

Verbal Issues in Intercultural Communication

- * **The sheer number languages spoken in the world today, about 6000, are staggering. The top 10 languages (Chinese-Mandarin), English, Spanish, Bengali, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, German and Arabic) are spoken by nearly half of the world's population.**
- * **How can people possibly communicate given all these different languages?**
- * **What are some of the difficulties in translation?**
- * **How can we use languages to become better intercultural communicators?**
- * **Is it possible for two people to communicate effectively if they don't speak the same language?**
- * **Should everyone learn a second or third language?**

The components of Language

- * Linguistics usually divides the study of language into four parts: phonology, semantics, syntactics and pragmatics.
- * **Phonology** is the study of the sound system of language – how words are pronounced, which units of sounds (phonemes) are meaningful for specific language, and which sounds are universal.
- * **Semantics** is the study of meaning- that is, how words communicate the meaning we intend to get across in our communication. For example, “Is this for here or to go?”
- * **Syntactics** is the study of the structure of a language – the rules for combining words into meaningful sentences.
- * **Pragmatics** is the study of how language is actually used in particular contexts; the focus is on the specific purposes of language use. It is not enough to know the grammar and pronunciation of a language.

Language and Perception

- * **Our perceptions are shaped by our language.**
- * **How much of our perception is shaped by the particular language we speak?**
- * **Do English speakers see the world differently from Kazakh speakers?**

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- * **The Nominalist Position** – perception is not shaped by the particular language we speak. Language is simply an arbitrary “outer form of thought.”
- * **The Relativist Position** – assumes that the particular language we speak, especially the structure of that language, determines our thinking and our perception of reality and, ultimately, important cultural patterns. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, language defines our experience.
- * The qualified relativist position takes more moderate view of the relationships between language and perception. This position recognizes the power of language but sees language as a tool rather than a mirror of perception.

Variations in Communication Styles

- * Communication style combines both language and nonverbal communication. It is the tonal coloring, the metamessage that contextualizes how listeners are expected to accept and interpret verbal messages. A primary way in which cultural groups differ is a preference for **high-context or low-context** communication.
- * **Edward Hall differentiates high context and low context cultures.**

- * People from **high context** cultures obtain information from **personal** information network. They discuss the matter with friends, business acquaintances and relatives.
- * People from **low context** cultures seek information about decisions and deals from a **research base**. They place much emphasis on the use of reading, reports, databases and information sources.

* William Gudykunst and Stella Ting-Toomey (1988) identify four major dimensions of communication styles:

- * **direct/indirect;**
- * **elaborate/ exact/succinct;**
- * **personal/contextual and**
- * **instrumental/affective.**

Direct/indirect

A direct communication style is one in which verbal messages reveal the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants and desires. **An indirect style** is one in which verbal message is often designed to camouflage the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants and desires.” **Get to the point”, What exactly are you trying to say? Don't beat around the bush.**

Elaborate/Exact/Succinct Styles.

- * **This dimension of communication styles refers to the quantity of talk that people value. The elaborate style is the use of rich, expressive language in everyday talk.**
- * **The succinct style values understatement, simple assertions and silence. Silence is especially appropriate in ambiguous situations; if one is unsure of what is going on, it is better to remain silent.**
- * **The exact style falls between elaborate and succinct, as expressed in the maxim, “verbal contributions should be no more or less information than is required” (Grice, 1975). The exact style emphasizes cooperative communication and sincerity as a basis for interaction.**

Personal/Contextual Styles.

- * This dimension refers to the extent to which the speaker emphasizes **the self**, as opposed to his or her role. The personal style is characterized by the use of linguistic devices to enhance **the sense of I**. Contextual Style emphasizes prescribed roles, status and formality.

Instrumental/Affective Styles.

