

INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS THROUGH
INTERCULTURAL RADIO INTERVIEWS

by

Armeda C. Reitzel
Judy Sims

Speech Communication Department
Humboldt State University
Arcata, California

A paper presented at the
Speech Communication Association-Puerto Rico Convention
December 6, 1985

SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION OF PUERTO RICO
BOX BG, UNIVERSITY STATION
RIO PIEDRAS, PUERTO RICO 00931

22 de septiembre de 1985

Dear Prof. *Simal*,

We are pleased to inform you that your paper has been accepted for inclusion in the program of the Fifth Annual Convention of the Speech Communication Association of Puerto Rico, to be held December 6th and 7th, 1985. Please limit your presentation to 30 to 35 minutes. A discussion period will follow each presentation. Will you please bring thirty copies of any handouts you will use?

As a presenter, you must register for the convention. Pre-convention and on site registration fee information will be mailed to you later.

The convention will be held at the Condado Plaza, formerly the Condado Holiday Inn. We selected the San Juan Escapade package plan of 4 days/3 nights with arrivals on Thursday, December 5th and departures on Sunday, December 8th. The rates are \$210 for a single and \$112.50 per person for a double. An equivalent of one night's deposit, \$70.00/single and \$75.00/double must be sent with the enclosed Group Reservation Form 21 days prior to arrival. Mail it to:

Condado Plaza
999 Ashford Ave.,
Santurce, P. R. 00907

The Condado will extend these rates up to 3 days prior and/or 3 days after the convention dates if you indicate this desire on the form.

Please indicate if you need any A.V. equipment. Considering the high cost of rental of equipment, we would appreciate this be kept within obvious limit.

Send a brief biographical summary and one copy of your paper by November 1st, so the chair for your presentation may prepare her/his introduction.

We look forward to meeting you at the convention.

Cordially,

Elizabeth Hernandez

Elizabeth Hernandez
Vice-President
SCAPR

INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS THROUGH INTERCULTURAL RADIO INTERVIEWS

"Culture learning has been made essential and urgent simply by reason of the nature of the new world in which we now live and in which our children will be living in the future" (Walsh, 1979: 3). We are now living in a global village in which events in one area of the world do affect lives in another portion of the globe. In the past few months, headlines have announced hijackings, terrorism, famine, and apartheid. News stories on radio and television have kept the world informed of the latest developments in nuclear arms talks, negotiations with terrorists, and relief to victims of natural disasters. According to Walsh (1979: 3):

Even ordinary laypeople, who are not well informed about lasers and masers, intercontinental missiles and thermonuclear weapons, ... have sensed the meaning of the term "global village" in watching television and movies, in reading the papers, and in listening to radio even in otherwise remote areas of the world.

Mass communications have made people more aware of the diverse cultures and people that constitute the nations of the world. Radio, a mode of mass communications, is an especially important medium. "Radio has indeed become a vital force in American life" (Busby and Parker, 1984: 26). In 1983 there were an estimated 425 million radio sets in the United States (Busby and Parker, 1984: 193). "Americans depend on radio for fast-breaking news, for weather information, for information on business and industry within the

local community, for entertainment, for companionship" (Busby and Parker, 1984: 193).

According to Dodd (1982: 256), "Mass media serve an awareness function, creating interest in an event or an idea through direct information about its existence." Smith (1985: 549) suggests that the media help new ideas and concepts gain acceptance by creating an awareness of these views and notions in people.

An awareness of one's own culture and other cultures is a common goal of many intercultural communication classes. Interviewing people from different cultures can give students an opportunity to practice their knowledge and skills in intercultural communication. As one intercultural communication workshop student wrote in her journal:

Our various cultures can be a source of enjoyment or a huge problem in communication. Simply getting out and talking to people is the first step toward real growth for the human race. Awareness and appreciation seem to be the keys (Jodi, 1984).

This paper discusses the use of an intercultural radio interview project as a means to making both intercultural communication students and the local community more aware and appreciative of their own cultures and other cultures in the "global village." The projects to be described involved the cooperation of the university public radio station, KHSU, and the intercultural communication classes at Humboldt State University. The interviews were developed and conducted by the students and produced by the radio station staff. The taped productions were aired as a public affairs segment of the International Folk Show on the university radio station.

This paper consists of four sections. First, the rationale for using intercultural radio interviews in intercultural communication classes is discussed. The interview activity has been used to: 1) educate speech communication students and the local community on international viewpoints; 2) develop students' skills in communication; and 3) focus students' interests and efforts. Second, the activities involved in preparing, producing, and promoting the intercultural radio interviews are described. Third, student and audience reactions to the interviews are summarized. Fourth, specific suggestions for the use of the radio interview activity are provided.

