

Cross-cultural Influences of the English Language

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ABSTRACT

The paper is a discussion of verbal and non-verbal communication issues. This paper seeks to demonstrate that values and customs are manifested not only in non-verbal communication but also in verbal communication in that native language influences the speakers' ways of using a non-native language. The paper concludes that it is sometimes difficult to make difference between what is cultural and what is linguistic, that acquisition of a second language is not culturally value-free, that aculturalization and linguistic competence goes hand in hand, and that aculturalization indicates identity shift.

keywords: *Values, Customs, Verbal/Non-Verbal communication, Immigrants, Self-identification, Aculturalization, Identity shift.*

I INTRODUCTION

All communication is cultural -- it draws on ways we have learned to speak and give nonverbal messages. We do not always communicate the same way from day to day, since factors like context, individual personality, and mood interact with the variety of cultural influences we have internalized that influence our choices. Each of them influences the course of communications, and can be responsible for conflict or the escalation of conflict when it leads to miscommunication or misinterpretation. A culturally-fluent approach to conflict means working over time to understand these and other ways communication varies across cultures, and applying these understandings in order to enhance relationships across differences.

II Cross-cultural communication

Communication is the process by which people exchange their views, meanings or information which they want to convey. In each communication there is an involvement of message sender and message receiver. Communication also depends on a person's (sender's and receivers) cultural background and is not the same for each person. Many times with same word differ in meaning. It is because of the difference in cultural background of two or more than two people who are involved in communication. Therefore, it demonstrates that the greater the difference in background between senders and receivers, the greater the difference in meanings attached to particular words and behaviors. The communication process is a continuous process of sharing of meanings with people. [1]

In cross-cultural communication, people from one culture share his/her views, information or messages with people of other culture. Cross-cultural miscommunication occurs with the confusion or misunderstanding between people who belong to different cultures and the when the sender's intended message is not reached to the receiver who is from other cultural background. Therefore, the chances of cross-cultural miscommunication becomes more with the increase in difference between the sender's and the receiver's cultures. Many times misinterpretation, misevaluation and misperception leads to cross-cultural miscommunication. Hence, cross-cultural communication can become cross-cultural miscommunication when there is lack of understanding. The cultural difference lowers the precision level of conveying a message. [2]

Cultural behavior study, body language study, societal background study according to culture helps to avoid these kinds of problems. Efficient cross-cultural communication can motivate the behavior of the people regarding coping with the other environment, society, culture and people. The foreign language teaching classrooms helps the learners to develop their insight regarding the differences in the language. So, cultural study in target language learning atmosphere motivates the learners

1. Accept wider range for the perception among individuals of different culture.
2. Create comfortable and enjoyable teaching classes that inform the learners about the possible mistakes during interpretation, communication, comprehension and translation.
3. Cross cultural communication develop and support maintaining prosperity and peace in the world
4. Facilitate communication and co-operation.
5. Increase the communication ability of the learner with other cultural different individuals.
6. Increase the international and intercultural understanding level.
7. Mutual understanding and enrichment of language, business, socio-political affairs etc. [3]
8. Recognize and understand the linguistic and behavioral patterns of the target and the native culture properly.
9. To achieve unity in the field of language learning and teaching.

III Human relationships

One important factor to maintain harmonious relationships with others is to be polite with others. There is a little difference in the usage of polite words between Indian and English. Though it is true that in every culture, people use polite language to be polite, when and what to say make differences. It can be very impolite not to add the polite words when one is supposed to. Take "Thank you" for example. When they receive help from others, and if it is only a minor help, people always omit that. However, in western countries, it is used in a much broader context. Except from getting help, they use it in occasions like buying things, receiving a call, or just for the attendances in a party. It sometimes puzzles the Indian, when a westerner says 'thank you' after we sell things to them. For we think it should be we who need to say that, and we sometimes respond that "thank me for what". [4]

This kind of misunderstanding is due to the ignorance of other's culture. In fact, "thank you" for westerners does not only show the gratitude in our understanding, rather, it has been used as a custom and of course, they sometimes are prepared for the others to say that. If we treat this situation the same as we Indian do, it will not be very polite. There is another point regarding to the difference in using "Thank you". We Indian will not use it or use fewer as a sign of intimate relations and just bear the gratitude in mind. For Indian are more introverted in showing feelings. However, in western countries, people are more open in showing feelings, so they will not omit that even to their parents. This different language expression concerning polite words is caused by the different culture.

