

## LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND HOW TO REMOVE THEM IN CROSS - CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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**Introduction.** Culture and language are intertwined and are shaping each other. It is impossible to separate the two ones. Language is not neutral codes and grammatical rules. Each time a person selects words, forms, sentences, and sends a message, either oral or written, he or she also makes cultural choices. It goes without saying that language helps in communicating with people from different backgrounds. However, someone may be less aware that cultural literacy is necessary in order to understand the language being used. If the people select language without being aware of the cultural implications, they may at best not communicate well and at worst send the wrong messages.

**Objectives.** Understanding the culture and learning to communicate comfortably with the people of that culture are as important as learning the rules of a language. Language learning and culture learning go hand in hand and may take a long time. In this context the problem of cross - cultural communication comes to the fore in up-to-date scientific investigations, whose positive results may be applied both to theoretical study of culturally-determined cognitive and communicative language peculiarities and practical foreign language teaching.

Contemporary linguistic studies have focused on the six important factors making the language barriers (real and perceived) in cross - cultural communication. The key factors include the following: the environment reflection, the reflection of cultural values, the meaning of words, changes in language, acronyms, language implications [1, p. 31-37]. The purpose of the article is to clarify the language barrier phenomenon and, consequently, determine what ways may remove language barriers and improve relationships across intercultural ties.

**Findings and discussion.** Language reflects the environment in which people live and label things that are around them, because the language of a society can direct the attention of its members to certain features of the world rather than to others. The classic example of this phenomenon is that, in the Amazon area snow is not part of the environment; therefore, people in the region do not have a word for snow because it simply does not exist. On the contrary, in areas where it snows occasionally, people have a word for snow, but it may just be one word without any differentiations. Most Americans, for example, use terms such as *snow, powder snow, sleet, slush, blizzard, ice*. That's the extent of most people's snow vocabulary. People who live in an environment where it snows during most months of the year may have a much more differentiated terminology for snow [3, p. 107]. Not surprisingly, the environment influences the appropriate vocabulary.

In addition to the environment, language also reflects cultural values. Values are abstract ideas about what society believes to be good, right, and desirable; they form the cultural basement of a society. They provide the context within which a society's norms are established and justified. E. Hall, for example, points out that the Navajos do not have a word for *late* [2, p. 47]. Time, he tells, does not play a role in Navajo life. There is a time to do everything, a natural time rather than the artificial clock time that industrial countries use. As a result, the Navajos do not have the differentiated vocabulary connected with time and clocks that Americans have. Time and the passing of time are things one can't control; therefore, one should not worry about wasting time and setting schedules.

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

Values include a society's attitudes toward cultural concepts. The Chinese, for example, do not have a word for *communication*, as in the term *business communication*. They use *letter exchange* or *transportation traffic* but not *communication*. The Chinese also do not have a concept of privacy; as a result, there is no corresponding word in the Chinese language. Typically *privacy* is translated *reclusiveness*, which brings up very different connotations in English than the word *privacy*. The word *privacy* has a positive connotation for people in the United States. They think of the privacy of their homes, the right to privacy, the right to private property. The word *reclusiveness* on the other hand, indicates that a person withdraws from society, is a loner, or does not fit in. In the U.S. context, a reclusive person is considered somewhat strange. In China a reclusive person is much more negatively viewed.

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

The word *manager* is used worldwide, but it has different levels of importance and meaning in different cultures. The same is true for the title *director*. Many Japanese, for example, have the title *director* on their business cards. In the American context, a director is a person of some importance and power. In Japan, the title may not carry the same level of authority. It may take some time to determine what titles mean and where the person stands in the hierarchy. The term *director* could be a loan word from English

to translate the position for use on a business card; the word is the same, but the meaning may be slightly different. The term could also reflect cross-cultural differences in organizational structure. The word *director* may be the closest translation of a job title that does not exist in the U.S. corporate structure. Likewise, the words *office worker* or *staff* are often used for the general administrative workers in a Japanese work group, which tends to have less defined job categories than their U.S. equivalents. An understanding of the specific title would require a more detailed explanation of the job and its fit in the organizational structure.

In the United States documents are often notarized. This is not a complex process. One simply goes to a notary public and gets the stamp and signature. Sometimes one pays a fee; sometimes the service is free. The German term, *notarielle Beglaubigung*, often translated as *notarized*, means something quite different. In this case one would go to a *Notar*, a lawyer. The *Notar* would prepare the document or, at a minimum, sign the document. This service is much more expensive. The meaning of the United States concept *notarized* is better reflected in the German term *Beglaubigung*, something any official person can do. The confusing part is the word *notarized* in the American expression. A notary public is not a *Notar*. The same confusion arises in Mexico where a *Notario* is a lawyer with special privileges to perform certain functions that require special qualifications.

Both the French and the Americans use the word *force majeure*, but the phrase carries very different meanings. Literally the term means superior or irresistible force. In U.S. legal language, the term refers generally to forces of nature or possibly war. The implications are that the terms of a contract may be changed because the risk was not allocated in either the expressed or implied terms of the contract.

