

Unit 3 Verbal and Non-verbal Communication

Unit overview

Both Units 1 and 2 mention a key word “communication”. As Thomas Payne points out in Text B of Unit 2, most of us, linguists or non-linguists, have the common-sense notion that “the main purpose of human language is **communication**”. Thus to develop a deeper understanding of the nature and function of language, we need to take a close at human communication. This unit examines this topic from a cross-cultural perspective, illustrating the similarities and differences in verbal and non-verbal communication between different cultures, which lays a foundation for further exploration into the interface between language and culture in the following units.

Text A

People in different communities demonstrate different perceptions and rules of both verbal and non-verbal communication. The way they interact is culturally relative in almost every aspect, including when to talk, what to say, pacing and pausing, listenership, intonation and prosody, formulaicity, indirectness, and coherence and cohesion.

Text B

Some non-verbal behaviors are practically universal and have the same meaning wherever you are (e.g., smiling and facial expressions of anger, surprise, fear, sadness, and so on). But for cultural and historical reasons, there have also developed great differences and variations in such aspects as eye contact, touch, gestures, and territorial space, etc. Without an awareness of respect and accommodation for people from a different background, these differences are likely to cause misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.

The two texts supplement each other in that Text A illustrates cross-cultural differences in both verbal and non-verbal communication while Text B focuses on non-verbal behaviors and addresses both differences and similarities.

Teaching objectives

This unit is designed to help students develop their reading skills, communicative competence, critical thinking, intercultural reflection and abilities of autonomous

learning in the following aspects.

Reading skills:

Use context to understand a new word

Identify cohesive devices

Predict the content of an upcoming sentence/paragraph

Communicative competence:

Develop a coherent and cohesive oral/written discourse

Use topic sentences, supporting sentences and concluding sentences in presentations/essays

Communicate constructively in team work

Critical thinking:

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of personal experience as evidence in argumentation

Organize the arguments using an outline

Note and reflect on the differences between academic writing and everyday writing

Intercultural reflection

Identify similarities and differences in non-verbal communication across cultures

Be aware of multiple levels of differences on which cross-cultural communication can falter

Interpret communication behaviors from cultural and historical perspectives

Teaching strategies

Non-verbal communication and cross-cultural communication are both interesting topics in linguistics. The teacher can introduce the two texts by quoting anecdotes or relating to students' own experiences (question 5 in Preparatory work, p. 59). For students who lack experience of cross-cultural communication, the topic can be led in by discussions about inter-subcultural communication.

Text A is a research article from an academic journal and its structure and writing style are quite clear. It is recommended to draw students' attention to the author's logic (i.e., ways of arguing) and use of evidence in class. If well-planned, all the questions in *Preparatory Work* and *Critical reading* can be dealt with in some detail in class. The teacher can follow all the questions in *Understanding the text* to check students' comprehension of the text, while the tasks in *Evaluation and exploration*

can be divided and assigned to groups. For example, in Making an outline (p. 62), the teacher can divide the students into three groups, each responsible for one topic.

For classical works in intercultural communication, please refer to:

Hall, Edward T. (1955). The Anthropology of Manners. *Scientific American*, 192: 85-89.

Hall, Edward T. (1959). *The Silent Language*. New York: Doubleday.

For more updated information, please find the following journals:

Cross-Cultural Communication published by Canadian Academy of Oriental and Occidental Culture (CAOOC)

Across Languages and Cultures published by Akadémiai Kiadó

Language and Intercultural Communication published by Routledge Journals, Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Preparatory work

- (1) Academic interests: gender and language, interactional sociolinguistics, conversational interaction, cross-cultural communication, frames theory, conversational vs. literary discourse, and new media discourse.

Main publications:

You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation. New York: Morrow, 1990.

That's Not What I Meant!: How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships. NY: William Morrow, 1986.

Gender and Discourse. NY & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Note: Outside the academic world Deborah Tannen is best known as the author of a number of books on the *New York Times* best seller and she is also a frequent guest on television and radio news and information shows.

