

The Criterion

December 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

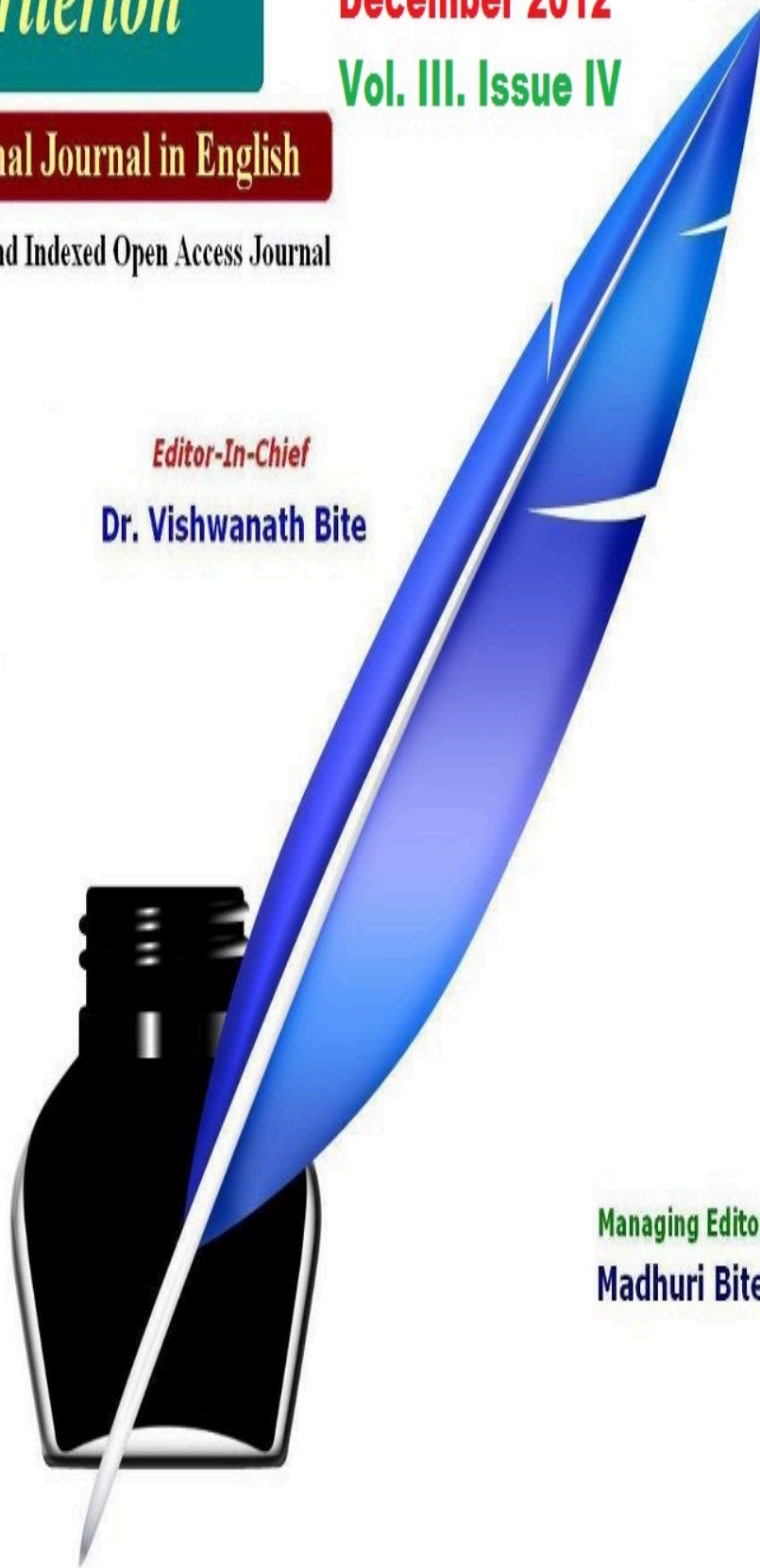
Vol. III. Issue IV

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

Editor-In-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite



Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

A Study of Cultural Context and its Impact on Intercultural communication

Dr. Neena Sharma

Asst. Professor of English

Department of Applied Sciences & Humanities)

Raj Kumar Goel Institute of Technology

Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh) India

Introduction

Intercultural communication is a form of global communication. It is used to describe the wide range of communication problems that naturally appear within an organization made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Intercultural communication is sometimes used synonymously with cross-cultural communication. In this sense it seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. Many people in intercultural business communication argue that culture determines how individuals encode messages, what mediums they choose for transmitting them, and the way messages are interpreted. It studies situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Aside from language, intercultural communication focuses on social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people. It also involves understanding the different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries. Intercultural communication plays a role in social sciences such as anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, psychology and communication studies. Intercultural communication is also referred to as the base for international businesses. There are several cross-cultural service providers around who can assist with the development of intercultural communication skills. Research is a major part of the development of intercultural communication skills.

When we visit another country where a different language is spoken, it is obvious that it is necessary for someone to speak the other's language in order to surmount this barrier and verbally communicate. What is not so obvious, however, is that cultural barriers are greater than language barriers and they frequently provoke reactions that are both negative and emotional. What is considerate behavior in one country may be rude in another. What is a sensitive issue to one culture, to another may not be a point of any consequence. Therefore, we really need to learn to "speak" the culture.

