

Book reviews

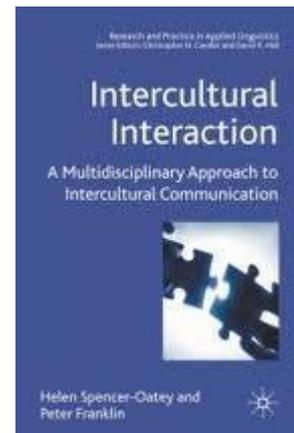
Reviewer Patrick Schmidt, SIETAR member

Author Helen Spencer-Oatey and Peter Franklin

Title Intercultural Interaction
A Multidisciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication

Publisher Palgrave Macmillan

Details £19.99, 367 pages,
ISBN 978-1403986313



Whether you're a professor, a researcher or a student who wants to know about current ideas and practices in intercultural relations (or interaction — the preferred term of the authors), this is the book for you. Simply put, it delivers an excellent survey of all on-going discussions and research in the intercultural field.

Spencer-Oatey and Franklin carefully define their title in the introduction. “Intercultural” refers to cultural distance between people when significant enough to have an effect on communication that is noticeable to at least one of the parties. “Interaction” emphasizes the activity of people talking to each other, which is very different from the usual (static) studies in which the language and/or behavior of two groups is compared. Furthermore, it draws attention to the dynamic nature of language and behavior.

Although this distinction might appear as nitpicking to the reader, the authors firmly believe it provides the groundwork for a clearer understanding of “cultural behavior” and “idiosyncratic behaviour”. Their analysis will help people manage cross-cultural encounters more effectively.

The book is divided into four parts, beginning with the conceptual issues of culture and the adaptation and impact of language and culture on understanding (defined as intercultural interaction competence). Part Two explores instruments for measuring and assessing intercultural interactional competence as well its development. The third section focuses on research: topics that can be investigated and the methods for doing so. Finally, the authors offer a solid list of resources for further study.

I found chapter nine, *Development Competence in Intercultural Interaction* (pages 199-241), especially informative--a fine summary of the methods necessary for intercultural development in both the professional and academic worlds. Classical transfer of knowledge, even in the classroom, isn't sufficient; developing skills and changing attitudes is also necessary.

The authors go on to classify methods and their expected results. A lecture or briefing brings about a “knowledge outcome”, for example, while a critical incident develops knowledge, skills and attitudes. For trainers like myself, it's a lucid overview for assessing the needs of workshop

participants.

This book is a state-of-the-art encyclopedia of intercultural research. At the same time, extensive use of stories and case studies makes abstract conceptual and theoretical points more lively, more direct. It's a work that's sure to inspire further investigation by students and scholars.