IV Cultural influence on reading

The reading process is not simply the repetition and reappearance of the language knowledge which the students already have, but it is a complicated process under the stimulations of outside information to decode, recognize, analyze, judge, and infer the material through the cognitive system. So, it is critical for us to catch the nonverbal information, such as: the background information about humanism, history, geography, and the traditional local customs, etc. Linguistic knowledge can affect one's reading, but cultural factors plays a more important role in the reading process, most of the true and serious reading barriers are not only from the language knowledge itself, but also caused by the cultural differences between the target language and our mother tongue. [5]

Cultural differences exist in background information, words, sentences, and text structures, all of which are going to become potential barriers in reading matters. Sometimes we find that the students may recognize and understand the meaning of each word in the text, but they are still not so clear about the meaning of the whole sentences or paragraphs. One of Churchill's speeches during the Second World War is a very typical example of this case. In his

speech, he used his private secretary's words to express himself: "After dinner, when I was thinking on the croquet lawn with Mr. Churchill, he reverted to this theme, and I asked whether for him, the arch anti-Communist, this was not bowing down in the house of Rimmon. Mr. Churchill replied, 'Not at all. I have only one purpose, the destruction of Hitler, and any life is much simplified thereby. If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favourable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.'" In the above paragraph, Churchill quoted three religious allusions: the first one is "bow down in the house of Rimmon." which comes from the "Bible". That means, "doing things against one's willingness"; the second one is "Hell"; and the third one is "the devil". [6]

If we don't know the three allusions, we can't fully understand that Churchill likened Communist USSR to the "Hell" and the Soviet Communist to the "devil". In the use of the religious allusions in this paragraph, Mr. Churchill not only showed his anti-Communist stand, but also avoided annoying the Soviet Union Communist directly. So the real meaning of this paragraph is that his support to the USSR is for the salvation of the human beings, and it does not mean that he has changed his anti-Communist stand. So we can see that the knowledge of language itself cannot solve all the problems in reading. People's works are always related with the culture of their nations, especially related allusions or usage, which we are not familiar with. That reminds us that we should pay attention to the cultural influence in reading.[7]

V LINGUISTIC INFLUENCES IN INDIA

Previous studies have reported on the relevance of linguistic knowledge to interpret non-literal speech. Adults generally interpret non-literal speech through paralinguistic and kinesic features like facial expressions, gestures, intonation, and volume. These cues are used to convey emotion and intent; they draw attention to the nuances of meaning in communicative discourse by supplementing oral speech with nonverbal meaningful information, signifying to the listener that additional meaning is embedded in the utterance that is not fully communicated through the oral statement alone. As an example, verbal utterances spoken in a low, dry tone can indicate a speaker's ironic intent by accentuating a contradiction to an emotionally charged statement, such as commenting, "Isn't this a beautiful day?" during a disruptive wind storm. The context of the situation, the utterance imbued with emotion, and the presence of intonation collectively attempt to convey an incompatible literal interpretation of the spoken statement with the speaker's intention. [8]

However, language use varies among individuals and cultures. There is not a uniform formula to communicate non-literal language that transcends individual difference. Linguistic development is fundamentally influenced by sociocultural contexts and experiences. Language development is unique to each individual. Moreover, the language input received from life experiences facilitates acquisition at varying degrees; this is particularly relevant for non-literal language processing. To illustrate, in a study that analyzes children's non-literal language development, Capelli, Nakagawa, and Madden contrast children's and adults' abilities to process non-literal language (sarcasm). They explain that children are less reliant on context to understand non-literal language than they are on international cues. They highlight, however, that children are distinct from adults in their reliance on intonation to interpret sarcastic utterances. [9]

