

Interaction Analysis: cultural influences

The interaction system I chose for today's analysis is my work as a student ambassador for the University of Turku, more specifically the preparing and planning work currently ongoing for our next high school visitation. I've defined this visitation as a project that has the stated goal of delivering a clear but also inspiring presentation of studying at the University of Turku, to second year Finnish high school students.

There is a cultural backdrop to this project that has many layers, which all influence our interaction within this system. The first one is that me and the one other person working on this, who is the person I mainly interact with, are both University graduate students, both working on our master's degrees. This helps interaction because we both have firsthand experience, from not so long ago, about what studying is actually like, and so there's a lot of shared knowledge.

The second layer is that we were both native Finnish speakers. Although we both have a shared native language, I'm bilingual and ethnically a Finno-swede, I haven't discussed this with them, so I don't know for sure what their ethnicity/cultural or linguistic identity is, but the assumption is that they are an ethnic Finn. Then again, I haven't told them about my identity so they might or might not be aware of it. Having a native-level proficiency in a language that isn't English helps the interaction because it makes working with them more intimate and personal, and expression in a native language tends to be richer and more authentic.

The third layer I bring up is that regardless of possible citizenship, the assumption is that as permanent citizens here in Finland we're a part of Europe and the larger "western world", which implies that we share the same fundamental values of our civilization, like the rule of law, human rights, democracy and a civil society with liberties and responsibilities. This already creates a sort of unspoken trust and an agreement to be honest about everything and to respect mutual decisions and commitments.

Our age is more or less the same, with both of us in our twenties, which makes communicating easier since we have a more common lingo with each other. On the other hand, being of an opposite sex, at least in terms of superficial qualities, adds a subconscious tension to any interaction we have. The fact that neither of us knows the other one's relationship status, sexuality or gender identity makes the interactions more intriguing for me, but it can also add awkwardness to interactions. It's important to keep a working relationship with a colleague professional, but certain deep aspects of the human psyche can never be removed, as long as we're still human.

Different departments and faculties all have their own subcultures, different flavors of academia. The fact that we both have studied and still study at the same faculty but in

different departments also influences our ideas about what professionalism and academic work should even look like, and how speakers are supposed to present themselves before students. This in turn influences what our presentation will sound and look like. This both helps and hinders interaction: on one hand the more students from various different backgrounds are presenting, the richer the presentation, but on the other hand, different working styles might cause initial friction.

I'm personally not from a family with any academic or industry background, so I often notice how other students from "better families" also behave differently as adults, and sometimes this can even lead to condescension, arrogance or pity towards fellow students from working class families like me. Luckily, I haven't encountered this kind of behavior in this context. Being from a working-class family makes interaction less formal and more pragmatic, which can be more straightforward and therefore effective, but it can also throw off people used to a more of a "protocol" of professional communication. I would also argue that small-talk is something that mainly exists in the middle and upper classes of our society, since working class conversations tend to be more substance-based. This lack of small talk can only throw certain people off.

As we can see from the elements discussed here cultural influences, like most human-centric things tend to form a complex network of interacting elements that all affect human interaction in any given interaction system. These influences stem from a hierarchical "system of systems" that can be viewed and modeled in a multitude of ways. Things like gender, ethnicity, sexuality and cultural background tend to be viewed in a cross-sectional way to truly understand how these things are affected and experienced by other things like age, wealth and nationality.

Self-assessment of essay

Structure 2/2

I think my text has a clear structure of headings and paragraphs with the proper total length. This time I also focused on the introduction and ending paragraphs

Clarity 2/2

There shouldn't be any grammatical errors in the text. Sentences are logically structured, and the paragraphs give a clear picture of what's being discussed

Content 1/2

Maybe the essay could have contained more real-world examples

Evaluation 2/2

I do evaluate the element being discussed in a particular paragraph in the last sentence of that paragraph

Reality check 1/2

Maybe a better target for a cultural analysis would have been something with more people, but I'm kind of socially isolated currently

Total: 8/10 = 4