

Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet.

— John F. Kennedy

*

*



When you meet someone, the first question often asked is "Where are you from?" Sometimes this refers to a question about where the person grew up, and other times it's a question about where the person lived previously. Without thinking about it, we tend to assume that people who are raised or live in a particular place probably speak the same language, hold many of the same values, and communicate in similar ways. In other words, they are said to be of the same culture.

What is culture?

When we look for a credible definition of "culture", we immediately realize that it has been defined in hundreds of ways, but none of them seems to be able to tell us everything about culture. The following definitions are just some of the well-known ones:

"Culture may be defined as what a society does and thinks." (E. Sapir, 1921)

"What really binds men together is their culture – the ideas and the standards they have in common." (R. Benedict, 1935)

"Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture

* * * 2

*

*

consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values." (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952)

"Culture is man's medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function." (Edward T. Hall, 1959)

"By 'culture', anthropology means the total life way of a people, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group. Or culture can be regarded as that part of the environment that is the creation of man." (Clyde Kluckhohn, 1965)

"Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artefacts that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning." (Bates and Plog, 1976)

"A culture is a collection of beliefs, habits, living patterns, and behaviors which are held more or less in common by people who occupy particular geographic areas." (D. Brown, 1978)

"...Culture refers to the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes." (R. Kohls, 1979)

"The culture of every society is unique, containing combinations of norms and values that are found nowhere else." (I. Robertson, 1981)

"Culture is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people." (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992)

"Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving." (Samovar and Porter, 1994)

"I treat culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. The 'mind' stands for the head, heart, and hands – that is, for thinking, feeling, and acting, with consequences for beliefs, attitudes, and skills." (G. Hofstede, 2001)

*

* *

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

"Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behavior; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behavior through social learning." (Hill, 2012)

From the above various definitions, we can safely arrive at the conclusion that every culture has its ways of doing things in daily life, such as ways of eating, drinking, dressing, finding shelter, making friends, marrying, and dealing with death. People have to learn the cultural ways of their community to satisfy their basic human needs. These ways are not something that the people in the group are born with. Instinctive behavior, on the other hand, is a pattern of behavior that an animal is born with. Spiders spinning their webs are examples. The mother spider does not teach her babies how to spin webs. (In fact, she is not even there when they are born.) Young spiders know how to do it when they are born.

As humans, we learn some of the ways of our culture by being taught by our parents or teachers. We learn more of the ways of our culture by growing up in it. We see how other people in our culture do things, and we do them the same way. We even learn how to think and feel in this way. Since we learn the ways of taking care our basic needs in the cultural group in which we grow up, our own culture seems very natural to us. We feel in our hearts that the way that we do things is the only right way to do them.

In other words, culture can be seen as shared knowledge since members of a particular culture have certain things in common, e.g. certain values and beliefs, certain customs, certain gestures and certain foods.

What is communication?

Communication is central to our existence. It is through communication that we learn who we are, and what the world around us is like. To a large extent, our identity as both individual and cultural being is shaped through communication. To be exact, we explore the world around us and establish bonds, network and relationship with other people through communication. Communication permits us to express our thoughts and feelings to others, and to satisfy our emotional and

material needs. As we learn to communicate better, we begin to achieve some measure of control over events that affect us and those around us.

There are three basic aspects to communication: our individual personality, the culture we operate in, and the physical environment that surrounds us. Each of these aspects has influence on what and how we communicate.

Communication is transactional. Each person encodes and sends messages, and in turn receives and decodes messages. The coding and decoding process is primarily culture-based and involves a diverse set of elements, including words, gestures, symbols, etc. Whether a communication is successful or not depends greatly on the circumstances. The key is whether the participants have some similar cultural background, knowledge and experiences. In cross-cultural situations, this shared area is very small.

What is the relationship between culture and communication?