Adults, they contend, recognize non-literal language use, namely sarcasm, by interpreting the context in order to understand the speaker's intention. In their conclusion, Capelli et al. maintain that children can recognize sarcasm with international cues because "children would note the negative tone of voice and use it to infer correctly the speaker's basic intention (to insult or convey something critical) without ever recognizing that the statement was non-literal". Lastly, they suggest that children's initial dependence on international cues may be a step towards a more cultivated comprehension of ironic language in the developmental process of language acquisition. Conversely, in their study, Winner, Windmueller,

Rosenblatt, Bosco, Best, and Gardner declare that children do not depend on intonation to interpret an utterance as sarcastic, at least up until age eight. From the data, they propose that children's miscomprehension of sarcasm is more affected by the obvious violation of truth in the relationship between what the speaker says and what the speaker means (Winner et al.). Philippova and Astington corroborate these findings, suggesting that semantic cues are more influential in accurate ironic interpretation than intonation. Furthermore, Winner et al. resolve, "when the sentence meaning directly contradicts the facts, children are more likely not only to notice the discrepancy but to recognize the utterance as non-literally intended".

Therefore, when there is a disjunction between the context of the situation and the non-literal utterance, children can identify the speaker's intention and then interpret the statement as non-literally intended, thereby continuing to engage in the conversation. Language experience influences the use of intonation to convey sarcasm, according to Cheang and Pell. In their cross-linguistic study to compare how English and Cantonese speakers recognize sarcasm, they expound that there are particular, though different, acoustic markers which signal sarcastic speech in both languages. Their experiment reveals that sarcasm is more easily identified in one's native language, and more problematic to recognize in a foreign language. Cheang and Pell submit that the difficulty in identifying sarcastic utterances in an unfamiliar language might be due to transferring a generalized conceptualization of sarcastic interpretation in their L1 to all other languages, consequently misattributing sarcastic intent in cross-linguistic contexts.

An example of the potential to misattribute sarcastic features can be seen in the researchers' study in which both Cantonese and English speakers rely on acoustic features like fundamental frequency to infer a speaker's intention and attitude. Despite the mutual reliance on acoustic features, the respective languages display opposing inferences: Cantonese speakers use a high F0 to convey sarcasm, whereas English speakers do the opposite. From this study, Cheang and Pell conclude that speakers should be aware of the language community they are in and adapt their acoustic cues accordingly. Their experiment determines that beginning L2 learners might experience constraints on their abilities to process extralinguistic cues (e.g., facial expressions, intonation, gestures) that signal irony because they are concentrating on vocabulary and syntax. In contrast, more advanced L2 learners focus less on rudimentary linguistic knowledge, enabling them to be more attentive to contextual cues that help them to recognize ironic utterances. Thus, Shively et al. conclude that identifying the use of irony improves with proficiency and experience in the target language.[10][11][12]

VI CONCLUSION

English is also the international language that is spoken by people of different nationalities and languages. It is the reference language for almost every scientific, literary and philosophical modern terminology. An English dictionary provides a precise concept and meaning of a confusing term thus solving a problem convincingly and decisively. Therefore, those English-speaking nations provide the entire world with words and terms that convey their own specific meanings of ideas and thoughts, acts and events. Consequently, those nations determine the direction that the entire world takes or even aspires to take, according to their own understanding. In a nutshell, the English language embodies the culture of the most achieved nations, their communication tool and shows their frame of mind. Those who don't have good command over English, regardless of their profession would be at a disadvantage. They would find it difficult to express their ideas meaningfully, and as a result, they are most liable to be misunderstood.

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