RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Many studies have made us aware that attention to a communication or persuasion by it is greater when the audience is favorably predisposed to the symbols used or to the message contained or to the source. Much of the most effective communication therefore tends to occur within the confines of the in-group. International communication, in contrast, is communication among out-groups and ones that are often mutually rejecting. The message comes from a source which may be regarded as hostile or at best alien.

Any sensible analysis of patterns of communications response must take full account of this variable of positive or negative identification of the audience with the communication. At one extreme is the pattern of the rally or the pep talk where only the converted come to hear ritualistic re-enforcing messages. The advertiser tries to approximate this situation by asserting that his product meets the audiences felt needs and by putting the ad in media which provide extraneous pleasures to the audience. He avoids any distentiation of himself as source from the audience. The newspaper man is less bound by the formula
of giving the audience what it wants to hear and he conceives his function as that of telling the readers what other people think and are doing, i.e. he assumes some distance between audience and message source. Yet the newspaper strives to achieve audience identification with it by meeting its needs for relaxing absorption. Furthermore in its sports columns, comics, and human interest stories it gives the reader vicarious familiar contact with characters with whom they identify. The paper is thus on the whole a medium with which its reader identifies closely.

Only students of psychological warfare have systematically concerned themselves with the problem of communicating to a hostile audience. Stated over-simply, their most general conclusion has been that these communications are ineffective until demoralization has created some mutual goals for the propagandist and the enemy troops. There has been some discussion in the literature of propaganda of a terrorizing character which does not depend upon an identification between the source and the audience, but relatively little. The bulk of the literature on that terrorizing situation concerns totalitarian propaganda, brainwashing and concentration camps.

The extreme situations of terroristic propaganda on the one hand and communication within tightly-knit small groups on the other are relatively rare. Most communication
processes operate within complex sets of positive and negative identifications. International communication is an example of such a complex situation, which in the broadest sense is communication between out-groups. However, insofar as it is not simply terrorization by one government of another people, it involves cross-cutting and conflict-producing identifications.

In its first year of activity the research program in international communication at the Center for International Studies, M.I.T., has focused much of its attention on two related variables which peculiarly affect communication among out-groups. These are the identification patterns regarding the in and out-groups among whom the communication is taking place and the phenomenon which Cooley called the imaginary interlocutor.

The imaginary interlocutor is a member of a prospective audience, to whom the member of the actually present audience thinks of himself as communicating. He may think of himself as passing on the information he is receiving and of his being approved for doing so. In that case he has an incentive to attend and retain the information. On the other hand, he may think of himself as being censured for hearing or believing such messages as those he is hearing, in which case he may feel anxiety and perhaps suppress recollection or understanding. There are many other possible phantasy relationships with the imaginary interlocutor, such as causing him surprise, imagining the interlocutor in one's own position, and imagining
how the interlocutor would react in the same situation, etc.

Whatever the nature of the phantasy, it is important to note that there is a population of imaginary characters whose attitudes are consciously or unconsciously brought to bear upon the recipient to a communication. Just as the demography of the population in magazine fiction or the movies differs drastically from the population of the real world, so does this population of imaginary interlocutors. For a study of international communication, it is important to take account of its national as well as social composition.

One of the foci of the M.I.T. Studies has been to compare the responses to international communications of persons with a narrow, provincial frame of identifications and persons with a broader, or super-national one. To illustrate this point, let me refer to some of the results of our studies. We have done a study of American business communications around reciprocal trade. We have also done studies in the Middle East, Indonesia, and are beginning one in India on differences between Western-influenced and narrowly traditionalist types. In our interviews with businessmen we have found one of the striking differences between protectionists and anti-protectionists, holding economic interest constant, to be in the scope of their frame of identifications. To put it most banally, the protectionists are, as could be expected, somewhat narrow nationalists, whereas the anti-protectionists are more internationally
oriented, but the results go further than that. The protectionists are not only more narrowly nationalist, they are also more apt to frame their responses within the context of a particular town, region, or industry. On the other hand, a considerable number of those individuals in the business community who became crusaders for freer trade did so after an experience of travel abroad, which left them with a vague and often not fully clarified sense of urgency about world economic and political stability. In short, the man who while listening to a debate upon tariff policy has a manufacturer down the street figuratively perched on his shoulder is more apt to wind up with a protectionist conclusion than the businessman who listens to the debate with an anxious European perched on his.

