

□ Chapter One Communication and Culture □

The life which is unexamined is not worth living. (Socrates) □

Every tale can be told in a different way. (Greek proverb) □

The greatest distance between people is not space but culture. (Jamake Highwater)

I. Warm-up: Look and Say

Study the picture on the right showing a “mature couple” on a tandem bike. Try to give a brief account of what you have seen from the picture to your partner, and then think about whether this picture can tell you something about the relationship between communication and culture.



Both the two wheels of a tandem bike and a mature couple in life have something in common: they work together with each other to get the best result. This may shed some light on how culture and communication are related. They “work in tandem” and they are so closely linked that it is often difficult to decide which is the voice and which is the echo.

We humans cannot live in a culture-free situation, nor can we survive without communication. In today’s “shrinking” world, our communication behavior is extended from that within our own community to that among and between others. As a result, intercultural communication competence becomes necessary. In this chapter, we begin with communication, the basis of all human contact. Then we will look at aspects of culture, and the relationship between culture and communication.

II. Basics of Communication

Communication: Broad Types and Essential Elements

The American anthropologist Edward T. Hall says communication is culture, and culture is communication. It means that communication and culture are directly linked. Since they are two different concepts, we’d better deal with them one at a time. Let us begin with communication. Communication is the term we are too familiar with to give it a second thought. Familiarity, however, does not mean good understanding. We need to understand communication to be better communicators.

Activity 1

Study the following communication situations. Work in groups to identify as many types of communication as you can. Then try to figure out the criteria on which you base your classification.

1. A car dealer delivers a speech to a large audience in the auto exhibition.
2. You complain to online sales about the late delivery through Wechat(微信).
3. Two blind people exchange ideas in Braille.
4. A jockey gives instructions to his horse in the horsemanship performance.
5. A programmer issues commands to a computer.
6. Tom talks to himself while brandishing his toy gun.
7. An archaeologist is deciphering a mysterious sign on the recently unearthed pot.
8. An Arabic traveler talks to you in Arabic that is Greek to you.

9. A hen clucks to her chicks.
10. My wireless earphones receive commands from the cellphone.

Discussion

You may use human beings as the criteria for classification; then you have two categories: human and non-human communication. If we extend our horizon a little, then we can have roughly five types:

1. Human communication (1, 3, 6, 7, 8)
2. Animal communication (9)
3. Human-animal communication (4)
4. Human-machine communication (5)
5. Machine-to-machine communication (10)
6. Human-machine-Human communication (2)



From the above situations, we see that communication occurs when:

1. there are at least two or more communicators, human or non-human;
2. there must be some contact between communicators;
3. there must be a language shared by communicators;
4. an exchange of information has taken place, however much it is.

For Rules 1, 2 and 4, it is self-evident; otherwise, no communication happens. For Rule 3, languages used by communicators vary.

We now move to the communication process between humans, since it is our primary focus. When we mention the term “communication” in the remainder of the book, we mean human communication.

Communication: Definition and Components

What is communication? What does it have to do with us? In fact, communication occurs in any place where there are human beings. When a baby is just born, it usually cries. Does the crying communicate anything? When you graduate, your friends usually say “Congratulations!” to you. When a driver sees the red light, he/she will stop. All these are cases of communication. Our experiences tell us that communication is closely connected with our everyday life; without it we can hardly survive. Communication, the basis of all human contact, is as old as humankind. Today it has become even more important. Some people believe that information (the content of what is communicated) means power and money. Whoever has information has power, and hence has control over those less informed. Whether you agree or not, it indicates that we have to take communication very seriously.

Although it constantly occurs around us, human communication is not at all a simple matter. That is why so far no single definition of human communication has been agreed upon.

Activity 2

Study the pictures below. Work in small groups and identify the many ways in which people usually get ideas and information across. Then try to 1) define communication in your own words, 2) work out as many components or steps involved in communication as you can, and 3) list the Chinese characters that are usually employed to translate communication.



Discussion

Human beings are social creatures who need to connect and interact with other humans for survival. However, it is not easy to find a single definition due to its complexity. Up to now there are as many as over 100 definitions of communication. The pictures on the next page give us some clues in defining communication. We see that communication involves a message exchanged between a sender and a receiver, a channel (face to face or through the telephone) for the message to be conveyed, a setting in which the communication event occurs, a feedback from the receiver and possibly a noise and/or gesture accompanying the process of message sharing.

From these components of communication, we can draw some definitions. In its most general sense, communication refers to the sharing or exchange of information, ideas, feelings and so on. Put simply, it means getting across our ideas, views, feelings,

emotions, etc. Since it involves an exchange process between humans, communication is never static. Instead, it is a dynamic, systematic process in which meanings are created and reflected in human interaction with symbols. But this definition doesn't mention whether communication behavior is intentional and/or unintentional. There are two schools of thought on this. The first believes that in a communication event one intentionally attempts to induce or illicit a particular response from another person. The second holds that the concept of intentionality is too limiting because there are instances where messages are conveyed unintentionally. In nonverbal communication cases, more messages are likely to be conveyed without the sender's awareness. This is what we have to be especially alert to in intercultural communications.

Owing to its complexity, the term communication does not have a single equivalent in Chinese. Many terms have been used to translate communication. They are 交际, 交流, 传播, 沟通, 通信, 传通. In mainland China, each of these terms is preferred by a certain discipline: 交流 in the field of psychology, 沟通 in management, 传通 in journalism, 通信 in communication. The first one, 交际, is mostly adopted by people with a linguistic background.

