



Emic, etic, and andragogy: The contributions of Nobleza Asunción-Lande to intercultural communication

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ABSTRACT

Nobleza C. Asunción-Lande (d. February 13, 2010) devoted her career to communication studies, specializing in intercultural communication and linguistics. A faculty member in Communication Studies at the University of Kansas for more than forty years, she was a pioneer and builder in intercultural communication, helping to conceptualize its theory and pedagogy. Her scholarship and leadership are notable in the areas of language, ethics, conflict, and gender studies. Born in Manila, she adopted the world as her sphere for intercultural scholarship and practice with a global perspective, and her endless pursuit of intercultural opportunities took her around the world, literally, as a scholar, visiting professor and conferee. She published more than fifty articles on a variety of topics, and presented at more than seventy conferences. She was a pioneer in the International and Intercultural Division of NCA, SIETAR International, ICA, the Pacific and Asian Communication Association where she served as president, and the Central States Communication Association. Her editorial role in professional journals included *Human Communication* and the *Howard Journal of Communications*. She was also a mentor, guide, role model, and consummate encourager for her students at the University of Kansas. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Asunción-Lande consistently operationalized an etic and emic approach to intercultural communication scholarship.

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1. Introduction

...the rule of culture is a historical phenomenon all of its dimensions, not merely as a category of analysis, or signifier of social identity, but also an ethic of self-realization, a model of moral progress, a form of authority, and a set of institutions. (Ray, 2001, p. x)

In this article on the pioneering role and spirit of my late intercultural communication colleague, Nobleza Asunción-Lande, PhD, the preceding quotation captures well the sentiment undergirding her teaching and scholarship, so I begin on a relational note. I had the rare privilege of being both her graduate student, and later, her colleague for thirty-six years in the Communication Studies Department at the University of Kansas. I also had the rare and morbid experience of being the last person with whom she had scheduled a meeting on the fateful day of February 13, 2010. She and I had earlier agreed to meet at an open house event and after arriving at the appointed location, I noticed, curiously, that Nobleza was not there, which was unusual, given her history of being punctual. I later learned that she

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had passed away around the time she and I were scheduled to meet. What a shock and loss, personally and professionally. As her first PhD graduate in intercultural communication, I can write about her as my professor and major graduate advisor, as a colleague in intercultural communication, as an intercultural communication pioneer, and as a friend.

She initiated and developed our University of Kansas intercultural communication program in 1969–1973. As a graduate professor, her standards were high and, yet, she fostered a sense of independence and creativity in her graduate students. She was caring and yet exacting in her expectations that we would demonstrate a mastery of the theories and theorists to which she exposed us, such as Edward T. Hall, Wilbur Schramm, Robert T. Oliver, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Whorf, Dean Barnlund, Marshall McLuhan, and Kenneth Pike, among others. Some key concepts in Asunción-Lande's early years of teaching were those of communication and innovation, the role of opinion leaders in developing countries, information flow, the diffusion of innovations, emic and etic communication, and digital and analogical communication.

One of her pedagogical/andragogical methods was to combine lectures with graduate student reports of assigned bibliographic references (usually, books). I now glean that her purpose for the latter was to ensure that we were able to master an author's work, since our degree of mastery was revealed in our oral and written reports. One of my assigned books was Jurgen Ruesch and Weldon Kee's *Nonverbal Communication: Notes on the Visual Perception of Human Relations* (Ruesch & Kees, 1956). While my report and critique of the book were oral, I kept my written report notes all these years, summarized as follows:

Although most people are familiar with the rules that govern verbal communication—logic, syntax, and grammar—few are aware of the principles, which apply to nonverbal communication. As a basis for understanding Ruesch and Kees, it is helpful to note that they define communication as the perception of perception and that statements are signals, which are coded in various prearranged ways. Such signals become signs when they impinge upon earlier impressions of those with whom one is attempting to communicate. When a statement is perceived and interpreted by the other person, it then becomes a message.

When there is consensual validation of an interpretation on the part of both the sender and the receiver, communication has occurred. The authors define two types of information codification: digital and analogical. Digital communication is discrete, linear, and segmented, containing logical intervals, whereas analogical communication functions continuously, using symbols that bear a close, analogous relationship to that for which they stand.

One can easily see how the perception of perception could include the nonverbal. With the knowledge that nonverbal communication utilizes analogic codification devices, it is easy to see how various kinds of actions, pictures, or material objects can be taken as communication, since they represent analogic types of denotation, as the authors illustrate.

This concept leads to the principal argument which the authors, Ruesch and Kees, seek to advance, that nonverbal communication requires analogical codification and that nonverbal communication must be processed (and possibly, responded to), without delay. While verbal communication allows a delay or long intervals between statements, nonverbal communication, (e.g., action sequences, gestures), necessitates an immediate response. The authors argue that verbal, digital codifications are too slow and exhaustive to meet the demands of a quick response or for adapting themselves to the scientific method of study.

The authors see biology and culture as the two determinants of nonverbal communication, and they present chronological time scales to show their view of the relationship between phenomena.

Thus began my understanding of the concepts of “digital” and “analogical” communication. Another graduate assignment that stands out in my mind was our requirement to plan and theoretically justify an innovation for a developing area within the US, such as an impoverished rural area or an Indian reservation. This assignment was intended not to negatively stereotype members of these communities, but rather to demonstrate our sound knowledge of their culture and communication networks and flow that would both allow our hypothetical innovation to succeed and to withstand and yet assimilate Asunción-Lande's critique and that of our class peers. Little did I realize at the time that this type of academic activity prepared us for later when we would present our research and scholarship at professional conferences. To perform this assignment, we needed knowledge of the etic and emic characteristics of the culture in question, a theme that Asunción-Lande would write about and imply in her own scholarship.

In essence, she stressed both theory and application which reflected the interdisciplinary underpinnings of the field, as some assigned readings represented development communication, cultural anthropology, mass media, public, interpersonal, and organizational communication, as well as linguistics, an area in which she had extensive graduate education. Through all of the sieving of our graduate study, as far as research methods and units of analysis were concerned, her simple mantra was the constant reminder that “culture is social.” Her early orientation portended courses that she taught in later years, such as “Cases in Intercultural Communication” (problem–solutions) and “Intercultural Business Communication,” which she later globalized into “Communication in Multinational Organizations.” In the 1980s, she and I co-developed and co-taught our still-existing course, “Introduction to Intercultural Communication,” which is still heavily subscribed by undergraduate students. Asunción-Lande's mainstay was a course titled “Communication and Culture,” which showed, as she would say, the inseparable relationship between communication and culture.

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