

Understanding intercultural communication: negotiating a grammar of culture, 2nd edition, by Adrian Holliday, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2018, 194 pp., £ 110 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-8153-5238-9

Understanding Intercultural Communication is an extensively revised second edition of Holliday's 2013 landmark publication. The two main aims of the volume remain substantially unvaried as the author proposes to offer a framework to understand intercultural communication and to solve intercultural problems. However, the format of the book is different. Whilst the first edition was essentially a textbook providing a set of classroom activities, the new edition is designed to stimulate discussion as readers are presented with a number of ethnographic case studies that explore 'the intercultural' everyday life. Throughout the chapters, Holliday engages in an ongoing dialogue with his readers and he encourages other researchers to interpret the examples he offers and to bring in their own experiences of intercultural encounters.

The book is underpinned by Adrian Holliday's 'grammar of culture' which has played a prominent role in the author's academic production (see 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2016). The grammar derives from Holliday's (2011a) interpretation of Weber's social action model. Constructed as an imaginary map to read intercultural events, the grammar is represented by different domains in conversation. As an approach to the study of culture and interculturality, the grammar does not aim to pin down notions of culture, but rather suggests a framework for understanding how discourses of and about culture are represented. Much of the focus of the book is on the concept of 'small culture formation on the go', that are everyday processes we all take part in as we engage with others, or choose not to, and we co-construct meaning.

The book draws on the grammar to address a number of key issues in intercultural communication, including: the positive contribution of people from diverse cultural backgrounds; the politics of Self and Other which promote negative stereotyping; the basis for a de-centred approach to globalisation in which periphery cultural realities can gain voice and ownership.

Two key features of the book are the presence of little academic reference, aimed at uncluttering the authorial voice, and the wide use of ethnographic narratives—at least two per chapter—to illustrate how interculturality 'happens' in everyday life as we meet others, for example, in the workplace, on holiday, in social situations. All the narratives reconstruct intercultural scenarios (e.g., meeting in-laws for the first time, having dinner at a friend's house, travelling abroad for a conference) based on the author's own research and experience. Holliday's characters meet others from different cultural backgrounds, and they face different issues as these encounters do not always have the outcomes that those involved expected.

The author's examples and reflections offer an insightful, multi-layered, and comprehensive picture of the 'the intercultural' beyond national stereotypes. Although

the narratives cover a number of issues and domains, they are by no means an exhaustive representation of interculturality, but they are rather springboards for the reader's own reflections on and analysis of intercultural practice.

The book comprises a preface and nine core chapters. The epilogue-literature review chapter in the first edition has been replaced by suggestions for further readings at the end of each chapter.

Chapter 1 revisits Holliday's 'grammar of culture'. The grammar comprises four domains in loose conversation. These are: particular social and political structures; personal trajectories; underlying universal cultural processes; and, particular cultural products. The grammar focuses on the relationships and interactions between structures and products—indicated on the left and the right of the map—"both mediated by politics and ideology, and the way that individuals construct meaning as they build their lives" (Holliday, 2016, p. 25). The grammar not only captures the fluid nature of culture, but it rests on the belief that culture is socially constructed by different people, at different times, and in different contexts. Individuals can associate with many cultural realities, creating meanings constituted by a variety of layered factors such as religion, class, family, education, profession, ancestry, and language which provide framings for identity formation (Holliday, 2010). Moreover, people can subscribe to different, and sometimes even conflicting and competing, discourses of culture (Holliday, 2013).

Throughout the book, the author refers to the different domains of the grammar and each of the core chapters looks at the interconnections between the different domains and the issues that emerge.

Chapter 2 examines the concept of cultural practices, defined as 'shared and perhaps relatively established ways of doing things'—for example eating, arranging furniture and addressing people in business meetings—with the main function 'to be an outward show of how people wish to project themselves to others' (Holliday, 2019, p.8). As cultural practices may represent one most noticeable sign of difference to 'foreigners' or 'newcomers', a careful consideration of how to approach them is important both to be able to engage with others and to understand them as individuals.

