each entry help us think further about the notion of interculturality today. Based on my 20+-year experience in researching and teaching in the field of intercultural communication education, my constant reflexive and critical engagement with interculturality (And my own critiques of the notion) and in-depth reviews of current research, I have chosen carefully (recurrent) concepts, notions, ideas that deserve to be deconstructed to help us think further about the notion, especially beyond the 'West' and certain static and resistant ideological positions. These all represent a complex body of concepts and notions but also myths and imaginaries that can prevent us from moving forward in our thinking and acting interculturally, leading to those who dominate the ways

we think and 'do' interculturality in research and education being reinforced in their privileged positions. As a whole the book also serves as a reading guide for further interculturologies that the reader might identify in the future or as they engage with the book.

The 100 entries include: *Adaptation, Affiliations, Assessing, Autobiography, Biculturalism, Centre, Citizenship, Clash of civilizations, Collaboration, Collectivism, Community, Complexity, Conflict, Confucianism, Cooperation, Cosmopolitanism, Council of Europe, Creativity, Critical, Culturalism, Culture, Cultural appropriation, Cultural confidence, Culture shock, Democracy, Democratic culture, Dialogue, Difference, Discourse analysis, Diversity, East and West, Effective communication, Encounters, Essentialism, Ethnicity, Ethnocentrism, Ethnography, Face, Face-to-face, Failure, Foreigner, Framework, Global, Globalization, Harmony, Hofstede, Homogeneous cultures, Hospitality, Hybrid, Identity, Inclusion, Ideologies, Individualism, Integration, Intercultural competence, Interdisciplinarity, Internationalization, Intersection, -isms, Language, Liquid, Linguaculture, Listening, Migrant, Minority, Monocultural, Mother tongue, Name, Non-essentialism, Openmindedness, Origins, Othering, Philosophical, Politeness, Politics, Power, Practical, Race, Reflexivity, Relativism, Respect, Responsibility, Similarities, Small culture, Social justice, Stereotypes, Stranger, Successful, Third space, Time orientation, Tolerance, Training, Transcultural, Translanguaging, Travel, Understanding, UNESCO, Universalism, Values, West (the), Westerncentric.*

[The best compliment I have ever received was about *how difficult reading my work is*. I see it as compliment because it means that *what* and especially *how* I write urges us to encounter interculturality in (imperfectly) complex and unpredictable ways. The tendency to make interculturality *nice, easy, happy* does not reflect the inherent challenges that the notion presents to us as researchers and educators.]

In most entries, I include moments whereby I open different windows to destabilize, disrupt the rhythm of my writing, paralleling the instabilities and unpredictabilities of interculturality. The reader will notice that the entries also contain part of my own autobiography and diaries since the personal, scientific and educational cannot be separated. To speak about interculturality in research cannot do away with what the scholar experiences, feels and projects onto realities. The 'diary moments' of the book are often related to what was happening in our confused and confusing world while I was writing the book.

In writing the entries, I have often followed a principle proposed by composer Salvatore Sciarrino (Feneyrou, 2013), which he calls the 'ecology of listening'. For Sciarrino, listening is not just about ears but should involved the entire body, listening with, e.g., our eyes, our skin and listening differently according to the time of the day (night, day), the weather (fine, cloudy, snowy), our moods (hungry, not hungry), etc. In engaging with the 100 interculturologies, I tried to 'listen to' the multiple (inner and outer) voices that I include with my whole body, while trying to engage with my own silences and other's silent moments. As you read through the entries, try to weigh the words that I use (and those I borrow from others), engaging your whole body, not just your ears. I am including pictures that I took during my visits to China to help us expand our ecology of listening…

I would also like to conclude by saying that this book is in itself a book of multifaceted encounters. Encounters with others I have met and never met, encounters with ideas, ideologies, concepts, notions, methods, books, articles, etc. It is also especially a book of encounters with my own interculturologies. In reviewing others' mythologies and ideologies, I evaluate and sometimes revise my own, setting my interculturologies against others', hoping that, at times, these oppositions and synergies, can create some special 'energy' urging us to continue exploring critical and reflexive takes on interculturality further. I hope that, by becoming more sensitive to interculturologies, we can all start un-re-thinking the notion of interculturality afresh and try out new ways of engaging with and around it.

