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To What Extent Does Language Encourage Cross Cultural Problems in Intercultural Communication?

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Intercultural communication plays pivotal role in cross-cultural social context. Some scholars argue that the lack of language proficiency and competency may contribute to negative phenomena in the communication setting. However, this research paper argues that the failure to embrace cultural and psychological factors also pose serious cross-cultural problems. The study employed library research to gain evidences for this research. The result shows that insufficient cultural knowledge leads to injured feelings and judgment of impoliteness in cross-cultural setting. In addition, negative ethnocentrism and stereotype are the psychological factors that also triggered the problems. As the solution towards the barriers, this paper also suggests several strategies to establish successful intercultural communication when conducting verbal and non-verbal communication.

Introduction

Language plays an important role in intercultural communication. Intercultural communication refers to the interaction of people from different cultural background societies (Liu, & Gallois, 2011). As they are different, verbal and nonverbal languages assist them to communicate belief, thought, feelings, habits, values and identity. These two types of communication are inevitably different among various cultures and may create positive and negative phenomena in intercultural communication. The positive phenomena may cover mutual understanding, increasing cultural knowledge and encouraging intercultural activities, such as business (Liu & Gallois, 2011). Regardless of the positive sides, negative phenomena, such as misunderstanding, ambiguity, miscommunication, ethnocentrism, prejudice and stereotype are serious cultural problems. To a large extent, the reason of the problems is language because the failure of cultural understanding lies in the lack of language proficiency of other cultures (Dodd, 1998). To some extent, though language is not the only triggering cross cultural factor but also culture and psychological factor (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel 2007). It is argued that even when nonnative speakers have sufficient language competence, lack of cultural knowledge and negative emotions also contribute to cross cultural problems. This research paper explores how language, culture and psychological factors encourage cross cultural problems in intercultural communication through verbal and nonverbal communication. By looking at poor language skills, this paper explains some barriers of intercultural communication. Throughout this writing, cultural issues, such as injured feelings and judgment of impoliteness are going to be elaborated to help readers understand that this factor can also contributes to cross cultural problems. Following the cultural issues, psychological factors, including ethnocentrism and stereotype are explained to clarify that language is not the only triggering factor of cross-cultural problems. Besides that, the impacts of ethnocentrism and stereotype are figured out to prove that both factors really boost cross cultural problems. The concluding paragraph then emphasizes how language does not really encourage cross cultural problems. In addition, it attempts to offer some strategies for success intercultural communication as the solution.

Discussion

A fact of intercultural misunderstanding is found in poor language proficiency. It is due to the fact that no culture has similar elements of verbal language such as vocabulary, syntax, phonology, semantics and morphology. When those different elements have contact with other cultures, incompetent speakers of other culture tend to misinterpret and misunderstand. For example, Nonnative Australian can confuse and misunderstand when they hear many Australian are glad in saying Mothers' Die. In fact, Australian does not mean to be glad in Mothers' Die but they mean to say Mothers' Day. Due to their pronunciation of day in Australia is similar to die in British and American English, people therefore often misunderstand (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel 2007). This example shows that lack of language competence really affects meaning interpretation in particular culture. However, even though the member of out-group has good language competence, an individual can still confuse what is being talked by the Australian if the person does not have any cultural knowledge about Mother's Day.

The other matter evolving from verbal linguistic diversity is ambiguity. Inexperienced nonnative speakers can confuse and misinterpret when they encounter various meaning of utterance because of their inadequate semantic comprehension. To illustrate, 'It appears that red tape is holding up the new bridge' (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007) could be misunderstood by non-native English speakers. The speakers may find peculiar meaning when meeting "red tape" and likely to translate it as red strip used for tying garments. Yet, the meaning is bureaucracy since red tape is the nonacademic word. To put this another way, language really determines the success of intercultural communication because missing one aspect of language poses meaning deviation. However, Samovar *et al* (2011) explains that language cannot be blamed because ambiguity can still emerge even a speaker has competent language skills. The reason for this is many culturally based expressions cannot be interpreted denotatively, unless the speakers have enough cultural knowledge. For example, Japanese tea ritual, called ChadŌ, may be understood the way of tea by other cultures. In fact, it is insufficient because it has cultural meaning and procedures in doing it. Therefore, Mohanty (1999) argues that an effective communicator should not only learn language but also culture (Chaudhary, 2003).

In addition to verbal communication, there is a belief that distinctive nonverbal behaviors boost miscommunication in intercultural communication. Thomas (Maude, 2011) argues that each culture has its own way of communicating its affective domain. Lustig and Koester (Liu, Volcic, Gallois, 2011) support Thomas's view by stating three distinctive categories, which vary each culture in nonverbal language, namely behavior, rules of context, and meaning. An interesting example has been used by Stewart and Bennett about the use of hands by American and Mexican to illustrate height for two different objects. When American opened his palm down to ground to explain his children height, a Mexican was confused because the way of his explanation can only be used for animal in Mexican language (Liu, Volcic, Gallois, 2011). The example shows that how language variation can create miscommunication since both cultures have different semantic function towards same nonverbal language.