- (2) Edward Sapir (1884–1939): an American anthropologist who is widely regarded as one of the most important figures in the early development of modern linguistics. His main interests are in the ways in which language and culture influence each other, the relation between linguistic differences, and differences in cultural world views. His most important contribution is what is known as the principle of linguistic relativity or the "Sapir-Whorf" hypothesis.

John Joseph Gumperz(1922 –2013): an American linguist. His research interests include the languages of India, code-switching, and conversational interaction. Well-known for his contribution in interactional sociolinguistics and the "ethnography of communication", Gumperz's research has benefitted such fields as sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and linguistic anthropology.

E. M. Forster (1879 –1970): an English novelist, short story writer, essayist and librettist. He is known best for his ironic and well-plotted novels examining class difference and hypocrisy in early 20th-century British society. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 13 different years.

Robert Kaplan: An American applied linguist. His research area covers applied linguistics, discourse analysis, language policy, language planning, and ESL/EFL Teaching. He is most famous for his contribution in Contrastive Rhetoric, a term he first coined in 1966. Kaplan has authored or edited 32 books, more than 130 articles in scholarly journals and chapters in books, and more than 85 book reviews and other ephemeral pieces in various newsletters, as well as 9 special reports to the U.S. government and to governments elsewhere.

<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/E-USIA/education/engteaching/kap0299.htm>

(3) Pragmatics is the systematic study of meaning dependent on language in use. Unlike semantics, which examines conventional meaning "coded" in a given language, pragmatics studies how the transmission of meaning depends not only on structural and linguistic knowledge (e.g., grammar, lexicon, etc.) of the speaker and the hearer, but also on the context of the utterance, any pre-existing knowledge about those participants involved, the inferred intent of the speaker, and other factors. Central topics of pragmatics include a speaker's communicative intentions, the use of language that requires such intentions, context of use, the relation between the user of a linguistic form and the act of using the form, and the strategies an addressee employs to work out what the intentions and acts are.

(4) Cohesion refers to the use of various phonological, grammatical, and/or lexical means to link sentences or utterances into a well-connected, larger linguistic unit such as a paragraph or a chapter. In other words, cohesion achieves well-connectedness by means of linguistic forms.

Example: Mary is a secretary. *She* works in a law firm. Yan (2012)

Coherence refers to the logical well-connectedness between different parts of a piece

of spoken or written language, which distinguishes it from a random assemblage of sentences or utterances. Yan (2012)

Formly incohesive discourse may be coherent through common sense, cultural background, contextual information, imagination, logical assumption, etc.

Husband: *That's the telephone.*

Wife: *I'm in the bath.*

Husband: *OK.*

(5) Pause is a temporary and brief break in the flow of speech, which is often classified into filled pause and unfilled or **silent pause**. The former is taken up or filled by a hesitation form like *ah*, *er*, and *um*. In contrast, the latter is not filled by a hesitation form. In other words, a silent pause is one where there is no vocalization.

Critical reading

I. Understanding the text

(1) The main purpose of this article is to illustrate eight levels of cross-cultural differences in non-verbal aspects of communication.

(2) We can understand the nature of language by observing it in communication and in contact with other systems of communication.

(3) Pacing and pausing, listenership. In deciding when to talk and what to say, the speaker usually takes a conscious speech planning, yet in pacing and pausing and in showing listenership in a conversation, one does not need to stop and think for a decision.

(4) Section 2.1 starts with a direct thesis statement. Then the author explains it with an expert's (Scollon) research findings and examples. In section 2.2 the author raises a number of questions (in para 7, 9 and 11) and responds to them with relevant research findings (Goody's as well as hers) and her own personal experience. Section 2.3 is also organized in the order of "question-answer". Section 2.4 illustrates cross-cultural differences in listenership with two examples, gaze (paras 21 and 22) and loud responses (para 23), and then moves on to the conclusion (para 24). Section 2.5: example-discussion. Section 2.6: personal experience and a very brief interpretation. Section 2.7: the thesis (para 30 "how to be indirect is culturally relative") and discussion about the cases of American-non-American differences (American men,

women, Greek and Japanese). Section 2.8: definition and illustration.

