

Cross-cultural influences of the English language in India

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ABSTRACT

The issue of language barriers is particularly critical during intercultural service encounters for ESL (English as a Second Language) customers. Customers may struggle to communicate what they want or even get necessary information regarding products or services. Through a qualitative study, based on a grounded theory approach, this study identifies issues that concern ESL customers in intercultural service encounters. The findings suggest that the language barrier generates negative emotional and cognitive responses, and prevents ESL customers from taking certain actions such as seeking necessary information or complaining about service failures.

Keywords: grounded theory, language barrier, intercultural service encounter, ESL customers.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is a kind of "collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another". With the globalization of world business, the problem of cross-cultural communication arises gradually seriously between India and its culturally different partners continues to increase at an unprecedented rate. A researcher explained that culturally-based values systems comprised four dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Further another research identified a fifth "Eastern" dimension called long-term/short-term.

India stresses the social role of the group, whereas Western people emphasize individuality. Collectivism is believed to generate more submissive behavior among Indian in group interaction processes. Specifically, the collectivist concern of Indian to avoid interpersonal disharmony becomes salient, and this concern can consequently encourage an Indian group member to avoid open disagreements with other group members and shift toward the majority position more often than Westerners do. Compared with their Western counterparts, Indian are more situation-centered and are more externally oriented. Indian people believe in which derives from Buddhism and is often used by Indian as an explanation for personal outcome by alluding to fate. Westerners admire the self-made person----the one who, with neither money nor family influence, fights his or her way to the top. Indian culture stresses the importance of maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and acting in a manner appropriate to one's position in a hierarchical social situation. Therefore in group interaction processes, they are inclined to be more restrained, cautious, patient, and self-contained, and less impulsive, excitable, spontaneous, and natural than Westerners.

Importance of Cultivating Cultural Creativity

The teaching of a foreign language inevitably involves the teaching of foreign cultures. We all know that language is a tool for people to communicate with each other. It consists of documents, articles and words people often write. And culture is often referred to the country, the language, the people, the religion, the political institutions, the economy, the social welfare, the mass media, the social behaviors and attitudes and so on. Therefore, language is a part of culture and a means of the culture transmission at the same time, language is influenced by culture and influences culture itself, too. English, as a foreign language in India, should be regarded not only as a resource for learning foreign cultures but also as a means of cultural interaction. In fact, it necessitates cultural interaction. But in the past, the overemphasis on language structure treats English as a set of abstract linguistic rules, an empty code system or a culturally neutral instrument.

However, by focusing on the teaching of language structure, we may not establish a foundation for developing learners' capability for interaction, given that a good understanding of both home culture and foreign culture is the basis for

interaction. Therefore, the study of culture, to some extent, may lead to liberation of the mind, to greater international understanding and cooperation, and an acceptance of other people's ways and values. Nevertheless, it is too simplistic to think that the study of foreign culture will automatically lead foreign language learners to develop creative power and capacity for change. In other words, the learners may gain cultural knowledge through cultural studies, but this does not guarantee an understanding of the target culture and change of attitude. As research stated, It is a mistake to equate a growth of "knowledge and awareness of the differences that exist between cultures" with a growth of empathy and understanding. Knowledge and awareness provide little more than the building blocks upon which attitudes can be erected: individuals can hold undesirable and intolerant attitudes, while still being knowledgeable and aware. In attempting to solve this problem, we suggest that we should focus on developing Indian students' cultural creativity in FLT, Cultural creativity refers to "a capability which is to be achieved through acquiring knowledge about foreign culture, embedded in language and beyond language, through using this knowledge in the performance of inter-cultural communication and creating new thinking for a new action".