It is widely recognized that one of the characteristics separating humans from other animals is our development of culture. The development of human culture is made possible through communication, and it is through communication that culture is transmitted from one generation to another. Culture and communication are so closely related to each other that Hall maintains that "culture is communication" and "communication is culture." In other words, we communicate the way we do because we are raised in a particular culture and learn its language, rules, and norms. Because we learn the language, rules, and norms of our culture by a very early age (between five and ten years old), we are generally unaware of how culture influences our behavior in general and our communication in particular.

What is intercultural communication?

Generally speaking, intercultural communication refers to communication between people whose cultural backgrounds are distinct enough to alter their communication.

Intercultural communication as a field of study first emerged in the U.S.

* *

* * *

*

*

* * *

*

*

*

*

in the 1950s as a result of convenient transportation systems and innovative communication systems. Edward Hall is considered the father of intercultural communication with his publication of *The Silent Language* in 1959 and his many other works. Therefore, as a discipline, its history is short.

Why is intercultural communication necessary?

Intercultural communication occurs whenever there is communication between people from different cultural backgrounds, for example, what happened on the Silk Road, Marco Polo's stay in China, Monk Jianzhen's mission to Japan, and Zheng He's seven voyages to the Western Seas-they tell us that intercultural communication is as old as history since wandering nomads, religious missionaries and conquering warriors have encountered people different from themselves since the beginning of time. Today's intercultural encounters differ from earlier meetings because we can now board a plane and fly anywhere in the world in a matter of hours and the reality of a global economy makes today's contacts far more commonplace than in any other period of the world's history. Technology has accelerated intercultural contact. Trips once taking days are now measured in hours. In fact, today tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. At one time, only wealthy Americans could afford to visit foreign lands, but now people from every country in the world use air travel as a means of discovering other cultures. Business executives and government officials can now attend a breakfast meeting in San Francisco and a dinner conference in Paris during the same day. With increased ease of mobility, we will likely encounter new cultures at a greater rate than before. New and advanced communication systems have also encouraged and facilitated cultural interaction during the past few decades. Communication satellites, sophisticated television transmission equipment, and digital switching networks allow people throughout the world to share information and ideas instantaneously. With the rapid development of electronic technology, intercultural communication changes with each passing day. In recent years, social media help billions of people worldwide stay connected and communicate regularly. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WeChat and QQ are so popular that it seems that people just cannot do without both at home and abroad nowadays.

Economic globalization and widespread migrations also make intercultural communication absolutely necessary. It is said that the United States is no longer the dominant economic force in the world in the 21st century. For example, according to Harris and Moran, there are now more than 37,000 transnational corporations with 207,000 foreign affiliates. This expansion in globalization has resulted in multinational corporations participating in joint ventures, licensing agreements and other international business arrangements. At the same time, people all over the world are faced with the same environmental issues, such as pollution. It has become clear that pollution does not observe geographic and cultural boundaries. Nations are beginning to realize that we must work together to solve these problems or face common disaster. So in a world of international interdependence, no nation, group or culture can remain aloof or autonomous. If you touch one part of the world, you touch all parts. So intercultural communication in the 21st century is really inevitable.

When we communicate with people from other cultures, we are often confronted with languages, rules and norms different from our own. So we find intercultural communication different from communication within our own cultural group. Even if we overcome the natural barriers of language difference, we may fail to understand or to be understood. Misunderstanding may even become the rule rather than the exception. If we are unaware of the significant role culture plays in communication, we may place the blame for communication failure on those other people.

In order to minimize misunderstandings when we communicate with people from other cultures, we need to understand the process of intercultural communication, and we need to understand people of other cultures and their patterns of communication. This is important not only to determine where misunderstandings occur, but also determine how these misunderstandings can be minimized in future interactions.



Study the Iceberg Model of Culture; get prepared for the learning of the next unit.

As Edward T. Hall points out, "culture hides much more than it reveals. Culture controls behavior in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual."