Communication: Characteristics

It is a great challenge trying to search for a universal definition of communication. Communication is a term that has been used in many ways, for diverse purposes. In addition to the definition and the components of communication, the study of its characteristics helps us to have a better understanding of how communication actually works.

Activity 3

Study the definition of communication and see what characteristics you can derive from it. Group discussion is recommended.

Definition: Communication is a dynamic, systematic process in which meanings are created and reflected in human interaction with symbols.

Discussion

From the above definition we know that communication is a process with several distinctive characteristics. Here are some important ones.

Communication is *dynamic*. It's more like a motion picture than a single snapshot. When we communicate, we interact with each other. When we don't like one idea, we replace it with another. We sometimes even shift topics in the middle of a sentence.

Communication is *irreversible*. Once a person has said and another has received and decoded the message, the original sender cannot take it back. Once a communication event takes place, it is done. Even if you can experience a similar event, it cannot be an identical one.

Communication is *unavoidable* - It is impossible not to communicate, since we communicate unintentionally all the time, even without the use of words. Our body language, the way we dress, the importance we give to arriving on time, our behavior and the physical environment in which we work, all convey certain messages to others.

Communication is *a two-way exchange of information* – Communication is sharing of information between two or more persons, with continuous feedback.

Communication is *a process* – Each message is part of a process and does not occur in isolation. This means that the meaning attached to a message depends on what has happened before and on the present context. It involves a sender and a receiver of information.

Communication is *systemic*. It is part of a large system. We send and receive messages not in isolation, but in a specific setting or context. The nature of communication depends to a large extent on this context. Settings and environments help determine the words and actions we generate and the meanings we give to the words and actions of other people. The elements of this system include a) the place or location: school buildings, theaters, public squares, homes etc.; b) the occasion: wedding, funeral, academic conference, class, graduation ceremony, etc.; c) the time when the communication takes place; and d) the number of participants: two people, a group, or a large audience. Perhaps now you may see how the people in the pictures of Activity 2 communicate and why they communicate the way they do.

Communication is *meaning loaded*. Humans are meaning-seeking creatures. Throughout our lifetime we have accumulated various meanings as the outside world has sent us trillions of messages. These meanings are stored somewhere in our brains for us to retrieve and employ. In each communication event participants attribute meaning to a behavior. Then meaning exchange is more obvious.

Communication is *symbolic*. Humans are symbol-making creatures. We are able to generate, receive, store, and control symbols. Human symbolic communication is the difference of man and the difference it makes. In other words, it is man's alone.



Today we have at hand very different types of symbols to conduct communication with: sound, light, a mark, a statue, Braille, or a painting etc. that represents something else. When we look at the road signs, no-smoking sign, or the Santa Claus, we learn something. Our words and actions are other sets of symbols (very important ones) through which we convey our messages, ideas and feelings to other people.



Communication is *self-reflective*. Just as we use symbols to reflect what is going on outside of us, we also use them to reflect ourselves. This unique ability enables us to be participants and observers simultaneously: we can watch, evaluate, and alter our performances as communicators in communication events.

Communication has a *consequence*. That is to say, when we receive a message, something happens to us. For instance, when someone asks you how to go to the Dean's office, your natural response is to say, "It's over there." And you might even point to that direction. Moreover, you sure feel happy on hearing "You look great!" So regardless of

the content of the message, it should be clear that the act of communication produces changes in people.

III. Understanding Culture

In this part we move from communication to culture. Like communication, culture is a term that still challenges scholars owing to its extreme complexity. Culture is not at all strange to us. We hear, read and even talk of it, such as Chinese culture, English culture, tea culture, campus culture, and so on. But when it comes to the meaning of culture, it may not be easy to give a conclusive definition. For example, you would find it difficult to define the Chinese culture even though you have grown up in it. The problem may lie in the fact that you are too familiar with it. Now let us approach culture from different aspects.

Culture: Too Familiar to Be Noticed

Activity 4

How important is air to us human beings? How often are you aware of its existence around you? When do you think you will be aware of it? Why? Discuss these questions with your neighbors.

Discussion

The fact is that we rarely think about the existence of air, because it is always there and so we have taken it for granted. We are usually not aware of it until there is a lack of it. In this sense we are similar to the fish that seems to notice everything around it except the water in which it is swimming. Then a somewhat strange phenomenon appears before us: we have distinct explanations for what is abstruse or complicated; however, when it comes to what is essential for our survival and familiar to us, we are often at a loss as to give it a definitive description. Familiarity does not necessarily mean good understanding. This is true of culture. We live in culture; we meet culture; we behave under the guidance of culture; we transmit culture; we enrich culture. In other words, we human beings are basically cultured animals. But when we stop to think about the meaning of culture, we find we are puzzled. This is perhaps why we should spend some time on its study.

Culture: Definition

Activity 5

Study the pictures and identify which of them shows a meaning of culture. Discuss this issue in small groups and try to define culture. Reference to an English and/or Chinese dictionary would be helpful.





Discussion

The answer is that each picture shows a meaning of culture, as each of them reflects the creation of man. Now look at how culture can be defined.

● Definitions of Culture

Semantically, the word “culture” stems from the Latin term “colere”, translatable as “to build on, to cultivate, and to foster”. This term, referring to something constructed willingly by men, composes the opposite of “nature” that is given in itself.

As has been mentioned above, culture is a very large, complicated and elusive concept. Up to now no agreement has been reached on its definition. “As early as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn listed 164 definitions of culture that they have found in the anthropology literature. And, of course, many new definitions have appeared since then.”

The following are just a few of them that may help us gain some general idea about culture.