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# Chapter 2
# From Adaptation to Autobiography

**Abstract**  This chapter reviews the following four interculturologies: *adaptation, affiliations, assessing* and *autobiography*. Etymological discussions in several languages as well as examples of myths concerning the ways these interculturologies have been constructed and used in research and education are presented. Recent literature reviews from different corners of the world serve the purpose of unravelling current mythologies and ideologies about the entries and help the reader move forward in their own understanding and position towards them. Critical and reflexive questions end the chapter to support the principle of criticality of criticality. The reader is asked to keep this principle in mind as they engage with the content of each entry, observing if and how the author himself puts it into practice while discussing the interculturologies he has identified.

**Keywords**  Interculturality · Adaptation · Affiliations · Assessing · Autobiography

## 2.1   Adaptation

**Examples of myths**: *Someone can adapt to a culture when they speak the local language. Adaptation means that one should abandon one's original culture. Adaptation can be tested.*

The word *adaptation* is often found in the literature on interculturality in English, alongside other terms such as *acculturation, assimilation*. Most of the publications have to do with international education, student mobility and general migration. The 'Chinese student', often stereotyped as 'different' in many parts of the world, seems to have the longest and most developed focus in research on adaption. The meanings and connotations of these terms are both polysemic and unstable. The word is based on Latin for *to join/fitted* (*ad-aptare*). In English, the word first referred to *a state of being fitted* and since the end of the eighteenth century *modification to suit new conditions*. This etymology helps me problematize a first important aspects of adaptation for interculturality: is it about a 'state' and/or a 'process'? My main concern about the concept is based on the myth that one person 'adapts' to another

and/or a given context. As a reminder, the inter- of interculturality indicates a two-way balancing act whereby those involved re-negotiate their relations, what they say and do together constantly. However, due to unescapable power differentials and relations, the inter- as well as adaptation cannot always (or can it ever?) lead to joint processes of equal relations and interactions. Although most research is about individuals, the main indirect focus is on how institutions can benefit from, e.g., models of adaptation to help students transition more easily—and thus save time and money by making them 'feel at home' and 'blend in'.

Most publications tend to adopt a linear approach through the (mostly Western) theories or models that they adopt, giving an impression that adaption goes through different stages (e.g., low, moderate…), with (often) no turning back, as if one could control one's life experiences, emotions and encounters flawlessly (e.g., Xu et al.'s (2020) three processes: *planning, implementing* and *reflecting*). Theories noted in recent publications include, e.g., integrative intercultural adaptation theory; anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory and Habermas's theory of communication action. Models and scales are plentifold: Motivation and Expectation Scale; Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students; The Intercultural Adaptation Strategies Scale; Baron and Kenny's (1986) framework to test the prediction that Intercultural Willingness to Communicate (IWTC) (e.g., Sun et al., 2022); the Council of Europe's Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE); Acculturation Strategies Research Questionnaire and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). All these are adapted from different (Western) contexts, ideological backgrounds and assumptions.

I note that discussions of adaptation and interculturality are often accompanied by inclusion into broader discourses of intercultural competence, cross-cultural adaptation strategies, intercultural transition, see intercultural 'intelligence' and aim somehow for discussing issues of effectiveness. In other words, one must be successful at adaptation, mistakes and 'failure' being negatively evaluated. The focus on adaptation is often justified by aggrandizing words such as *collisions* (clashes?), *the gulf between 'cultures'* and *stress*, which are observed by researchers. Adaptation is thus often presented as the result of problems and challenges, see even a problem itself. Reading most studies on international students' adaptation one notices two strong biases: 1. these challenges must be banished and 2. Students never seem to face 'easy', 'problem-free' situations, especially at the beginning of their stays abroad. But what does adaptation seem to mean concretely in research? Similar keywords seem to appear: for instance, (the polysemic and unclear idea of) flexibility; (similarly problematic) self-knowledge; familiarizing oneself with an education system (types of courses, academic tasks…). In *A study of intercultural adaptation in the Sino-American joint training dual degree programs* (Yueyue et al., 2022), the authors have identified a number of elements that are said to 'facilitate' adaptation such as the number of 'local' friends (an unclear term, who is 'local' and who decides?); the length of stay; the strength of motivation. They assert that active participation in interpersonal communication, an enhanced understanding of the 'new culture', with the amplification of cultural identity will support adaptation. All these elements represent typical interculturologies: what is a 'new culture'? Is a place one culture?