In European law the term has a broader meaning. It also includes changes in economic conditions or other circumstances that were not reasonably anticipated when the contract was drawn up. The implication is that when Americans make agreements with Europeans that include discussions of unforeseen circumstances and use the term *force majeure*, they need to clarify what they mean and spell out what that term covers.

Words and phrases that are commonly being used at one time may be discontinued or their meaning may change over time. For example, the word *gay* means happy, light-hearted. In recent decades, however, the word has taken on the meaning *homosexual*. As a result, English speakers in countries like New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States don't use the word in its original meaning any more, and young speakers of English may not even be familiar with its traditional meaning. In other cases, the words may take on additional meanings, and one must understand the context in order to understand the meaning. An example is the word *hardware*, which used to refer to tools and materials used in repairing and building houses. Today the word also refers to computers and components that can be added to a computer, such as a printer or an extra drive.

Foreigners and U.S. citizens who have lived outside the United States for some time may not be familiar with subtle changes in language usage. Twenty years ago words such as *businessman*, *chairman*, *salesman*, *airline stewardess*, and *fireman* were regularly

used. Today, with more women in the workforce and with growing awareness of the way gender and power can be linked to communicate value, the use of gender-neutral terms, such as *businesspeople*, *chairperson* or *chair*, *sales clerk*, *flight attendant*, and *firefighter* is common. The old terminology is seen as too restrictive.

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

The example of Canadian French illustrates that a language, if spoken in different parts of the globe, will ultimately develop differently. The *Academie Franqaise* may insist on certain rules, but other French-speaking groups may make their own rules and consider their French just as correct. The same is true for the development of English. What is standard and correct English? Former British colonies such as India and Nigeria increasingly insist that their English is just as correct as Oxford English. The result is the emergence of different «Englishes» used in different parts of the world. Attention recently has focused on «Singlish» - the English of Singapore that incorporates Malay and the Elokien dialect of Chinese as well as English words, and follows a syntax like other pidgin Englishes.

Here are three examples of Singlish [4, p. 209]:

- *Eh, this road so narrow, how you going to tombalik your big fat Mare-see-deese? You going to do 100-point turn or what? Sekali tombalik into the langkau your father kill you then you know!*

(Oh, this road is so narrow, how are you going to turn around your big fat Mercedes? Are you going to do a 100-point turn, or what? Wait until you turn it into the roadside ditch. Your father will be furious!)

- *Eh, Katong sopping sehnta got the "Sah-Leh" you know. Some up to hap- pride ah! (Hey, the Katong Shopping Center has a sale, some [items] are up to half-price off!)*
- *Aiyah, you want to chit in your exam tomolloh, har? You tinkyou can life the ansir on the table? Cher catch you, Ippl (lam pa pak Ian) man! (Oh no, you want to cheat on your exam tomorrow? You think you can write the answer on the desk? Teacher will catch you, and it [your plan] will backfire!)*

Many countries adopt English terms specifically in business and related areas. Some words are simply taken over without changes. For example, the Germans frequently use the word *shop* instead of *Geschäft* or *Laden*, *ticket* instead of *Fahrkarte*; *standard* instead of *Norm*. They use the words *computer* and *software*, but they do not use the word *calculator*, retaining the German word *Taschenrechner*. The difficulty is that the outsider cannot be sure whether they will use German or American terminology. An increasing

number of Germans are concerned about the use of English in everyday speech and advocate the use of German whenever possible. The newly formed Verein Deutsch Sprache, for example, has requested replacing English computer terminology with German terms, and there are some changes. For example, a few years ago Germans would use ((download material)) and ((shut down the computer)). Today they say ((runterladen)) and ((runterfahren)).

In some cases people use foreign words, but adapt them to their own language both in grammatical usage and pronunciation. For example, the Japanese have changed the word *salaryman* to *sarariman*, *homerun* to *homurunu*, *headhunter* to *heddo hantaa*, and the German word *Arbeit* to *arubaito*, meaning a part-time job. After some time, the words are considered native ones because they have been integrated into the Japanese language and culture. In German, for example, the word *stress* has been integrated. Thirty years ago nobody used the word. Today everyone uses it. The pronunciation is German and when used as a verb it is given German grammatical form. A German says, ((Ich bin gestreBt)), I am stressed. The word has become part of the language.

Acronyms pose special problems because they are based on a particular language. The same institution may carry a different acronym in different languages. For example, MITI, the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Investment, is referred to as MITI by the Germans but then spelled out as *Ministerium fur Industrie und Aufienhandel*. The UN stands for United Nations, but the Germans transcribe UN as *Vereinte Nationen*. The former East Germany was called Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR. The English translated the term but also changed the acronym to German Democratic Republic, GDR. Germans would not have immediately recognized that GDR and DDR stood for the same thing.