Culture may be defined as what a society does and thinks.—Sapir

Culture is that which binds men together.—Ruth Benedict

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.—Kluckhohn

Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. —Bates and Plog

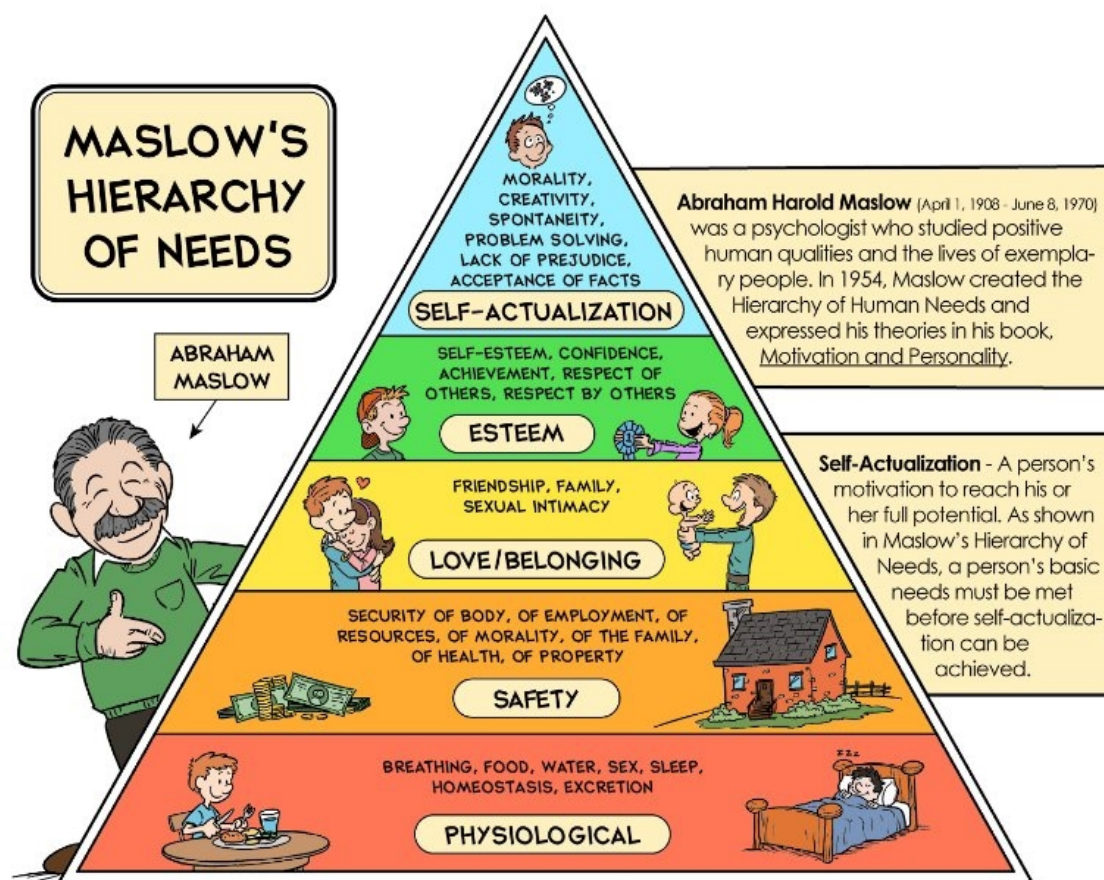
We define culture as the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. —Samovar et al

From the above few definitions, we see that culture is complex, covering almost every aspect of our life. A simpler definition can be derived: culture is the total way of life that a (usually very large) group of people share.

● Importance of Culture

From the above we know that culture is what we cannot do without in our life process. The importance of culture can also be understood from other perspectives. Here we are going to talk about it in terms of satisfying basic human needs and overcoming the innate human deficiencies.

Culture is a particular way to satisfy human needs. Human beings are basically the same, with similar needs to be met. Abraham Maslow (1908—1970, American psychologist) has proposed the theory of a five-type hierarchy of human needs. One of the basic axioms of his theory is that once the lower needs are satisfied, higher needs materialize to take their place.



At the very bottom are the basic needs such as air, water, food, sleep, sex, etc. When these are not satisfied we may feel sickness, irritation, pain, discomfort, etc. At the

second level, we see the needs for safety—the needs to do with establishing stability and consistency in a chaotic world. These needs are mostly psychological in nature, such as the security of a home and family. Then next on the ladder come the needs for love and belongingness. Humans have a desire to belong to groups: clubs, work groups, religious groups, family, gangs, etc. We need to feel loved (non-physical) by others and accepted by others. What then follows are the needs for esteem. There are two types of esteem needs. First, it is the self-esteem which results from competence or mastery of a task. Second, there is the attention and recognition that comes from others. This is similar to the belongingness level; however, wanting admiration has sometimes to do with the need for power. Finally, at the top of the hierarchy there are the needs for self-actualization— “the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.” People who have everything can maximize their potential. They can seek knowledge, peace, esthetic experiences, self-fulfillment, etc.

Though we have basically the same needs, ours are satisfied in different ways. For example, all people need food. This is universal. But how to eat food is modified by culture. Some use chopsticks, others knives and forks, still others their fingers. In all human history, there are love stories. But how love is expressed differs from culture to culture. A point in case is the difference between the Chinese story of *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* and the English one of *Romeo and Juliet*. Therefore, culture provides us with a way to satisfy our needs.

