Chapter 2

Borders and Etics as Units of Analysis for Intercultural Rhetoric and Professional Communication

ABSTRACT

This chapter lays out the methodological frame for intercultural inquiry, based on a quasi-structuralist approaching using common human thresholds of interaction. It then explains in detail eight of these common human thresholds of interaction and showing how all eight surface in rhetorical patterns and strategies. The chapter then exemplifies this frame by examining Anzaldúa's Borderlands.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out and demonstrate the variables or units of analysis that will be used for intercultural comparison for the rest of the chapters in this book. These variables are founded on four critical characteristics of intercultural research that are carefully explained in Chapter One. These include:

- Focusing primarily on the regularities in cultures while acknowledging differences, using a bell curve logic to demonstrate this variation. This is the etic-then-emic approach.

- Drawing on deep and often implicit variables that underlie everyday sense-making activities, which works against using race, gender, and ethnicity variables for cross-cultural comparison but highlights a situated agency.
- Connecting variables to intercultural rhetoric and communication patterns.
- Using variables that are fair and equitable for the cultures being compared so as to avoid biases and orientalism.

As introduced in Chapter One, the type of variable that meets these four criteria is the etic, which I define as a common human threshold of

behavior. These thresholds are boundaries or borders that all cultures share, and therefore, have to develop reoccurring responses to; and using these thresholds places the cultures for comparison in a valid, reliable, and balanced framework.

This chapter first explores the need for using common human thresholds by presenting an analogy of the U.S.-Mexico border. Second, this chapter summarizes eight common human thresholds and the cultural variation to these thresholds in a multitude of intercultural studies around the world. Finally, this chapter exemplifies the border-etic approach by evaluating Anzaldúa's (2007) influential work *Borderlands/La Frontera* on the U.S.-Mexico border.

BORDER AS ANALOGY OF COMMON HUMAN THRESHOLDS

As explained in Chapter One, the most fruitful, valid, and fair approach to intercultural inquiry is using an etic frame that then integrates emic details. This chapter examines more closely the dynamic of the etic frame itself. To explain this

dynamic, I will draw an analogy between geo-political borders and the etic frames. Below, I present three Google images of my U.S.-Mexico border region (the El Paso, TX-Ciudad Juárez, Mexico region). Figure 1 is a large overview of the entire border, with the border highlighted in yellow. Figure 2 is a middle class neighborhood in El Paso, and Figure 3 is a middle class neighborhood in Ciudad Juárez.

From these images, it is easy to identify the two sides of the border, which means that geo-political border, in this case, the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, is significant in many ways, despite all the arguments that the border is essentially meaningless. First, on the El Paso side there is more space between the buildings, whereas on the Ciudad Juárez size things are more compact, except for the large park shown on the east side. In fact, the cost per square-foot on the Ciudad Juárez side is two to three times the cost compared to El Paso, but the cost of labor is about one third of that in El Paso; and water and electricity are more expensive in Ciudad Juárez. Not surprisingly, you will also observe many more swimming pools

Figure 1. Google image of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico
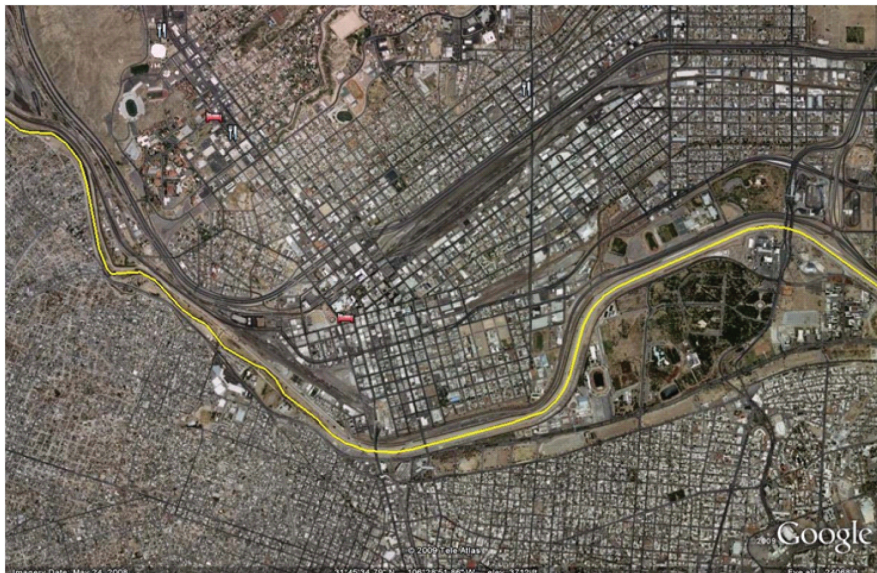
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