The author concluded the chapter by citing Dervin (2016) in acknowledging that 'interculturality is very difficult to define' (Holliday, 2019, p.30), and by suggesting '10 commandments' to deal with its complexities.

Chapter 3 offers guidance on how to approach and make sense of 'unfamiliar' cultural practices and environments. The chapter centres on the importance of appreciating common underlying universal cultural processes that we all engage in as, for example, we are faced with the difficult task of overcoming prejudices that we have previously internalised about the unfamiliar 'other'.

Chapter 4 focuses on culture as a social construct drawing on the author's understanding of mechanisms of 'small culture formation' (Holliday, 1999) defined as 'the everyday business of engaging with and creating culture' (Holliday, 2013, p. 56). In the study of culture and interculturality, Holliday (1999, 2011b) advocates a 'small culture approach' which enables exploration of the ways in which people make sense of and operate under particular, changing circumstances.

Chapter 5 explores the theme of creativity in cultural construction and its looks at its potential dialogue with particular social and political structures. These are understood by the author as structures that 'form us and make us different from each other' such as education, language, and religion (Holliday, 2016, p. 24). The chapter argues that, although social and political structures refer to the society where we were brought up, and they resonate with the idea of 'national culture', they do not limit who we are but they rather offer a set of possible resources that we can draw on to make sense of the reality around us when we encounter unfamiliar cultural environments.

In *Chapter 6* the author shifts the focus from individual processes of culture formation to grand narratives of nation and history. The key idea in the chapter is that we all draw on these grand narratives and carry them with us as we embark in everyday cultural engagements. The idea of 'historical reality' as underpinning these narratives of cultures is also problematised.

Chapter 7 focuses on the statement about culture domain located on the bottom right of the grammar. At the core of this domain, is the exploration of individuals' statements about culture, that is, why and how they choose to say particular things about 'their culture' (Holliday, 2016). Holliday (2019) problematises how discourses of culture — that are how we describe and discuss about 'culture' — draw people into the thinking which underpins them' (p.118). Rather than taking individuals' statements, or establishing whether or not they are true, the author encourages researchers to investigate what lies behind these statements and how and why people use them, for example, to perform particular identities.

Chapter 8 draws on the close association between cultural prejudice and neo-racism to illustrate 'the everyday dangers of falling into the trap of prejudice, especially when dealing with the strangeness of living away from home' (Holliday, 2019, p.154). Central to the chapter is the concept of *cultural disbelief*, that 'while 'other cultures' have the right to be themselves they present a 'problem' because they are incompatible with an *imagined* Western world view' (Holliday, 2019, p.157). The author considers it a major feature of cultural prejudice which underpins essentialist discourses of culture and it is often denied by those who practice it.

Chapter 9 explores how cultural experience and competence can be carried from one location to another. It uses the concept of underlying universal cultural processes — universally shared processes that transcend the boundaries between different cultural locations—to argue how 'cultural newcomers are able to transfer experience into a new

cultural environment' (Holliday, 2019, p.165). The narratives discussed in the chapter show how cultural travel can result in innovation as the different characters contest, accept and reject the 'otherness' that they encounter.

Overall, the book fulfils its aims and it provides both a theoretical framework through which to understand 'culture' from an intercultural perspective and a methodology that signals what needs to be researched when investigating it. The book is engaging, and the author tries to unpack and exemplify the guiding concepts. However, in order to fully appreciate the complexity of the different arguments, the reader needs to have some familiarity with Holliday's previous work and in particular with his terminology and his grammar of culture.

The publication of the book is timely for academics, students, and practitioners in intercultural communication and related fields as it offers guidance on how to research and understand 'the intercultural'. Perhaps more importantly, Holliday's work reminds us that, although we are all different because of our individual journeys through society are different (e.g., our upbringing), we all negotiate the intercultural in very similar ways and we are faced with similar problems. It also reminds us that interculturality is not just difficult to define but that achieving it is 'a long process of making sense in which we all try to find ways to be ourselves with each other' (Holliday, 2019, p. 180) and that as such it requires commitment and ongoing effort.

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