Culture is man's second nature, an effective way to overcome the essential vulnerability (unspecialization or deficiency) of human beings. Culture is what distinguishes humans from animals. According to some scholars, man differs biologically from animals in that they are not as specialized as animals. In other words, they do not have built-in instincts for survival that are biologically predetermined. Birds learn to fly by instinct. Cows are predetermined to eat grass. But man has no wings to fly, no teeth for grass, no claws to get food. Man is thus biologically weak. But it is just this inborn weakness that makes man exceed animals in earning himself a better life. Nature does not predetermine what man should do, or what they should not do. This leaves room for humans to find a way to compensate for their very weakness. The human activities that try to make up for the weakness compose human culture. It is human culture that allows man to adapt to almost all situations, and thus be superior to animals. In this sense, culture serves as the “artificial, secondary environment”.

Clyde Kluckhohn¹ sums up the importance of culture when she stated that culture regulates our lives at every turn, and from the moment we are born until we die, and there is —whether we are conscious of it or not—constant pressure upon us to follow certain types of behavior that other men have created for us.

Geert H. Hofstede² compares culture to the software of the mind. This software takes time to acquire. That is the process of socialization, the process of learning culture.

¹ Clyde Kluck hohn (1905—1960) a cultural anthropologist with a deep interest in culture and personality.

² Greert H. Hofstede (1928—present) Dutch scholar who has contributed a lot to intercultural communication.

Therefore, man is the producer of culture and also the product of culture. It means that man makes culture, and is also shaped by culture once culture is produced.

When we talk about culture, we had better distinguish it from society as they often appear in the same context. It seems that we cannot talk about culture without mentioning society. According to some researchers, a culture is the way of life of a nation, while a society is a community organized in accordance with a certain way of life. In other words, a society is composed of people with a distinct identity, a territorial area, and a distinctive way of life. Put simply, society is a people with a common culture, and a culture is the transmissible way of life within a society. Cultures can exist apart from their societies: the Roman Empire disappeared, for example, but much of its culture was preserved and handed down through manuscripts and works of art.

Culture: Elements

As we know, culture is an umbrella term that refers to everything concerning our life. In order to have a better and fuller understanding of culture, we will see how scholars classify culture.

In very general terms, culture can be roughly divided into three categories: material or artifact (物质文化), including such items as dresses, buildings, food, etc.; institutional (制度文化), including family, education, law, etc.; values/beliefs (观念文化), including ideas like freedom, democracy, equality, etc.

From the point of view of visibility, culture can be seen as composed of two parts: the visible (material/artifact and institutional) and the invisible (values/ beliefs).

From the perspective of levels, culture is classified into two categories. One concerns intellectual and artistic activity, and the works produced by it, including things like education, history, geography, institutions, literature, art, music, and so on. The other refers to the way of life of a given people who share values, beliefs, customs, norms, etc. Some scholars name the first one “Big C” (Culture with a big C) and “small c” (culture with a small c). Another version of “Big C” and “small c” is “high culture” and “anthropological culture”. High culture focuses on intellectual and artistic achievements. One might speak of a city as having a great deal of culture because there were many art exhibits, concert performances, and public lectures. Or we might say so of a particular period in history, such as the Tang Dynasty (618—907 AD) in Chinese history.

According to the sphere of influence, culture is divided into dominant culture and sub -culture. No matter how diverse a culture can be, within each society there is always one part of the culture that is shared by most people and exerts greater influence. It is to this part—the dominant culture, or umbrella culture, or mainstream culture—that we refer to when we are applying the term culture. At the same time, we should not neglect the fact that numerous sub-cultures that co-exist within each culture in addition to the dominant one. Sub-cultures refer to the groups or social communities exhibiting communication characteristics, perceptions, values, beliefs, and practices that are significantly different enough to be distinguished from the other groups, communities, and the dominant culture. This distinction can be made based on race, ethnic background, gender, sex, sexual preference, locality, and so forth. In the United

States, for example, there are such sub-cultures as those of African Americans, native Americans, women, youth, gays and lesbians, and so on. Please think about the sub-cultures in China.

Activity 6

It is the “small c” discussed above that plays an essential part in intercultural communication. It defines people’s thinking, action, etc. For example, culture decides:

- how people get married (their customs)
- what people teach their children about right and wrong (their values)
- what people think is beautiful (their beliefs)
- how people look at each other when they are talking (their nonverbal communication)
- what people study in school (their institutions)...

Now work with your neighbor and continue the above list. Please find out more aspects of human life that are affected by culture. This activity helps us see how culture affects our life.

Activity 7

Read the following stories and decide what caused the difficulties in communication.

- A. It was my first visit to Chongqing, southwest China. I felt uneasy when I asked the way to some place. In my hometown in the North, directions are given in terms of East, West, North and South. We may easily find the way when local people there tell you whether the place is in the direction of North or South; while in Chongqing the local people tell you the way in terms of direction on the right, or on the left, to which we Northerners are quite unfamiliar. And I guess people from Chongqing may meet the same problem as I had when they were in the North.
- B. 古时候有个不学无术的人，好不容易用钱买了个县官，却不会说“官话”，上任之后，照例要去拜访顶头上司——知府，在闲聊中知府问：

“贵县风土怎么样？”

“并没有大风，更少尘土。”

“百姓怎样？”

“白杏只有两棵，红杏不少。”

“我问的是黎庶！”

“梨树很多，结的果实很小。”

知府动气了：“我不是问什么梨树，我是问你的小民！”

县官见知府生气，急忙站起来回答到：“卑职的小名叫狗儿。”

Discussion

It is very likely that problems arose in the above communication events because the communicators came from different co-existing cultures, and they did not share enough

to carry a smooth communication. In the first case, there is the difference between regional cultures. In the second, a gap is obvious between the levels of education.