Therefore, culture can be viewed as an iceberg. Nine-tenths of an iceberg is out of sight (below the water line). Likewise, nine-tenths of culture is outside of conscious awareness. The part of the cultural iceberg that is above the water is easy to be noticed.

The out-of-awareness part is sometimes called "deep culture". This part of the cultural iceberg is hidden below the water and is thus below the level of consciousness. People learn this part of culture through imitating models. Once these behaviors and attitudes are learned, they are automatic and taken for granted.

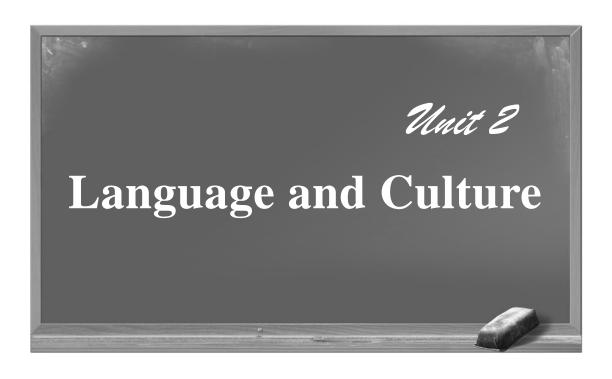
Venturing into different cultures without adequate preparation can be just as dangerous as a ship attempting to navigate icy waters without charts, hoping to be lucky enough to avoid hitting an iceberg. The difference is that the ship will know immediately when it hits an iceberg.

* * * *

8

Food Music Language Etiquette Festivals Dress **Performing Arts** Body Language Literature Leisure Activities Visual Arts Nature of Friendship Kinship Conception of Beauty Sense of Space Learning Styles Rules Sense of Time Arts of Leadership Attitudes towards Age Sense of Achievement Spirit of the Contract Thinking Modes Legal Awareness Values Gender Roles Notions of Individuality Norms Attitudes towards Social Status Concept of Fairness Views on Parenting Approaches to Problem Solving Notions of Modesty Religious Beliefs Spirit of Freedom Preferences for Cooperation or Competition Expectations

The Iceberg Model of Culture



To know another's language and not his culture is a very way to make a fluent fool of one's self.

— Winston Brembeck





Language is part of culture and plays a distinct role in it. Some social scientists consider it the keystone of culture. Without language, they maintain, culture would not be possible. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture; it reflects culture. In the broadest sense, language is the symbolic representation of a people, and it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking. It provides a window to the culture in which it is used. To sum up, language is both a means of communication and a channel of culture.

It is obvious that to communicate with people from different backgrounds we have to use a language, native or foreign. But we may not be quite aware that language alone does not ensure effective communication. As a matter of fact, cultural competence is absolutely necessary for effective communication since language and culture are inseparable.





How Is Language Related to Culture (I)

Culture and language are intertwined and shape each other. It is impossible to separate the two. Language is not a matter of neutral codes and grammatical rules.

11

* *

*

*

*

*

*

*

* *

*

*

*

*

Each time we select words, form sentences, and send a message, either oral or written, we also make cultural choices. We all agree that language helps in communicating with people from different backgrounds. However, we may be less aware that *cultural literacy* is necessary to understand the language being used. If we select language without being aware of the cultural implications, we may at best not communicate well and at worst send the wrong message.

In our own environment we are aware of the implications of these choices. For example, if an American says "How are you?" other Americans register the phrase as *Hello*, the equivalent of *Guten Tag, Bonjour*, or *Ohio Gozayimasu* rather than the literal meaning. A foreigner in the United States, knowing some English but not familiar with the culture and usage of English, may attribute a very different meaning to the phrase and interpret it much more literally.

All languages have social questions and information questions. A social question, even though it comes in question form, does not ask for information. It is simply a *lubricant* to move the conversation forward. In American English the question "How are you?" is a social question. In many other countries, such as Germany, Russia, and Poland, "How are you?" is an information question. The speaker actually wants to get an answer to the question. In Japan the question "Where are you going?" is a social question. The same question is an information question in American English. An American may feel that the Japanese question is *intrusive* and may not know what to answer. However, no answer is expected. A simple "Over there" will do. The point is that words in themselves do not carry the meaning. The meaning comes out of the context, the cultural usage.