Rationale

There are three major objectives underlying the use of the intercultural radio interview activity in the intercultural communication classes at Humboldt State University. These objectives, which will be discussed with examples, include: 1) making students and community aware of various international viewpoints; 2) developing students' communication skills; and 3) focusing students' interests and efforts on a major culminating communication activity.

The first objective, to make students and the community aware of international viewpoints, involved the discussion of various issues to increase an understanding of the views and concerns of young people from different countries. A frequently discussed issue concerned the roles of men and women in the United States and in other countries. The intercultural communication workshop students, while well aware of

the fact that the roles of women differ between the two countries from class discussions and assigned readings, were made much more aware of what the roles of Japanese men and women are and how the Japanese view the roles of men and women in their society. One American student who expressed a greater understanding of the Japanese viewpoints on gender roles through the interview experience wrote:

What I did discover is that Japanese culture is a male dominated society like the United States, however, it appears that they don't perceive it as dominance. Males simply have roles which include having a stable job, providing for the family, and running the politics. While on the other hand, women have equally important roles in the society which include chiefly domestic things like preparing meals, and raising children. Without either role the society as a whole would not run smoothly, and so the genders are content. I guess this is just another perspective which varies across cultures. It is similar in this manner to the roles in which Americans and Japanese perceive sincerity as illustrated in the text. Americans see sincerity in individuals who act as themselves. While Japanese find it in the person who follows a prescribed role that a sincere person would follow (Rob, 1985).

Thus, through the intercultural communication experiences of the radio interviews, the students and, ultimately, the listening community, were presented with opportunities to learn and become aware of foreign ideas and concepts. Culture learning, an exercise for minds seriously concerned with survival in the global village, potentially occurred for the students and the listening community.

The second objective, to develop students' communication skills, was achieved through the numerous intercultural interactions between the interviewers and interviewees. Informal interpersonal skills were practiced and sharpened during the

small group meetings preceding the actual radio interviews. The American and the foreign students, of course, experienced some communication barriers. According to Barna (1982: 328-9):

Anxious feelings usually permeate both parties in a dialogue. The host national is uncomfortable when talking with a foreigner because he or she cannot maintain the normal flow of verbal and non-verbal interaction. There are language and perception barriers; silences are too long or too short; proxemic and other norms may be violated.... The foreign members of dyads are even more threatened. They feel strange and vulnerable, helpless to cope with messages that swamp them, to which "normal" reactions seem inappropriate.

Still, American students learned to better deal with their feelings of anxiety through practicing their interpersonal skills, and foreign students developed their verbal and non-verbal communication skills in American English.

Intrapersonal communication was also highlighted during the radio interview experience. Pearson and Nelson (1985: 12) define intrapersonal communication as "the process of understanding and sharing meaning within the self." These authors go on to say that "Intrapersonal communication occurs ... when we evaluate or examine the interaction that occurs between ourselves and others" (12). The students were given many opportunities to reflect upon their experiences. According to Gudykunst and Kim (1984: 23), "we become more conscious of our behavior when we enter new situations." Not only were the students meeting new individuals, they were meeting people from cultural and linguistic backgrounds other than their own. Students became aware of their own verbal and nonverbal cues. For example, one workshop student discussed her use

of "foreigner talk" during the interview in her radio interview summary paper.

During our interview, I found myself using a little bit of "foreigner talk." "Foreigner talk" is defined in our text as a form of loud and slow speech patterns, exaggerated pronunciation, and simplification (Gudykunst and Kim, pg. 96). I was aware that my interviewees spoke English very well but that they have only been speaking English for a relatively short time and still have difficulty with vocabulary, sentence structure, and other aspects of the English language. I felt that if I spoke slightly slower, used my best pronunciation, and whenever possible, used the simplest words I had to convey my meaning, the interview would run smoother (Gwen, 1985).

Students' interpersonal and intrapersonal communication skills were most definitely enhanced through the intercultural radio interview experience.

The third objective, to focus the students' interests and efforts on a major culminating activity, was easily accomplished through the interview project, an activity which is exceedingly student-oriented. The radio project involves all of the students from the very beginning of the activity. Students are responsible for establishing rapport with the interviewees, preparing and conducting the interviews, and evaluating their experiences in their journals and through class presentations. Students are able to integrate book learning with experiential learning. As one student wrote, "That was our interview; challenging, interesting, different, exciting, and a test of maintaining composure under pressure. Yes, it was all of that and more, but it was most meaningful for me in that it was educational and enlightening" (Rob, 1985). Such enthusiasm was reflected in most of the students' journals and class presentations.