The fact that many sub-cultures co-exist within a dominant culture tells us that there are usually many cultural differences within a single race or nationality. When we use culture in this book, we refer or relate to the dominant culture as it is the culture that most people within a nation share. However, we have to always remember that when we say Chinese are modest, we do not mean that every Chinese possesses the same degree of modesty. It only means that most Chinese display a relatively large degree of modesty in many occasions. There are always differences!

Culture: Characteristics

Activity 8

Read the following story and rank the five characters according to whom you approve of most and whom you approve of least, and write a sentence or two explaining your first and last choice. Next, think about what made you rank them as you did, and try to identify where you learned the values that underpinned your reasoning and choice for the particular ranking. Do you think the values that guided your decision were personal or cultural or both? Share your opinions in pairs or in small groups.



Rosemary is a woman of about 21. For several months she has been engaged to a young man named *Geoffrey*. The problem she faces is that between her and her fiancé there lies a river. No ordinary river, but a deep, wide river filled with hungry alligators.

Rosemary wonders how she can cross the river. She remembers Sinbad, who has the only boat in the area. She then approaches Sinbad, asking him to take her across. He replies, “Yes, I’ll take you across if you’ll spend the night with me.” Shocked at this offer, she turns to another acquaintance, Frederick, and tells him her story. Frederick responds by saying, “Yes, Rosemary, I understand your problem—but it’s your problem, not mine.” Rosemary decides to return to Sinbad, spends the night with him, and in the morning he takes her across the river.

Her meeting with Geoffrey is warm. But on the evening before they are to be married, Rosemary feels she must tell Geoffrey how she succeeded in getting across the river. Geoffrey responds by saying, “I wouldn’t marry you if you were the last woman on earth.”

Finally, Rosemary turns to her friend Dennis. Dennis listens to her story and says, “Well, I don’t love you... but I will marry you.” And that’s all we know of the story.

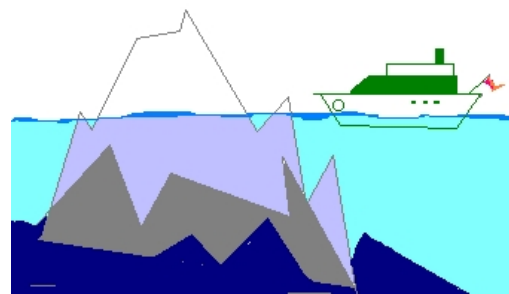
Discussion

This story provides us with some clues that help us understand the characteristics

of culture. Let us see how this story can be possibly interpreted. (1) People do not always have similar interpretations of the world around them. They perceive and interpret behavior in different ways; (2) as a result of different values, people's beliefs, behavior and reactions are not always similar; (3) no two people, even from the same culture, have exactly the same perceptions and interpretations of what they see around them; (4) many interpretations, however, are learned from within a person's culture. Therefore, those who share a common culture will probably perceive the world more similarly than those who have different cultural backgrounds. The conclusion we can draw is that individuals are unique with different views, but individuals who share a common culture have more similarities with each other than with those from different cultures.

From this story we learn some characteristics of cultures. Can you find some more from the passage below?

Here are five metaphors of culture. First, the popular iceberg metaphor illustrates "hidden culture": the world of assumptions, habits, beliefs that may not be consciously articulated or taught. Culture in one sense is like an iceberg. Only a small part is visible. What we can see of culture is the tangible part like food, dress, paintings, architecture,



statues, etc. However, the majority of culture is like the iceberg hidden under the water, and we don't see with our eyes the intangible aspects of culture such as views, ideas, attitudes, love, hatred, customs, habits, and so on. It means that most of culture is out of our immediate conscious awareness and thus the study of culture is no easy job.

Second, culture is like the water a fish swims in. A fish notices everything around it except water in which it is swimming. The fish just takes the water for granted as it is always there around it. The same is true for us. We are usually not aware of culture, because it is so much a part of us as our environment.

Third, culture is our software. Our physical selves can be seen as the hardware. Hardware does not work without software. Culture is what provides us with the needed software. However, as with any good software, we are only vaguely aware of it when we use it.

Fourth, culture is Jelly Beans. All jelly beans in the organizational jar are "diverse" not just the red ones or purple ones.



Fifth Culture is like melting pots and salad bowls. Popular metaphors for the relationship of immigrant cultures within a larger nation or dominant culture have shifted from the melting pot to the salad bowl. In the latter, immigrant cultures maintain their original integrity in the new national salad. More cynical observers may note that whether it is stew or salad, it all gets eaten and assimilated in the end.



Culture is extremely complicated; some of its characteristics can be seen in the passage and the story above, and the definitions in Activity 5. The following is a list of some more important ones that may help you understand culture better.

a) Culture is *learned*, not hereditary. Because culture is a shared symbolic system within a relatively large group of people, the only way for group members to integrate into, reinforce, and co-create this shared symbolic system is through a learning process of socialization or enculturation. Interaction with family members and friends is the most common way for us to learn about our culture. Other sources for learning our culture are schools, media, folk tales, and art.

The needs that we are born with are basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Humans need food, but what to eat, when, where and how to eat is learned. That's why we Chinese use chopsticks while Westerns prefer knives and forks; and we like rice while Americans prefer bread. Sneezing is physiological, but after the other person sneezes, a Guangdong person says “吉星”, while an English native says “God bless you”. When we cough in public places, we Chinese tend to ignore it, but an American usually says “Excuse me” immediately after he/she does so.