Language reflects the environment in which we live. We label the things that are around us. For example, in the Amazon area snow is not part of the environment; therefore, people in that region do not have a word for snow. It simply does not exist. In areas where it snows occasionally, people have a word for snow, but it may be just one word without any *differentiations*. Most Americans, for example, use terms such as *snow*, *powder snow*, *sleet*, *slush*, *blizzard*, and *ice*. That's the extent of most people's snow vocabulary. People who live in an environment where it snows most months of the year may have a much more differentiated terminology for snow. If you go to a pub in northern Germany and order wine, you may ask for "ein Glas

Weißwein, bitte" (a glass of white wine, please). You may specify *Moselwein* or *Rheinwein*, but that's it. The north of the Germany is beer country, and the knowledge of wine is much more limited. In Baden, in southwestern Germany, in contrast, a waiter would just stare at you if you asked for a glass of white wine. Here you would specify the type of wine, the vineyard, and the year. Wine is important in this region, and you are expected to know about wine.

In addition to the environment, language reflects cultural values. Edward Hall, for example, points out that the *Navajo* do not have a word for *late*. Time, he tells us, does not play a role in Navajo life. There is a time to do everything, a natural time rather than the artificial clock time that industrial countries use. As a result, the Navajo do not have the differentiated vocabulary connected with time and clocks that Americans have. Time and the passing of time are things one can't control; therefore, one should not worry about wasting time and setting schedules.

One of the problems in dealing with people from other cultures is that we translate concepts from a foreign language and culture with words that fit our priorities. For example, businesspeople in the United States typically are frustrated with the *manana* mentality of Spanish-speaking countries: "They said tomorrow, but they did not mean it." For Americans *tomorrow* means midnight to midnight, a very precise time period. To Mexicans, *manana* means in the future, soon. A Mexican businessman speaking with an American may use the word *tomorrow* but not be aware of or not intend the precise meaning of the word. This vague terminology is not precise enough for the American emphasis on efficiency. The difficulties over the word *manana* are at least as much an American problem as a Mexican problem. Dictionaries do not help because they typically pretend that there are exact equivalents that have the same meanings. To communicate concepts effectively, cultural knowledge is as important as linguistic knowledge.

Notes

- 1. literacy ['lɪtərəsɪ] n. 读写能力;熟练使用语言的能力 cultural literacy: the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture
- 2. lubricant ['luːbrɪkənt] n. 润滑剂
- 3. intrusive [ɪn'truːsɪv] adj. 侵扰的, 烦扰的

*

*

*

*

*

*

* *

*

*

*

*

*

- 4. differentiation [dɪfə ren [i'eɪ n] n. 区别;区分
- 5. Navajo ['nævəhəu] n. 纳瓦霍人 (美国最大的印第安部落)
- 6. manana [ma:'na:na] n. (西班牙语) 明天



How Is Language Related to Culture (II)

Sometimes different cultures use identical words that have rather different meanings. The results can be humorous, annoying, or costly, depending on the circumstances. Let us look at several examples.

An American university and its French partner discussed the possibilities of exchanges for students, professors, and administrators. Both sides agreed that it would be a good idea. The French negotiator spoke pretty good English, at first glance very good English; the American spoke good French. In the discussion they used both French and English. In both languages they used the identical word – administration – when they talked about exchanges between the administrations of the two institutions. The surprise came later. For the American, administration in the university context meant department chair, dean, or provost. For the French, administration meant upper-level clerical staff. What the American considered to be an administrator, the French considered faculty.