- * **An instrumental style is characterized as sender oriented and goal oriented. The burden is on the sender to make the message clear.**
- * **The affective style encourages the listener to sense the message before the speaker actually expresses him or herself verbally. The affective style is receiver oriented and process oriented. The burden is on the receiver.**

* **Discourse** refers to language in use. By this we mean that all discourse is **social**. The language that is used, the words and the meanings that are communicated, depend not only on the context but also on the social relations that are part of that interaction.

*** Orbe has studied how communication operates with many different dominant and co-cultural groups. He has identified three general orientations: nonassertive, assertive and aggressive. Within each of these orientations, the co-cultural individuals may emphasize assimilation, accommodation or separation in relation to the dominant culture. The strategy chosen depends on many things, such as preferred outcome, perceived costs and rewards and context.**

	Separation	Accommodation	Assimilation
Nonassertive	Avoiding Maintaining interpersonal barriers	Increasing visibility Dispelling stereotypes	Emphasizing commonalities Developing positive face Censoring self Averting controversy
Assertive	Communicating self Intragroup networking Exemplifying strength Embracing stereotypes	Communicating self Intragroup networking Using liaisons Educating others	Extensive preparation Overcompensating Manipulating stereotypes Bargaining
Aggressive	Attacking Sabotaging others	Confronting Gaining advantage	Dissociating Mirroring Strategic distancing Ridiculing self

Semiotics

- * **The study of semiotics or semasiology offers useful approach to understanding how different discursive units communicate meaning. The process of producing meaning is called semiosis.**
- * **Intercultural communication is not concerned simply with the cultural differences in verbal systems. Semiotics can be useful in unpacking the ways that the cultural codes regulate verbal and nonverbal communication systems.**

Moving between languages.

- * Sometimes entire nations are officially bilingual or multilingual. Belgium has three national languages: Dutch, German and French. Switzerland has four official languages: Italian, German, French and Romanish.**

Top 10 Non-English Languages Most Commonly Spoken at Home in the United States

1. **Spanish**
2. **Chinese**
3. **French**
4. **German**
5. **Tagalog**

1. **Vietnamese**
2. **Italian**
3. **Korean**
4. **Russian**
5. **Polish**

*** One interesting linguistic phenomenon that has implications for the teaching and learning of other languages is called interlanguage. Interlanguage refers to the type of communication that emerges when native speakers of one language are speaking in another. The native languages' linguistic structure often overlaps into the second language which creates a third way of communicating.**

Translation and interpretation.

- * Languages are entire systems of meaning and consciousness that are not easily translated into other languages word for word. The ways in which different languages convey views of the world are not equivalent. The tradition of translation studies has tended to emphasize issues of accuracy and equivalency- the condition of being equal in meaning, value, quantity and so on.**

Often word-for-word translation that is not equivalent in meaning can yield amusing target texts, like the following signs in tourist spots around the world:

- * **Is forbidden to steal hotel towels please. If you are not a person to do such thing is please not to read notice (Tokyo hotel)**
- * **The lift is being fixed for the next day. During that time we regret that you will be unbearable (elevator in Bucharest, Romania)**

- * Because of the impropriety of entertaining guests of the opposite sex in the bedroom, it is suggested that the lobby be used for this purpose (Zurich hotel)**
- * It is forbidden to enter a woman even a foreigner if dressed as a man (Bangkok temple)**
- * Specialist in woman and other diseases (Rome doctor's office)**
- * The manager has personally passed all the water served here (Acapulco hotel).**

Language Politics and Policies

- * **Language or customs that emerge to determine which language is to be spoken where and when are referred to as language policies. These policies often emerge from the politics of language use.**

There are different motivations

- * **As a part of a process of driving people to assimilate into the national culture;**
- * **As a way of protecting minority languages so that these languages do not disappear;**
- * **By location**
- * **Language parity, but the implementation is not equal.**
- * **We can view the development of language policies as reflecting the tensions between the nation's history and its future, between the various language communities and between economic and political relations inside and outside the nation.**



* Thank you!