We learn our culture in many ways and from a variety of sources, either consciously or unconsciously. One way is by means of proverbs that offer in a vivid way an important set of instructions for members to follow. For example, the English proverb “*The squeaky wheel gets the grease*” encourages people to “speak up” and make sure their views are heard. What are the other sources for people to learn culture? You should be able to list some now.

b) Culture is *transmitted* from generation to generation. Without the advantage of knowledge from those who lived before us, we would not have culture. A culture is but one link in the whole chain of generations, some of which have become history and some of which are in transition.

c) Culture is *dynamic*. Cultures are constantly changing over time. Some cultures are more open and accepting of change, others tend to resist it. Culture change in the process of transmission from generation to generation, group to group, and place to place. The Chinese culture has experienced great changes in its long history, especially since the May 4th Movement in 1919. For example, handshaking that was not practiced before is popular now, yet in some remote rural areas, elderly farmers still don't shake hands. Today changes in China are even more obvious and prominent, as contact with other countries is getting more frequent than ever before. Contact, by its very nature, brings change. Cultures also change through several mechanisms: innovation, diffusion, and acculturation being the most common.

One point needs emphasizing. Although many aspects of culture are subject to

change, the deep structure of a culture resists major alterations. That is, changes in dress, food, transportation, housing and the like are likely to occur very quickly. However, values associated with such things as ethics and morals, work and leisure, definitions of freedom, the importance of the past, religious practices, the pace of life, and attitudes toward gender and age are so deeply embedded in a culture that they persist generation after generation.

d) Most of culture is *hidden*, like the part of the iceberg under water. It's difficult to study culture because most of what we call culture is of an intangible nature and cannot be seen. That is to say, most of culture exists in the subconscious mind of people, who therefore aren't aware of the fact that their actions are governed by their own culture, or cultural rules.

e) Values are the *core* of culture. Cultures are mainly differentiated from others by way of different values people hold. Many of these differences can be seen from what people do. For example, Western people celebrate Christmas; people in East Asia celebrate Spring Festival. Some people speak Spanish, but others speak English. Some people talk to God, but others have God talk to them. And still others say there is no God. Some people paint and decorate their entire bodies, but others spend millions of dollars painting and decorating only their faces. People like to hear compliments and praise, but people from different cultures respond differently to the same compliments and praises.

f) Cultural elements are *integrated*. They are closely linked as if in a complex chain like system. You touch a culture in one place and everything else is affected. A good example of this is the Opening and Reforming in China, which has brought huge changes not only in the areas of the economy, but also in many other sectors including politics, education and so on.

g) Culture is *ethnocentric*. Practices that differ from one's own are usually considered strange, even abnormal or barbarous. This is the manifestation of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism, the belief that one's culture is primary to all explanations of reality, is usually learned at the unconscious level. It often leads to a negative evaluation of another culture's ways of doing things, because a logic extension of ethnocentrism is that *our way is the right way*.

IV. Communication and Culture

Communication: Culture Bound

Communication permeates our life, and our life is guided by our culture. Communication itself is the basic human need, but the way an individual communicates emanates from his or her culture. In other words, communication is a product of culture. This can be seen in the fact that when communicating some cultures prefer debate, while others value silence more. Therefore, "communication is culture, and culture is communication" (Hall). The following part will tell us how the human communication style is modified by specific cultures. Communication: High-context and Low-context

From the study of communication characteristics, we see that communication is

systematic. We send and receive messages not in isolation, but in a specific setting or context. Before we discuss high and low context, let us first engage in two activities (9, 10) and think about how people get meanings from the context and what elements are included in the context.

Activity 9

Read the dialogue below and see what the conflict is between the two speakers. Discuss in groups the questions following the dialogue.

In Hong Kong, a Chinese policeman (A) goes to his British superior (B) and asks for leave to take his mother to hospital.

A: Sir?

B: Yes, what is it?

A: My mother is not very well, sir.

B: So?

A: She has to go into hospital, sir.

B: Well, get on with it. What do you want?

A: On Thursday, sir.

B: Bloody hell, man. What do you want?

A: Nothing, sir.

Questions:

1. What do you think the Chinese policeman wants?
2. How do you know his meaning?
3. What do you think of the British officer's response?

Discussion

A Chinese professor has made a survey among both Chinese (including foreign citizens of Chinese origin) and the native speakers of English. The respective responses may surprise you. The Chinese respondents said that the British officer had no human feelings whatsoever! However, the native English speakers' reaction was that the Chinese policeman was a terrible guy; he was not clear or specific at all!

The possible cause of the conflict is that the Chinese policeman makes the request by stating the reason only. In the Chinese culture, this is a clear contextual clue with which the hearer can indirectly get the message. The officer, as a superior, should have shown his concern and understanding for the policeman and taken the initiative to grant him a leave of absence. However, in the English culture, "Your mother's illness is your personal and private business, what you should make clear to your superior is what you want from him". What the Chinese policeman said cannot give the British officer any clue for asking for leave, because the latter is not accustomed to the culture where a lot of meaning comes from the context instead of explicit verbal message.

Activity 10

Now you will find another kind of difference. Study the paragraph and discuss the questions below.

If you are one of the residents of the global village who actually get on airplanes and fly from country to country, you will notice an interesting phenomenon at the arrival gates of international airports. Usually there is a group of family members or a host waiting to meet the Chinese, Japanese, and other Asians who are getting off the airplane. Often there is no one waiting to meet the Westerners who are arriving. They just collect their luggage and then take a taxi or a bus to their destination.

Questions:

1. How do you account for this difference?
2. If you were to arrive at New York for the first time, would you like to have some friends or relatives meet you at the airport? Why or why not?