Cultural creativity is a kind of creative power to be obtained through language and culture learning. We use "creativity", rather than "capacity" here, for the notion of cultural creativity pays more attention to the students' capability to take part in cultural interaction rather than his/her ability to use a language. To develop students' cultural creativity, first of all, we should consider how to help the Indian student gain knowledge and raise their cultural awareness. When a person knows little about foreign people and countries, they assume that the ways of life of people in foreign countries are exactly the same as those at home. As a result, they use their own norms of behavior to interpret foreign people's thinking, behavior and even appearance. So Indian students should be exposed to sufficient information about foreign culture and then they can turn external knowledge into their own internal knowledge. Secondly, Indian students should understand foreign culture and their home culture on the basis of previous experience and new knowledge. Finally, from knowledge to understanding, Indian students should be encouraged to develop an independent ability to perceive "their previous perceptions" so that they establish a dialectical relation with reality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is the key to a person's self-identity. It enables the person to express emotions, share feelings, tell stories, and convey complex messages and knowledge. Language is our greatest mediator that allows us to relate and understand each other (Imberti, 2007). It can be defined as a system of conceptual symbols that allows us to communicate. It also provides us with a significant frame of reference and a relational context that sustains our identities (Imberti, 2007).

The social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) focuses on the understanding of psychological processes driving intergroup discrimination. The categorization of in-groups versus out-groups can be generated when customers recognize certain cues, such as language, that delineate cultural differences (Brickson, 2000; Nkomo and Cox, 1996).

Not being able to identify with other cultural groups may lead to negative attitudes towards such groups (Bartel, 2001). A sense of ignorance due to such differences can prevent ESL customers from interacting with domestic servers (Baker & Haretl, 2004). Consequently, the understanding of the link between language and social identity patterns is of great importance to the international business community. Surprisingly, literature is silent regarding the effects of language barriers on ESL customers.

However, literature on intercultural service encounters and low literate consumers may be relevant Literature on intercultural services marketing seems to run counter to the notion of the social identification theory. While the social identification theory suggests that not being able to identify with other cultural groups leads to negative consequences, studies on intercultural services argue that customers adjust their service evaluation standards and tend to be more understanding in intercultural service encounters.

For example, Strauss and Mang (1999) state that customers do not perceive inter-cultural encounters to be more problematic than intracultural encounters. Warden et al. (2003) agree with this notion and states that customers are more forgiving of service failures in the context of intercultural encounters. However, it is noteworthy that these studies do not examine the emotional and cognitive mechanisms that customers may go through when interacting with inter-cultural service providers. ESL consumers can also be perceived as low literate customers in terms of their English skills.

They struggle not only with reading and writing but also with listening and speaking English. Low literacy levels are associated with a range of negative market outcomes. Adkins and Ozanne (1998) identified problems encountered by low literate consumers ranging from choosing the wrong product to misunderstanding pricing information. Similarly, Viswanathan, et al. (2003) found that low literate consumers experience difficulties with effort versus accuracy trade-offs when making purchase decisions.

Overall, previous studies suggest that language is more than just a communication tool (Imberti, 2007; Lauring, 2008) and can influence different aspects of the service encounter for ESL customers. Accordingly, it is essential to better understand how language barriers affect ESL customers' service experience.

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".

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.

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.

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".

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 antiCommunist 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.

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.

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 intonational cues. They highlight, however, that children are distinct from adults in their reliance on intonation to interpret sarcastic utterances. 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 intonational 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 intonational 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.). Filippova 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.

Cultural Considerations for Language Instruction

The unfolding social transition from face-to-face conversation to frequent utilization of electronic communication has propelled general discourse practices to create new digital markers that distinguish non-literal language use across cultures and languages. Non-literal language is deeply reflective of cultural discourse and perspectives, and notoriously problematic to decipher. Non-literal utterances are semantically enigmatic even in face-to-face discourse; thus, semantic cues accompany the speaker's message to guide the listener to the intended meaning. Decoding non-literal statements can be even more obscure in information technology mediums in which common paralinguistic features like intonation and facial expressions are unavailable to convey emotional valence and semantic intent. As a result, markers like emoticons and punctuation are frequently reappropriated to facilitate effective interaction. Utilizing computer-mediated communication, writers must learn how to anticipate the potential for ambiguity and deliberately mark their statements to signify non-literal meaning.