Is this a reference to 'national' culture? Does communicating (whatever the word might mean) lead to adaptation? In the study the authors seem to blend in adaption, integration and assimilation. Using questionnaires and scales, one is left to wonder if adaption can be so easily observed. Interculturality is an unstable relation and experience, which fluctuates with time, space and encounters. 'Adapting' is neither definitive nor 'successful'. Another important aspect of adaptation is: from whose perspective is it observed and 'dictated'? Does it come from within individuals or from an external force such as a theory/model used by a researcher?

Most of the recent papers consulted offer some 'implications' for, e.g., both policy-making and educators. The way the recommendations are formulated indicate again some biases ('reduce the negative effects of intercultural adaptation'), influenced by economic-political ideologies. Adaptation means money, effectiveness and well-being/happiness for the authors and the policy-makers they speak to—neo-liberal values that are ambiguous (ethically) and that deserve to be questioned. All the (somewhat empty and ideological-oriented) 'recipes' proposed for adaptation seem to hint at some kind of 'soft medicalization of interculturality': a major problem was identified and we need *ointment, plasters* and *medicines* to solve them. However, both the diagnosis and treatment appear to be very problematic. In the 2020s, living in another country, communicating with others, do represent different phenomena compared to 70 years ago when the issue of adaptation started to emerge in the field. Using the same words, ideologies and models to 'deal with' it does not seem to make sense anymore. Often, I feel that discourses of adaptation (gradation, culture shock, etc.) somehow influence individuals too much and can have a negative impact on their experiences and encounters (e.g., 'I must avoid culture shock'; 'I must adapt to the local culture'—statements that are either empty or so polysemic as to mean nothing by the end of the day).

**Further questions**: *Who can adapt to whom and what? Who can observe these adaptations and decide who can adapt, how and why? Who can define adaptation, especially in terms of the dichotomy of success and failure? Can adaption discourses and practices go beyond this dichotomy? Can adaption reflect the never-ending balancing act of interculturality? Finally: what if one does not feel one adapts or one is deemed not to have adapted? Does it really matter and for whom? What do such judgmental phenomena tell about us as researchers, educators, interculturalists rather than about the one we are observing?*

## 2.2 Affiliations

**Examples of myths**: *When one is affiliated to a culture, it is for life. Affiliation is always authentic. One can decide if one is affiliated to a group or a culture.*

Although the use of the word *affiliations* is not so common in research on inter-cultural communication education, it is found in-/directly in the descriptions of some publications and research projects. Since there is a deep need in all social beings to be

affiliated to something or someone (see the idea of elective affinity, Maffesoli (1997) and community), it is important to look into it as an interculturology. I note first that the English word comes from Latin for 'to adopt as a son' (*filius* = son, see filial), which hints at a 'biological/social' connotation. Often, affiliation, which has to do with one's identity, associating, partnering, joining, developing a relationship with, leaving groups, can relate to *place* (e.g., a city, a region) *race, ethnicity, civilization, culture, language, religion* but also *economic statuses, politics* and *organizations*— depending on the context of affiliation-speak. For instance, cultural affiliation is defined by Law Insider (a contract database for lawyers and business owners, see Law Insider, 2023) as follows:

> *Cultural affiliation* is established when the preponderance of the evidence—based on geographical, kinship, biological, archeological, anthropological, linguistic, folklore, oral tradition, historical evidence, or other information or expert opinion—reasonably leads to such a conclusion.