Discussion

We tend to believe that you would prefer to have some people to meet you at the airport the first time you arrived at certain place in a foreign country. We are Chinese. Our social norms tell us that no one arriving at an unfamiliar place should be left to find their way on their own, if that could be avoided. That is why whenever foreign teachers come to our campuses, they are always met at the airport. Moreover, a Chinese, usually a person who speaks their language, is often assigned to be their contact who is supposed to help them with any difficulties they might encounter in the new culture. Westerners, however, are more likely to get enough explicit information in the form of a guidebook, a brochure, a manual, etc. before they arrive. Then they tend to assume that certain predictable services will be available and that they can find these and use them without any assistance.

● **Context**

From the previous two activities, we see that meanings do not come from the verbal language alone. They are also implied from the context in which communication takes place. For example, the real intention of the Chinese policeman is not expressed through words, but is to be inferred from the relationship of the communicators. And being present at the airport to meet guests is also meaningful. In other words, setting and environment help determine the words and actions we generate and the meanings we give to the words and actions of other people. Therefore, the meanings that people exchange in ways other than language are usually referred to as context. According to Hall, context is the information that surrounds an event, and bound up with the meaning of the event.

● **High-context and Low-context**

Anthropologist Edward Hall categorizes cultures as being either high or low context, depending on the degree to which meaning comes from the settings or from the words being exchanged. This helps us to see more clearly the relationship between culture and communication, and provides an effective means of examining cultural similarities and differences in communication.

A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part

of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite, i.e., the mass of information is vested in the explicit code.

Any transaction can be characterized as high, low or middle context. HC transactions feature programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. LC transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context.

High-context cultures

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Japanese
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Chinese
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Korean
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African American
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Native American
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Arab
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Greek
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Latin
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Italian
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English
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French
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American
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Scandinavian
|
German
|
German-Swiss
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Low-context cultures

According to Hall, Native Americans, Latin Americans, Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans belong to high-context cultures, where people are very homogeneous and so they tend to share more common experiences. In these kinds of cultures, information is provided through gestures, the use of space, and even silence. Meaning is also conveyed

through status (age, sex, education, family background, title, and affiliation) and through an individual's informal friends and associates. At the other end of the spectrum lie the low-context cultures such as German, Swiss, and American. The population there is less homogenous. It leads to the lack of a large pool of common experiences, and so each time they communicate they need detailed background information. This largely explains why in low-context cultures, people input meanings in explicit verbal codes. A study shows that the American adults in Hawaii talk on average 6 hours and 43 minutes every day, while Japanese adults talk only 3 hours 31 minutes a day on average. The scale on the left indicates how much people in diverse cultures depend on context in communication.

This continuous scale tells us that no culture exists at either end and the difference lies only in degree. What we have to remember is that this categorization, based on national cultures, is general and in each culture there are both high-context and low-context situations. For example, communication between close friends and family members that is high-context situation exists in any culture. Moreover, banquets, the typical example of high-context situation, and contracts, the typical low-context documents, are not restricted in a certain culture. American culture, for example, is generally low-context, but there are also many high-context communication transactions. A case in point is the mother-son talk when each knows the other too well to use many words. Again, cultures vary only in degree in this regard.

● **Characteristics of High/Low-Context Communication**

Each style manifests its own characteristics. First, as we have noticed before, high-context communication tends to be more personal while low-context communication seems more impersonal. In general, people in high-context cultures prefer to get information from other people—neighbors, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, while those in low-context cultures tend to look for, trust and use impersonal sources such as newspapers, textbooks, guidebooks, lectures, roadmaps, announcements and instruction sheets.

Second, high-context communication is often economical, fast, and efficient, because participants share many common experiences and so they do not have to rely on speaking out as much as low-context culture communicators do. However, this way of communicating takes a long time to learn. When we turn to low-context communication, we find that it is an effective way of transmitting information among people who do not share the same experiences.

Now we know why the British officer did not recognize the implied meaning. The problem is that he comes from a low-context culture. Low-context communicators tend to pay little attention to messages sent non-verbally. They think communication is the exchange of verbal messages that are meaningful apart from the context in which they are said. They are aware of some non-verbal behavior such as facial expressions and tone of voice, but to them these behaviors only emphasize and modify what people say rather than how they are behaving and why. They pay little attention to the situation, the roles of participants and other factors that make up the context of the words. This means that they often fail to note things such as the status of the people they are communicating with, what the other person is not saying, and any social expectations

that are not expressed in words. Usually high-context communicators have no difficulty understanding the meaning of these contextual messages. Because of these differences, problems or misunderstandings may arise when people from high and low-context backgrounds are communicating.

高情景文化	低情景文化
多表达含蓄的信息， 使用比喻， 有很多言外之音	信息表达比较简单、直接
很多非语言交际	语言交际多余身体语言
价值观倾向于团队意识	价值观倾向于个人主义
倾向于花时间培养和建立长期的个人关系	倾向于发展短期的个人关系
强调螺旋式逻辑	强调线性逻辑
重视非言语的互动， 更容易读懂非言语表达方式	重视直接的言语互动， 很难读非言语的表达方式
倾向于在表达中加入更多“情感”	倾向于在表达中加入更多“逻辑”
倾向于传递简单、含蓄、模棱两可的信息	倾向于传达有组织的信息， 基于足够的细节、强调重点词语和技术标识。

Revision Tasks

1. What is communication? What are the characteristics of communication? Can you give some examples of these characteristics?
2. What role does it play in your life? Do you know your communication style? Can you design a communication model of your own?
3. How much do you know about high-context and low-context communication? can you give some examples of the differences between high-context and low-context communication ?
4. What is culture? What is its nature? Is culture important to you? why or why not?
5. Is culture unique to humankind?
6. Do you agree that culture is man's second nature?
7. Do you think there are differences between cultures? If yes, please give examples.
8. What do you think is the relationship between culture and communication?
9. Have you ever experienced cultural puzzles and/or conflicts?
10. How do you look at sub-cultures? How do sub-cultures affect communication?