(5) The experience in a dinner party in paragraph 12 indicates that (1) people from different cultures not only differ in whether compliments should be accepted, rejected or deflected, but also in which compliments should be accepted/rejected/deflected; and (2) every culture has its own conventions about what to say on particular occasions, and without knowledge of these conventions, we can by no means appropriately interpret the messages in cross-cultural communication.

In Para. 29, Tannen refers to her first visit to Greece to exemplify the cross-cultural difference in formulaicity, i.e., what is novel and what is conventional in different languages.

(6) Generally speaking, the eight levels are arranged in the order of importance, from the core of verbal communication to more peripheral factors. The first three levels and the fifth level belong to what is said while the last three center on how it is said. The fourth level, listenership, is the only level examined from the perspective of the hearer.

(7) As has been illustrated in part II, verbal communication involves many hidden rules and conventions that vary from culture to culture. Since every individual has his/her own unique experience, education background, and beliefs, etc., no two interactants would share exactly the same communicative rules and conventions. In this sense all communication is cross-cultural.

Summary writing

Ways of communication are culturally diversified in almost every aspect, from what to say to how to say it. When to talk (and when not to) is culturally relative. People from one culture may find a particular silent moment unbearable while it is deemed appropriate in another culture. What to say also differs greatly across cultures. Many of us consider raising questions as a natural or even basic part of daily communication, but in some cultures questions are perceived imposing and hence rarely asked. A certain degree of indirectness in communication is universal in all languages, but how to be indirect varies from culture to culture. American men value “sticking to facts” while Japanese and Arab often insist on elaborate “small talks”. Cross-cultural differences can also be observed in the different ways of showing listenership, control of pace and pause, use of conventional and novel language, and variation of intonation. Even when people are asked to describe or write about the same thing, their

organization of a discourse will very likely differ in ways of establishing coherence and cohesion as Kaplan illustrated.

II. Evaluation and exploration

1. Evaluating the text

- (1) Personal experiences and anecdotes help elucidate abstract and difficult terms and add to the vividness of the text. Controlled use of personal experience may also shorten the distance between the author and the reader. But the overuse and misuse of personal stories can also damage the objectivity and credibility of the argumentation.
- (2) Beside personal experience, Tannen mentions a lot of academic researches (e.g. in para 4, 7, 8, 10, 21, 23, 38 and 39), which all add weight to her arguments.
- (3) It is obviously not an exhaustive list. Cross-cultural communication can vary at many other levels, e.g., proxemics and turn taking in a multiparty context.

2. Exploring beyond the text

(1) Questions for exploration

- 1) There are altogether 16 questions which help structure the text in part two and they are not equally important. The question in para 2, for example, is a global one that covers all the eight sections in the main body, while the question in para 20, "Now how many milliseconds shall I wait?", is just an example to illustrate why pacing and pausing is an automatic level.

a. See above.

b. The first question in para 7 is asked to introduce the topic of this section, what to say. It is a transition from section 2.1 to section 2.2.

c. This is a rhetorical question requiring no answer. It is asked simply to reinforce our conviction that questions are basic to the educational setting, which forms a sharp contrast with the case of Gonjans.

- 2) In all the known languages there are strategies of making indirect requests/apologies/invitations/, etc. In a strict sense, the use of language is an indirect means to achieve communicative ends. How to be indirect differs from culture to culture. For example, in English a request is often put forward as a question of ability (*Can you pass me the salt?*).

- 3) For example, introvert people may be more tolerant of silence in face-to-face verbal interaction while extroverts usually find silence awkward and uncomfortable. This is primarily an interpersonal difference since in all cultures there are introvert and extrovert people.

Gaze is another example. People with more aggressive personality usually hold longer and steadier gaze when they talk to others, while shy people are more likely to diverge in eye contact.

Language enhancement

I. Words and phrases

1. Adverbs and prepositions

(1) off; (2) out; (3) across; (4) away; (5) up; (6) between, for; (7) after; (8) out of, into; (9) off; (10) up; (11) out of

2. Verbs

- (1) illustrate, vary, discussing, exemplifying, signaling, mean, say
- (2) vary
- (3) differ
- (4) illustrated
- (5) exemplifies
- (6) expounds
- (7) demonstrates
- (8) elucidate, interpret

3. Words in context

Open to discussion:

To guess the meaning of a new word, one can first recognize its part of speech, analyze its word formation, identify its attitude if necessary, and then evaluate its meaning in the linguistic context.