The Middle Eastern studies at M.I.T. which are now being prepared for publication by Daniel Lerner have similarly shown that one of the most important single differentiating factors in communications behavior was the ability of a respondent to project himself beyond his narrow environment. Isolated villagers tended to reject such a question as, "Where would you like to live if you could not live in Turkey?" or, "What would you do if you were head of a radio station?" Educated urban characters, of course, responded to such questions much more readily. Though it is significant how far projectivity is systematically related to urbanism, stature, education, etc., what was striking was that even holding such social structural variables constant, the variable of
projectivity indexed by responses to such questions proved one of the most predictive of all regarding communications behavior as well as other conventional sociological variables.

Starting from such field results we have recently inaugurated a more carefully controlled and partly experimental program on the mechanism of the unseen interlocutor. We have in some pre-tests taken general attitudinal questions into the field and then after receiving the responses to them, have asked the respondent what individuals came into their mind in the course of answering the question. Most respondents are able to identify some individuals of whom they had just thought. There are striking class differences in the replies. We also found striking differences in the frequency of approving and critical imaginary interlocutors. Academic types of persons seem to be particularly prone to carrying critics around on their shoulders and to engaging in unspoken polemics with them. We are not yet ready to say anything about the amount of anxiety which may accompany the situation.

In the actual history of the project we arrived at this order of problem first by considering the differences between the behavior of tourists and other abroad from the behavior they would engage in at home. For the tourist who
can make a scene of himself on the streets of Paris, the population physically around him is probably not a significant part of the mental population which controls him. His reference group during his stay abroad may be the folks from his home town. They are the reference group with which he identifies. In typical authoritarian fashion he makes a sharp in-group, out-group differentiation.

It cannot be assumed, however, that everyone who makes this dichotomy identifies positively with his in-group and rejects the out-group. Some of the researches carried on at M.I.T. by Howard Perlmutter have shown that there is a xenophilic type of person who, like the xenophobe, dichotomizes in and out-group relationships, but who tends to reject his own in-group and to glorify the out-group. To our surprise, we found there to be a positive correlation between xenophilia, as measured by an attitude scale, and authoritarianism, just as previous studies have shown a correlation between ethnocentrism and authoritarianism. These results obtained with groups of students in the United States are now being replicated in Montreal, France, and India. What they suggest is that a strong identification with things foreign may often represent not simply a broad scope of identification, but rather a rejection of the individual's own group and culture. If this is so, then the foreign out-group may tend to be a projective screen rather than a realistically imagined set of reference individuals. The foreign country would tend to be viewed as a Utopia,
and first-hand experience with it would be disillusioning. A better adjustment would be made by persons with a less stereotyped, though less xenophilic, image.

This brings us back to the point at which we started. International communications which is labeled as such is affected by the stereotype of the out-group from which it comes and is affected by the positive, or more often, negative identifications with that group. It should be emphasized, however, that most international communication is to one degree or another covert. A study of American business communications on the tariff, for example, has revealed remarkably little direct communication of foreign attitudes. Even the American exporter typically relies upon American trade magazines and other American sources for his written information about foreign countries. It is only in the editorial offices of these trade journals, in the State Department and in similar highly specialized agencies that genuinely foreign information is received in large quantity and is then transformed into domestic communications. Nevertheless, much of this material is at least partially recognized as foreign in origin and there is face-to-face contact with a certain number of foreign individuals. In this way, each specific communication, which would otherwise be stereotyped in a simple fashion as foreign in source, tends to assimilate a combination of stereotypes, including that
of the particular intermediary individual or agency. The net reaction to the communication is to a considerable extent a function of the individual's unconscious decision to categorize it in a certain way as to its possible sources and a function of his relationship to these in-group and out-group sources as imaginary interlocutors.