Activities in the Intercultural Radio Interview Project

The student-oriented intercultural radio interview project entails preparing the students for the event, conducting the interviews at the radio station, editing and airing the talk show segments, and evaluating the productions. This section of the paper outlines the major activities involved in the project.

In order for the students to be prepared for the interview, background information on intercultural communication and radio interviewing should be presented. The use of an intercultural communication textbook, supplemented with readings about radio interviewing and in-class discussions, is recommended. Mock (practice) interviews help students prepare for "the real thing." In addition, student interviewers and interviewees need to interact with one another before the actual interviews so that all are familiar with one another's patterns of verbal and nonverbal communication. It is important for students to know who they are interacting with and what they are going to discuss so that communication breakdowns are less likely to occur. Most of the interviewers gave their interviewees sample topics and/or questions ahead of time. Gwen (1985) wrote:

A few days before the interview, Dan and I made a list of questions we might ask during the interview and gave it to the girls to look over so they would have an opportunity to formulate their ideas on the subject before the interview. Also, we didn't want to ask them questions on subjects they either felt uncomfortable about or unknowledgeable about--we didn't want to put them on the spot.

Preparation for the interview activity, then, involves background information and practice in intercultural interviewing

and interpersonal interactions between prospective interviewers and interviewees.

Several weeks before the actual interviews take place, the students should visit the radio station to become familiar with the studio, equipment, and the station environment. The initial visit to the station can help to alleviate tensions that are often felt by students who are unfamiliar with a radio station.

On the day of the actual interview, the students meet at the radio station. Before the interview, the students should be briefed on how to use the microphones and the meaning of various hand signals that might be used by the engineer or producer. There should also be a general review of the organization of the interview (the introduction, the body, and the conclusion).

Recording time for the interview is contingent upon the desires of the instructor and/or the producer. The recording time for the interviews described in this paper was forty-five to sixty minutes. After the interviews were edited, the final product was thirty minutes.

The last step in the production process of the intercultural interviews involves editing the interview tapes. Since the interviews are taped, the interviews can be cleaned up in order to remove difficult and nonbroadcast quality spots without changing the meaning of the messages. In editing any production, especially intercultural interviews, it is most important to retain the natural pauses, enthusiasm, and energies of the communication interactions. Editing should be

used to tighten up a production in order to present a message with broadcast quality.

After the interviews are edited, the productions are ready to be aired. The interviews described in this paper were aired as a public affairs segment of the International Folk Show. Each week a different interview was aired on the show. A student announcer promoted the interviews in advance and often featured music during the show related to the particular interview. Thus, the intercultural interviews, which initially serve as an educational experience for the students involved in its production, also serve to educate the radio listeners in the community to the tune of internationalism.

Follow-up activities for the students include listening to their unedited tapes, evaluating the content and the process of the interview in their written 3-4 page summary reports, and listening to their fifteen to twenty minute oral presentation of the highlights of their project with the class. The oral presentation involves playing short segments of the interview and making specific comments about those segments as well as describing the overall content and process involved. The oral presentations give students a chance to get feedback on their performances as well as getting the opportunity to listen to others' interviews. In addition to the written summary report and the oral presentation, the students keep a journal throughout the entire quarter and record their impressions of their total experience--from the planning stages through the evaluation stages.

Evaluations of the Interviews

The interview activity has been positively evaluated by the students, the community, and the teachers. This section of the paper summarizes some of the major comments.

Three common themes emerged in the students' oral presentations and in their journals/reports: anxiety, problems in oral communication, and the interesting content of the interviews. Journal entries and summary papers mentioned the "butterflies in the stomach" phenomenon. Some of the most outgoing personalities became a bit tongue-tied while some of the most introverted persons did an excellent job of asking and answering questions during the interview. Although most of the workshop students were native speakers of English, they often showed more anxiety than the foreign students did during the taping. A Korean student wrote, "That day, when I saw the microphone, I was a little bit nervous. Although my partners could speak English I thought they were much more nervous than I was." The workshop students had expected the foreign students to experience a lot of communication apprehension at the radio station, yet the reverse was true. Rob (1985) reported in his journal:

I too was becoming infested with a case of nerves, and I had visions of everything falling apart... Needless to say, I made it through the introduction.... I didn't know how to lead into some kind of small talk, and I was too nervous to wait for someone else to do it. Thus, I asked Masahiko, "So Yumi, how old are you?" I looked at the wrong person and asked a pretty dumb question. After everyone recovered from that things started to go fairly smoothly from there. It was like jumping into a pool of cool water, after you get over the initial shock of it, it becomes bearable and almost invigorating.

In spite of the students' initial insecurities, almost all of the students felt good about the final, unedited interviews.