The word manager is used worldwide, but it has different levels of importance and meaning in different cultures. The same is true for the title director. Many Japanese, for example, have the title director on their business cards. In the American context it is a person of some importance and power; in Japan that title may not carry the same level of authority. It may take some time to determine what the meaning of titles is and where a person stands in the hierarchy. The term director could be a loan word from English to translate the position for use on a business card; the word is the same, but the meaning may be slightly different. The term also could reflect cross-cultural differences in organizational structure. The word director may be the closest translation of the job-level title, which describes a

job that does not exist in the U.S. corporate structure. An understanding of the specific title would require a more detailed explanation of the job and its fit in the organizational structure.

Both French and Americans use the word *force majeure*, but the phrase carries very different meanings. Literally, the term means superior or irresistible force. In U.S. legal language it refers generally to forces of nature or possibly war. In European law the term has a broader meaning: it includes the changes in economic conditions or other circumstances that were not anticipated when the contract was drawn up. The implication is that when Americans make agreements with Europeans and discuss unforeseen circumstances and use the term *force majeure*, they need to clarify what they mean and spell out what that term covers.

As anyone who has been abroad for any length of time can attest, language lives; it changes over time. Words and phrases that are used commonly at one time may be discontinued or their meaning may change over time. For example, the word gay means happy, lighthearted. In recent decades, however, the word has taken on the meaning homosexual. As a result, English speakers in countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States don't use the original meaning anymore, and young speakers of English may not even be familiar with the traditional meaning.

Countries such as France and Iceland try to keep their language pure. The French have the *Academie Francaise* to police the language and ensure that business use pure French. But even in France the language changes. The officials may *frown on Franglais*, but people in France eat a *sandwich*, go on a trip for *le weekend*, and go on *le jogging*, all pronounced in the French manner with the accent on the last syllable. To use English is "*chic*," and somehow the English terms seem to be more precise and descriptive. French Canadians make the Academie Francaise really nervous when they use *char* for car and many other English words in their French. French Canadians do not feel compelled to follow the rules of the Academie Francaise.

The example of Canadian French illustrates that a language, if spoken in different parts of the globe, ultimately will develop differently. The Academie Française may insist on certain rules, but other French-speaking groups may make

*

*

*

*

*

their own rules and consider their French just as correct. The same is true for the development of English. What is standard and correct English? Former British colonies such as India and Nigeria increasingly insist that their English is just as correct as Oxford English. The result is the emergence of different "Englishes" used in different parts of the world.

As the examples above show, communication across cultures and languages is difficult and full of hurdles and pitfalls. Even if two people from different cultures can speak a common language, they may misinterpret the cultural signals. The result is confusion and misunderstanding. Many people have difficulty identifying the root of the problem. For example, American students often complain that they can't understand their foreign professors. In some cases the professors actually may have a poor command of the English language; however, in most cases the problem is not the language but different intonation patterns and different cultural signals. English-speaking students listen to their instructors with certain expectations. For example, if the instructor's voice drops to a low pitch, the students take that as a signal of a *rhetorical* topic boundary - "I'm finished with this idea" - whereas the instructor may mean no such thing. Students adjust their interpretation of the lecture according to those intonation signals, thereby *misconstruing* the instructor's intent. A professor who comes from a culture in which the professor is almighty and never is challenged, Korea or India, for example, may send signals to that effect to his students. If the students are not aware of the cultural issues, in all likelihood they will identify the problem as a language problem rather than a cultural problem.

Notes

- 1. provost ['provəst] n. (大学学院的)院长;教务长
- 2. hierarchy ['haɪə raːkɪ] n. 等级制度
- 3. Academie Francaise (法语)法兰西学院(负责制定法语的标准)
- 4. frown on 不赞成;反对
- 5. Franglais (法语)过多使用英语词语的英语式法语
- 6. chic [ʃiːk] adj. 时髦的
- 7. rhetorical [rɪ'tɒrɪkəl] adj. 修辞(性)的
- 8. misconstrue [讏mɪskən'struː] vt. 误解, 曲解