The necessity of non-literal language marking for accurate interpretation is particularly important in blogs, websites, and other forums where the audience is unknown and diverse. With the increased risk of misunderstanding, it is reasonable to hypothesize that interlocutors would be less likely to incorporate non-literal meaning statements into electronic discourse, yet research has highlighted examples of non-literal language in a variety of online mediums. The very nature of non-literal language is multivocal, but the conscious inclusion of potentially ambiguous statements in digital discourse reveals both the significance of non-literal statements and the prudent insertion of meaning markers to convey specific semantic intent.

Cultural Frameworks and Effective Communication

Immediate access to international websites and global correspondents with information technologies brings the vibrant diversity of the world closer to the Internet user. Yet, though the Internet has reached far corners of the world, the earth's inhabitants do not all share the same language and culture, despite worldwide access to sites and people in other nations. The interrelationship of language and culture is evident in both the design and content of web pages in which the content is highlighted to reflect cultural trends and the language reinforces ideologies. The layout and rhetoric of the sites are not incidental, however; they are tailored to appeal to a specific audience – the West. Murray explains, “The domination of cyberspace by English is the result not only of the global expansion of English as a lingua franca but also of the historical development of the technology itself”. Since the rise of computer technologies, dominant technological advances have occurred in the United States, further fortifying the hegemony of English. The primacy of English has domineered the Internet and, subsequently, has saturated the Web with Western culture and ideology. Digital text reflects this English proclivity by embedding linguistic expressions and cultural values in information technologies content.

Most Western Internet users often feel confident in their ability to both read and interpret computer-mediated content, but for non-Western Web users, there is an unequal degree of access that can be associated with diverse linguistic and culture orientations. The augmentation of the Internet has facilitated interconnectivity, eclipsing prior capability. Though the Western culture remains the dominant voice, a distinct global presence is beginning to penetrate the Web's anatomy, instilling more linguistic and cultural variation. Many countries are eager to embrace information technology so they can engage in worldwide commerce. By closing the digital divide, social inclusion through information and communication (ICT) can be achieved”.

Inclusion in ICT is frequently gained through international cooperation. Consequently, Western dominance in both technology and business has escalated the demand for English language learning so nations all over the world can increasingly collaborate. As English is the international language of commerce, there is over a billion English speakers worldwide, yet all do not share the same degree of proficiency, which often results in communication failure between English-speaking digital interlocutors. Furthermore, access to the Web considerably varies worldwide and extends hegemonic divides. The push to modernize societies can transpire without the consent or approval of citizens, many of who do not have the requisite tools to participate in digital discourse without personal hardship. With a multicultural and multiliterate Web user population, it is imperative to consider the communicative influences of culture and language on information technologies.

Discourse practices across information technologies are complex. With the affordance of expedited electronic communication, collaboration has monumentally increased. Time delay is reduced between correspondence, which not only accelerates information transfers, but also has the potential to illuminate miscomprehensions in conversations. Misconceptions can arise from linguistic and cultural differences. For example, cultural attitudes toward work context and humor may significantly differ, particularly from East to West. In his discussion of cultural influences on CMC, St. Amant explicates that efforts of joking or using wit “may conflict with the communication expectations or the values of individuals from other cultures... what is considered a valid topic for poking fun at can vary greatly from culture to culture”. Cultural perspectives and ideologies undergird behavioral and communicative practices, but they are not always understood or appreciated in other cultural contexts. Additionally, communicative expressions reflect cultural and individual value systems.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, the relation between language and culture determines the importance of culture teaching. Especially in ELT, it is necessary and urgent to teach not only cultural knowledge information but cultural communication information as well. Briefly, Culture is an indispensable ingredient of communication and cultural competence - the mastering of the shared knowledge, assumptions and values of the culture, is one part of communication competence, of which cross-cultural communication competence is a further development, including non-linguistic competence, macro-linguistic competence and communicative competence. Only those competent in the message sender's culture as well as the message receiver's culture can succeed in cross-cultural communication.

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