One can see that the definition of *cultural* with *affiliation* is very broad (for critiques of culture, see Wikan, 2012) and seems to include a multitude of elements such as history, geography, biology. Some of these elements can be understood and determined in different ways in different parts of the world (e.g., traditions, kinship, folklore). Even in the English language, all these elements are polysemic. Law Insider notes that in general cultural affiliation has to do with a group identity—this is probably why the qualifiers for the concept are so broad. The problem with the idea of group identity is: *where does a group start and finish? Who can determine these elements and for whom?*

In China, affiliation with a 'hometown' (place of birth or related to family roots over three generations) matters for most individuals and can serve as a 'bonding' identity marker, a link for increasing one's social capitals, etc. Affiliations might also be secretive, for example, in relation to a powerful underground association or a religious group. Synonyms for affiliations in English include *alliance, connection, union, kinship,* and even *incorporation, integration* (amongst others). In Chinese, the idea of affiliation is often associated with the word 关系 (guānxì) which might also translate as and indicate dependency and subordination. Creating 'affiliations', 'supportive relationships', 'ties' in Chinese can be seen as a way of increasing one's possibilities and opportunities in life, as well as those around us (close family and friends). In English, guānxì can translate as social capitals. Signs of affiliation can also appear through symbols (e.g., a flower, an animal representing a nation, a region), drawings, words, etc. They can be applied to T-shirts, pens, phone covers, flags, etc. For example, I have noted that many people who wish to 'affiliate' with Finland might tend to wear clothes designed by, e.g., the fashion company Marimekko famous for its poppy flower patterns. It is important to remember that affiliations (can) also change overtime as one navigates the complexities of life, and with the development of digital technologies one can expand one's network of affiliations in an unlimited manner. We can affiliate with a short-lived group for a few seconds or for longer (see, e.g., TikTok). In the era of 'liquid' identity (Bauman, 2004), affiliations can easily change while being reinforced, solidified in the face of adversity. For example,

debates around gender identity in recent years in the 'West', which has led to many people identify through pronouns in different ways (with the use of the pronoun 'they' to refer to self, pushing aside the dichotomy of he and she), signal the amplified questioning of static affiliations. Finally, it is important to note that some of us have more opportunities to expand their affiliations than others, depending on their economic-political status. This is the case, for example, of those who can afford to, e.g., obtain several passports or residence permits in different parts of the world or who can navigate between different (often positively perceived) identities. Others do not have such freedoms and are often restricted to a single affiliation by powerful figures (e.g., affiliated to a group of migrants, religious people…).

For interculturality, affiliation might relate to, e.g., a cultural heritage and nationality one might find on someone's passport. Affiliations can be claimed, desired, imposed, rejected, criticized, appropriated, promoted, fabricated, marketized… Affiliations can also be appropriated, which can lead to problems of identification for those who belong to the appropriated affiliation, leading to accusations of, e.g., cultural appropriation. We spend most of our time claiming, showing, linking up to, entertaining, reinforcing, splitting up from affiliations. Every utterance starting with *I am xxx* or *she is xxx* in education relates to an affiliation, i.e., how we position ourselves in reference to (constructed) realities, others, groups, and other entities that require comparison to our own being. As such affiliations are exclusionary, they can divide people. When I affiliate, while I connect with a few selected ones, I exclude others. Affiliations thus represent what and who I identify with; what and who I am identified with. In educational contexts one might hear teachers being urged to be sensitive to 'cultural affiliations' of each of their students in order to provide good teaching. About the concept of intercultural competence, one might read that one does not need to abandon one's cultural affiliations or identifications to be able to develop such a competence.

In research, affiliations do matter too and are often omnipresent one way or another. There is first the very affiliations of the scholar within specific fields (linguistics, education, sociology), as a member of a national/linguistic identity and even in terms of seniority/advancement globally. What is more, research often affiliates those we research willy-nilly. For example, many research articles talk about 'Chinese students', 'Finnish student teachers', 'American businessmen' in intercultural studies. The questions we ask our research participants might also require from them to declare their affiliations (see a question heard many times asked to so-called 'migrant students' in Finland: 'do you feel more Finnish than Iraqi?' to someone whose family is from Iraq). So as scholars we often 'play' with affiliations implicitly or explicitly, which may have an influence on what people say/do, what we write about and how those who read us perceive these affiliations. As said earlier affiliations are about doing identity, including/excluding and creating specific (fantasized) images of who we are versus others. Generally speaking, we need to beware of imposing any form of affiliation on people through research. Since affiliations can be unstable and sensitive, space should be given to affiliation 'claimers'. People should never be judged in-/directly for affiliations, for example, in the way we use words to refer to them or in the way we 'interpret' what they say. Affiliations are at the core