However, there is evidence to suggest that lack of cultural knowledge encourage cross cultural problems, such as injured feelings and judgment of impoliteness. It is due to the facts that there are two categories of cultures, firstly, high and low context cultures. High context cultures refer to countries which speaking habits is more implicit, while low context cultures always prefer explicit utterance (Maude 2011). Such these types of cultural knowledge should be learnt by non-native speakers of any target culture, otherwise assumption about low context culture is rude or high context culture is too sensitive may arise. For instance, most American will directly say yes or no if they mean it. By contrast, East Asian cultures views saying something frankly may injure others' feeling (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). This case shows inexperienced East Asian speakers possibly evaluate that American is rude because of using its cultural context.

Secondly, judgment of impoliteness mostly occurs in tight and loose culture. Triandis explains tight culture as disagreement of incorrect behavior based on cultural rules (Maude, 2011). On the other hand, Maude (2011) sees loose culture as independent mind, action and language. To illustrate, sitting with foot's sole pointing towards other is considered impolite and offensive in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Singapore or Thailand (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel 2007). The sole is understood as the lowest part of body in these cultures. On the other hand, American, which holds loose culture, sees this sitting style as casual and friendly one. It is inevitable that people of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Singapore and Thailand assume American is impolite because they have no idea about this culture.

The second factor that affects cultural problems is the negative emotion. Matsumoto et al. (2005) argues that even though one's cultural knowledge and language ability are good, cross cultural problems can emerge if the individual cannot control the negative emotion. The most common negative emotions evolving in intercultural communication are negative stereotype and ethnocentrism. The reason of stereotype is emotional necessity always occur in individual to sort and group other (Samovar,

Porter, & McDaniel 2007). Negative stereotype, moreover, likely takes place if a party gives room to negatively group others. For example, English, American, Australian and Germany may avoid having conversation with Brazillian. It is due to the fact that Brazillian always makes close space and distance when they are communicating because it is considered as warm conversation. Conversely, when England, Germany, United States and Australia society chat with them, they may find it strange and likely to angry because they assume that their space and distance are destroyed. As a consequence, stereotype grows and brings impacts toward the object of stereotyping.

The impacts may be firstly, the object of stereotype possibly will depart from intercultural communication. It is due to the reason that they are afraid of making any verbal and nonverbal miscommunication. Secondly, the object of stereotype might depress. The reason for this is they are struggling for communicating based on what is good in others' cultures. Feeling of worry and afraid of being embarrassed is preoccupied in object's mind. As a result, restricted and artificial communication style dominates intercultural conversation (Maude, 2011).

The other cross culture problems encouraged by psychological factor is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism as has been pointed out by Nanda and Warms (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007) is judging one's own culture is better than other cultures using narrow standard of one particular culture. Matsumoto et al (2005) argue that the psychological reason of ethnocentrism is the inability of in-group member to regulate negative emotions. Krueger and Funder (2004) support Matsumoto by providing types of negative emotions, including bias of self-enhancement, conformity, uncompromising norm and zero-tolerance. Brown (Krueger & Funder, 2004) explains bias of self-enhancement as the assumption that people are worse than one's self or group. Asch, in addition, explains conformity as rejection to accept other's difference (Krueger & Funder, 2004). Ross argues that uncompromising norm refers to out-group should behave based on in-group cultural norms (Krueger & Funder, 2004). Zero-tolerance, moreover, deals with unfairness judgment of out-group based on insufficient rationalization (Krueger & Funder, 2004).

When these types of negative emotion evoke in one's personality, the emotion will hinder critical thinking, helping to adjust with out-group. As a result, ethnocentric people tend disregard other cultures. They may show criticism, sarcastic, and disapproval behaviors. This issue, for instance, happens to the judgment of beauty in several cultures. The concept of Japanese beauty is based on the small body appearance, American, conversely, seeing it as poor body figure (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel 2007). Richmond and Gestrin, moreover, notice African's fat body as symbol of prosperity while slender appearance indicates miserable life (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). In other words, the way each culture sees concept of beauty may encourage bias self-enhancement leading to ethnocentrism. This issue might not happen if others cultures not try to make quick assumption and be open minded towards the difference.

Conclusion

This paper aims at explaining the pivotal aspects of culture and psychology affecting cross culture issues when conducting verbal and nonverbal communication. In reflecting the problems of cross culture in intercultural communication, language cannot be judged as the main factor which encourages cross cultural issues. It is due to the evidences that though an individual has good or bad language proficiency, cross cultural problems can still emerge. Cultural knowledge contributes more to meaning interpretation and prevents miscommunication. Yet, the absence of this knowledge may pose out group and in group to have injured feelings and judgment of impoliteness in intercultural communication. Psychological factors, in addition, might raise ethnocentrism and stereotype. The existence of these factors could inhibit logical thinking, which favor to open and flexible intercultural communication. Therefore, cross cultural problems in intercultural communication are not only encouraged by language but also culture and psychology. Though, those barriers are inevitable, several strategies can be applied to prevent the problems. This research paper has left several gaps that need to be investigated in future. For example, miscommunication issues of intercultural marriage couple: a case study of mixed marriage between East Nusa Tenggara province of Indonesia and Australia. The other area that can be explored is negative stereotypes about western people: a perspective of Kupang people – Indonesia. Finally, another interesting issue to study is western nonverbal gestures in the eye of Timorese culture.

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