II. Complete the tasks below.

1. Read the story told by Litz, a Finnish, who married a Taiwan Chinese doctor. Misunderstanding between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is obvious in the story. Try to explain why. You may use the framework we have learned in this chapter.

My husband and I had long wished to bring his mother to stay with us for a while. Last summer, after we re-decorated our house, we invited her over. You can well imagine how happy my husband was! And I was just as happy. I know being filial to parents is a great value Chinese people cherish. As a wife of a

Chinese man I try to be as filial as my husband.

Two days after my mother-in-law's arrival, I talked to my husband while his mother was sitting in the garden enjoying the sunshine.

Litz: Dick, how long is your mum going to stay?

Dick: I don't know. I haven't asked her.

Litz: Why not ask her?

Dick: What do you mean by asking her?

Litz: I mean what I said. Just ask her how long she's going to stay.

My mother-in-law overheard our conversation, and decided to leave for Taiwan the very afternoon. I had never expected that her visit should be so short. I tried very hard to persuade her to change her mind, but in vain.

2. In the following story, David's strategy worked well in Australia and New Zealand, but failed in Taiwan. Read it and try to diagnose what was wrong with David's strategy in Taiwan by using the high / low context frame.

Glorious Paints, a Singapore manufacturer, is a fast-growing company headed by three young Western-educated directors.

In early 1990s, the firm decided to sell a large quality of paint to Australia and New Zealand. Director Tan achieved this success by 1) sending information to potential candidate firms, 2) negotiating a distribution agreement with the company he decided was best qualified to handle that market area. This process took about 4 months and sales volume is already exceeding expectations.

Then the company decided to do business in Taiwan, China which was a very promising market with high demand and little local competition. So David was instructed to set up distribution there using the same approach that succeeded in Australia and New Zealand.

After necessary research, David sent off brochures and product information to the prospective candidate firms, enclosing a cover letter requesting an appointment to discuss possible representation. He expected perhaps 5~6 of them to reply.

Six weeks went by without a single response. Then David sent off the second mailing, this time in Chinese. Still no answer.

Mr. Tan was upset. He expected David to come up with a solution. David was at a loss. "What have I done wrong?"

3. Read the following story about Walmart's failure in Germany, and then think about what it tells us about doing business in foreign countries.



Walmart (a famous US supermarket) that entered Germany in 1997 and took over 95 stores quit the country in July 2006. What was wrong with Walmart's operation in Germany? The main factor by many analysts is the cultural philosophy. Walmart tried to relocate the American model: service with a smile from the bag-packer at the end of the band, employees chanting W-A-L-M-A-R-T to raise morale and an ethics code which included banning sexual relations between employees. The latter was overturned about a year ago by the German courts, which supported the German custom by which man and wife can often be found across the hall from each other in the same firm after romance blossomed in the workplace. And clerks ordered by supervisors to smile at customers are reported as invitations to unwanted social interaction. It is because in Germany smiles are exchanged between friends, but not between strangers. And raising morale? Well, in Germany that is the job of the

workers' council, a group of employees quite akin to a union, which ensures employee concerns are represented during management meetings on the one hand, and organizes employee activities such as the company soccer competition or discounted access to mind and body classes on the other.

4. Study the unhappy experience of an Australian student who learned Chinese in a University in Beijing and try to explain why she felt unhappy. She taught some non-English majors of the second year. She found that the Chinese students were not good at speaking in discussion. Every time she asked questions in Chinese, the students laughed. Then she picked up a basketball at hand, and said that anyone who got the ball had to answer, which is often used in Australian high schools. She explained the rules and then threw it to a male student. The whole class burst into laughter. She was so confused that she shouted: "Nothing funny. Answer!" Again another fit of laughter.
5. Read the story about Mr. Geddy Teok who was in trouble and give him advice on how to deal with the problem.

Geddy Teok, an American-Chinese (second generation) employee of a large New Jersey pharmaceutical firm, was based in Tokyo, Japan. His main aim was to get a major joint venture going with one of the largest Japanese pharmaceutical manufacturers. After four years of negotiating, the supreme moment had come for signing contracts. Obviously the lawyers from HQ in New Jersey were well prepared and sent the contract to Geddy one week before the "ceremony".

Geddy was shocked when he received the document from the USA. "I could not even count the number of pages. I would guess the Japanese would leave the room when they saw the thick pile."

Geddy called HQ. The legal department said that the relationship was so complex that the contract needed to cover many possible instances. Moreover, a consultancy firm that advised them regularly said that Asians in general and Japanese in particular had a reputation of being quite loose in defining what was developed by them and what came from the USA: "We'd better have some pain now and be clear in the terms of our relationship, than to run into problems later because of miscommunication. If they sign it at least they show they are serious."

The meeting was tomorrow. Geddy was in despair. His dilemma was: "Whatever I would do, it would hurt my career, If I insist on the Japanese signing it they will see it as proof of how little trust that has been developed over the years of negotiation. This might mean a postponement of the discussions and in the worst case the end of the deal. If I reduce the contract to a couple of pages and present it as a 'letter of intent', HQ in general and even worse the whole legal department will jump on me, jeopardizing my career."

If you were Geddy, what would you do?

Chapter Two Intercultural Communication