II. Sentences and discourse

1. Paraphrasing

- (1) Athabaskan Indians consider that it is inappropriate to talk to people they do not know. According to Scollon, this causes a strange effect when the Athabaskan Indians meet people from other cultures. The non-Athabaskans may want to make acquaintance with the Athabaskans by talking to them, but the Athabaskans will not talk to the non-Athabaskans before they become acquaintances.
- (2) Gonjans take it for granted that questions are always asked to achieve indirect functions, so they never ask questions for pure information.
- (3) The Americans usually take it for granted that in communication people should be direct and say no more or less than needed, and that what people say is exactly what they mean. This is especially true in business and education and applies more to American men than to women.
- (4) No two people have just the same cultural background. Therefore, all communication is cross-cultural to some extent. In this sense, understanding cross-cultural communication can help us understand the nature of language and tackle

problems in the world, especially those caused by and related to the use of language, e.g. obstacles in foreign language teaching and learning.

2. Translation

- (1) 物理学家通过观察物质元素在不同环境中的表现及其与其他物质的相互作用来理解它们的本质。与此相似，我们通过观察交际中的语言以及语言与其他交际符号系统的关联来认识语言的本质。
- (2) 外语学习者可能会把在一种新的语言中所学的显性的词汇和语法填充到母语交际系统中隐性的语篇框架或副语言外壳里。
- (3) 社交网络总是区域性而非全球性的，不同社区的人有不同的语言手段来实现交际目标，与其他文化模式一样，人们说话的方式将他们界定为一个“（言语）社区”。
- (4) You are very likely to find many people who have stereotyped ideas about the forms and functions of language.
- (5) Please let me elaborate on my proposal.
- (6) Runaway inflation further plagued the wage- or salary-earner. (Edwin O. Reischauer)
- (7) Such jokes tend to reinforce racial stereotypes.

3. Paragraph completion

(1)B (2)E (3)C

4. Rhetorical devices

(1) rhetorical question; (2) antithesis, rhyme; (3) antithesis, alliteration; (4) ellipsis

Rhetorical question: If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

Antithesis: Rude words bring about sadness, but kind words inspire joy.

Antithesis and rhyme: Man proposes, God disposes.

Alliteration: The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew (S.T. Coleridge: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*).

Ellipsis: Fred took a picture of you, and Susan took a picture of me.

Intercultural reflection

1. Chinese and American people are different in many aspects of non-verbal communication. Text A and Text B have already made a quite comprehensive list for this, including when to speak, pausing, listenership, intonation, indirectness, cohesion and coherence, eye contact, touch, gestures, and territorial space. In addition to all these, Chinese and Americans also differ in courtesy, use of facial expressions, and participation in group communication, etc..

Classroom tactics: please refer to the distinction between intuitive and critical ways of thinking defined in Unit 2 of Teacher's book (p. 11).

2. The different conventions of eye contact between East Asians and Americans may be partly accountable in their history and culture. American culture has a deep evolutionary root in capitalism, which nurtures an efficient and reasonable social system. In such a culture, directness is encouraged in both verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Eye contact, as a sign of directness, helps the speaker get and hold the hearer's attention and facilitates message conveying.

In East Asian countries Confucianism has long been the overwhelming ideology. In accordance with this ideology, communicators must strictly conform to the social hierarchy, and direct eye contact is supposed to be impolite and hence prohibited between social unequals.

3. Since Kaplan's (1966) ground breaking research in comparative rhetoric, many scholars have made efforts to validate or falsify his conclusion from different perspectives. Some conclude that Chinese are more indirect in verbal communication in order to show politeness; while others conduct empirical researches (e.g., in writing) to test this finding.

Kaplan's (1966) observation of different ways of thinking between Chinese and English awaits further evidence, yet it is fair to say that cross-cultural differences of thought patterns seem to show in both verbal and non-verbal communication. (c.f. eye contact in Question 2)