Listening to the interviews and getting feedback from other people helped alleviate any of the students' misgivings during the interview itself. As Cindy (1985) wrote:

My overall impression of this interview has changed considerably since the afternoon it was taped. I realized that my own nervousness led me to misconstrue certain aspects of the process. Through editing I think we will have a very good final product.

Many students indicated some difficulties in understanding some of the questions and answers. For example, Rob (1985) stated in his journal:

In the conclusion ... a little verbal misunderstanding arose between Masahiko and myself. He was describing the music that was about to be played, and he mentioned the group's name. I clarified it by repeating it, and he acknowledged that what I said was right. In reality, however, I said, "the Southern Oysters," and he said, "the Southern All Stars." It was just a pronunciation problem, and I bet most listeners won't even pick it up. What's the big difference between All Stars and Oysters anyway?

In spite of pangs of anxiety during the taping and occasional breakdowns in communication due to verbal misunderstandings, the content of the interviews made them enlightening experiences for the students and the listening audience. It was exciting for everyone to explore viewpoints across cultures, such as the comparison of gender roles or the discussion of stereotypes. One of the best interviews involved a discussion of baseball between an American interviewer and a Japanese interviewee. One American community member commented:

I don't normally find baseball interesting, but it was interesting to me that some of the American sense of individualism has carried over into the Japanese version of the game. I'm talking about the fact that Japanese do argue with umpires.

As teachers we found the discussion of baseball terms in English and Japanese interesting in regard to content and also because of the fact that a sportscaster thought it "sportsworthy" to include such a discussion in an interview.

Students, community members, and teachers can all become aware of the viewpoints of different people from different cultures through intercultural radio interviews. Exploring channels of communication through such interviews is a positive and effective exercise in culture learning, whereby all may tune into the ideas of internationalism, ideas to be shared in our global village.

Suggestions for Using the Radio Interview Activity

Based upon our experiences using the interview assignment in several intercultural communication classes, we would like to end our paper with the following list of suggestions. These suggestions come from our observations as teachers and from the students' writings in their journals and project reports.

1. Listen to and discuss examples of intercultural radio interviews before the actual interview.
2. Have students perform short mock interviews before the real event.
3. Have students write out the list of questions that they plan to use during the interviews. Have the interviewers share some of the proposed questions with the interviewees before the actual interview.
4. Have students write out their introduction and their conclusion to the radio interview.
5. Have students prepare the introduction to the music if music is to be part of the interview show.

6. Discuss first impressions with the students immediately after the taping. Encourage them to write down their feelings and ideas as soon as possible.
7. Get copies of the interview tape to the students as soon as physically possible so that they can hear themselves "almost live." Have the students record their reactions to hearing themselves "on the air" with the unedited version of the tape.
8. Have students play and discuss the interview tape with classmates. Have the classmates provide feedback to the students. Encourage students to indicate the strong and weak points of the interview as heard on the unedited tape.
9. Let students have a say in the editing process. Have them indicate parts which they feel extremely uncomfortable with so that these parts can be cut.
10. Have the students record all of their experiences and feelings throughout the project, from the beginning of the planning stages through the end of the evaluation procedure. Encourage them to note what they have learned and how their feelings about themselves, others, and the project have changed through time and experience.

In summary, the intercultural radio interview activity provides students with "firsthand" experience of what their textbooks and teachers have been telling them "secondhand." As one student wrote in her interview summary paper:

The opportunity to meet and interact with Japanese students over the quarter has been very valuable, because it has forced me to let go of some of my stereotyped ideas of Japanese people. For example, before this class, I had the idea that all Japanese people ran around with cameras and kimonos. Now I see that while kimonos are important to their culture, they also have many other attributes that are far more significant. I am very glad that I had the opportunity to learn about this culture in a format like the radio interview, for the actual interactions with Yumi and Masahiko taught me more than a textbook ever could (Tracy, 1985).

Such experiences make international awareness and culture learning exciting and meaningful.

REFERENCES

- Barna, LaRay M. 1982. "Stumbling Blocks in Intercultural Communication." In Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter (Eds.), Intercultural Communication: A Reader, 3rd ed., Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Busby, Linda and Parker, Donald. 1984. The Art and Science of Radio. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Dodd, Carley. 1982. Dynamics of Intercultural Communication. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
- Gudykunst, William B. and Kim, Young Yun. 1984. Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Pearson, Judy Cornelia and Nelson, Paul Edward. 1985. Understanding and Sharing, 3rd ed. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
- Smith, F. Leslie. 1985. Perspectives on Radio and Television, 2nd ed. New York: Harper and Row.
- Walsh, John E. 1979. Humanistic Culture Learning. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.