**Conclusion and research perspectives.** As the previous examples show, communication across cultures and languages is difficult and full of hurdles and pitfalls. Even if two people from different cultures speak a common language, they may misinterpret the cultural signals. The result is confusion and misunderstanding. Many people have difficulty identifying the root of the problem. For example, American students often complain that they can't understand their foreign professors. In some cases the professors may actually have a poor command of the English language; however, in most cases the problem is not the language itself but different intonation patterns and different cultural signals. English-speaking students listen to their instructors with certain expectations. For example, if the instructor's voice drops to a low pitch, the students take that as a signal of a rhetorical topic boundary - «I'm finished with this idea», - whereas the instructor may actually do not mean such thing. Students adjust their interpretation of the lecture according to those intonation signals, thereby misinterpreting the instructor's intent. A professor who comes from a culture where the professor is almighty and never challenged, Korea or India, for example, may send signals to that effect to his students. If the students are not aware of the cultural issues, they will in all likelihood identify the problem as a language problem rather than a cultural one. In this context the phrase, *I don't understand you*, can mean any of the following:

- a) Don't understand the words you use.

b) My interpretation of what you say raises a flag and makes me wonder if this is actually what you want to say.

c) In my perception, your words and nonverbal behaviour do not complement each other, and I am puzzled.

In two – way communication, what one person says or does influences what the other person says or does. The United States of America is a verbal culture. In contrast to people from other cultures, Americans see communication as a verbal activity more than a nonverbal one. For most Americans, interacting with someone means speaking with that person. For instance, Americans believe that participation in a classroom or in a business meeting means speaking. If someone does not speak, then he or she is not participating. Spoken interaction, in its turn, means a lot. Many Americans believe that talking together is the best way to get rid of misunderstanding or conflict. This belief can be seen in everyday expressions like:

“Let’s talk things out.”

“It’s best to get it out in the open”.

“Get it off your chest”.

While not all Americans are comfortable with this, the general cultural belief is to “talk things out”. Most Americans expect immediate feedback. They want to be reassured that the person is listening and has understood. For example, if a supervisor gives instructions to an employee, he or she wants to know, at that moment, “Do you understand? Do you have any questions?” Silence makes Americans uncomfortable. Silence in an interaction often causes misunderstanding and misinterpretation. For instance, one American businessman complained about a meeting with a group of businessmen from another country: “They didn’t say anything. I don’t know if they understood me or not!” It takes both experience and careful observation in order to become aware of what people see as “normal” or “natural” behaviour.

There are no “right” or “wrong” ways of interacting. Rather, they show cultural differences. Sometimes similarities and differences across cultures are obvious; sometimes they are not. When there are cultural differences, people often need to learn new ways of interacting in order to reach two – way communication. Acceptance of culturally different ways of interacting can take a long time, but then a person will enjoy every minute of talking to people and acquainting himself or herself with their culture.

All the presented issues stress that communication differences knowledge is an important strategy for removing language barriers which sometimes lead, in turn, to conflicts. The communication success depends on cultural competence, or literacy of communicants, i.e. the balance of common and different in their perception and symbol systems. This balance is not given, it should be acquired through learning and experiencing. Many training courses and programmes are intended to do this on the basis of intercultural sensitivity. They are built on fundamental investigations on intercultural contents; the leading position is occupied by linguistic analysis. Different approaches to language as the subject revealed in communicative styles, discourse studies, cross-cultural pragmatics testify the dominating role of linguistics on the whole and

ethnolinguistics in particular in finding ways for improving relationships across intercultural lines.

When miscommunication happens, try to understand why. It can be an opportunity for culture learning. Careful observation can give you valuable cultural clues. Culture learning is gaining knowledge and skills. It is adapting to a different style of life and people in a way that is possible for you to do. Culture learning, like language learning, is adding to what you already have. Promising in this respect are the studies which focus on various forms and means of cross – cultural communication as well as on all possible ways of miscommunication across cultures.

### References

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### Резюме

Стаття присвячена актуальній проблемі сучасної лінгвістики – взаємозв'язку мови та культури, їхнього взаємовпливу й взаємозалежності. Значну увагу приділено аналізу факторів, що призводять до встановлення мовних бар'єрів, а також шляхів їхнього подолання. У статті наголошується на необхідності врахування як мовних, так і культурологічних чинників у процесі міжмовної та міжкультурної комунікації.

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## БЛОГ-ТЕРМІНИ ЯК СКЛАДОВА АНГЛОМОВНОЇ БЛОГОСФЕРИ

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**Постановка проблеми.** Вивчення різних аспектів мовленнєвої комунікації завжди вважалося однією з найбільш перспективних та актуальних сфер лінгвістичних досліджень. Поява і широка популяризація Інтернету, який є не тільки глобальною системою взаємопов'язаних комп'ютерних мереж, але і новим комунікативним простором, кардинально змінили наші погляди на природу та процес комунікації. Більше того, зазнав змін і сам характер обміну інформацією.