Communication specialists estimate that some two-thirds to three-fourths of our communication takes place nonverbally through behavior. Behavior itself is learned from our culture and all behavior communicates. Since we cannot stop behaving in one way or another, we cannot stop communicating. Therefore, during all of the waking hours that we spend with other human beings we "speak" volumes through the behavior our culture drilled into us.

Basic Intercultural Communication Skills

There are basic intercultural communication skills and behaviors that one can use to reduce confusion and miscommunication when communicating with others from various backgrounds and cultures. The following tips will improve your intercultural communication interaction skills.

Make sure communication interactions take place in a quiet space or room away from large crowds, activities, and loud background noises. When communicating with people of a different culture, it is important to be able to concentrate on the communication interaction. Crowds, noises and activities take concentration away from the intercultural communication interaction and leads to increased misunderstandings, confusion, mistakes, and miscommunication.

Make sure the space or room where intercultural communication is taking place is comfortable for the person with the different background or culture. Different cultures prefer specific settings for communication with others. Lighting, temperature, refreshments, tables and seating are a few examples of how space setup effects successful intercultural communication interactions. Every culture has its own “ideal” communication space. Do research about other culture’s communication habits, styles and behaviors. Being aware of and understanding the differences in cultural communication styles will improve intercultural communication skills and reduce confusion, mistakes, and miscommunication.

Culture and language are intertwined and inseparable. Culture is the driving force behind a language and the reason for the language's existence, make up, and grammatical rules, but language is equally important to culture. Culture is expressed through language. It is the way people of a culture communicate (Gladstone, 1969). In Spanish, there are grammatical rules which express views of the culture. One of these rules expresses how they react to blame. When a person is constructing a sentence that would be roughly similar to the English sentence, I broke the glass, the sentence has to be reworded to say that the glass broke itself. This is because the Latin American culture makes it so that a person does not want to blame themselves for what happened.

Differences in culture can also be seen in the same language that has been spread to different regions. For Spanish, some words and pronouns are different depending on the region. Spain is the home of what is considered proper Spanish and differs from spoken Spanish in Latin America (Spanish Language, 2011). One of these differences comes from the the equivalent of the English word you. In Spanish, there are singular and plural pronouns. The formal pronouns for “you” are Usted (singular) and Ustedes (plural). The informal pronouns for the English word you are tú (singular) and vosotros (plural) or vos (plural abbreviation). In Spain, the formal pronouns are used around friends and family and the informal pronouns are just known, but rarely used except in small areas (Spanish Language, 2011). In Latin America, usted and ustedes are used in formal settings for teachers, older adults, and acquaintances, and tú, vosotros, and vos are used among friends and family. For Latin America, the use of the informal pronouns is not looked down on, but in Spain, the use of these same pronouns is considered a sign of ignorance (Spanish Language, 2011).

Barriers to Intercultural communication

Anxiety

The first barrier is high anxiety. When you are anxious because of not knowing what you are expected to do, it is only natural to focus on that feeling and not be totally present in the communication transaction. For example, you may have experienced anxiety on your very first day on a new college campus or in a new job. You may be so conscious of being new and out of place—and focus so much of your attention on that feeling that you make common mistakes and appear awkward to others.

Assuming similarity

The second barrier is assuming similarity instead of difference. In 1997, a Danish woman left her 14-month-old baby girl in a stroller outside a Manhattan restaurant while she was inside. Other diners at the restaurant became concerned and called New York City Police. The woman was charged with endangering a child and was jailed for two nights. Her child was placed in foster care. The woman and the Danish consulate explained that leaving children unattended outside cafés is common in Denmark. Pictures were wired to the police showing numerous strollers parked outside cafés while parents were eating inside. The Danish woman had assumed that Copenhagen is similar to New York, that what is commonly done in Copenhagen is also commonly done in New York.

Ethnocentrism

The third barrier to effective intercultural communication is ethnocentrism, or negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one’s own culture. To be ethnocentric is to believe in

the superiority of one's own culture. Everything in a culture is consistent to that culture and makes sense if you understood that culture. For example, assume that global warming is a fact and, as a result, assume that summers in the United States average 43° C (109° F). It would be logical to make adjustments: Rather than air condition buildings all day, you might close schools and businesses in the afternoons to conserve energy. Such adjustments would make sense. Why then do some people attribute sensible midday siestas in hot climates to laziness?

Extreme ethnocentrism leads to a rejection of the richness and knowledge of other cultures. It impedes communication and blocks the exchange of ideas and skills among peoples. Because it excludes other points of view, an ethnocentric orientation is restrictive and limiting.

Jargon and Slang

Each culture, even regional cultures within a larger culture, develops unique sets of jargon and slang. Though members of that culture may find these words commonplace and use them with abandon, newcomers to the culture may misunderstand the meanings behind them or fail to understand them altogether. In addition, some slang words appropriate for use in one culture may carry strong connotations in another, as explained in the publication "Diversity in the Workplace," so intercultural communicators should limit use of jargon and slang words or phrases.

Personal Space

Different cultures can take significantly different approaches to personal space, and a lack of cultural understanding can make some individuals uncomfortable and insult others. While Western culture prefers an arm's length of physical personal space while communicating, according to a 2006 article in the "Journal of Applied Social Psychology," people from some Latin and Middle Eastern cultures stand considerably closer together when speaking. To a Westerner, this personal space violation can lead to discomfort, and the communicator may view a resulting step away as a sign of distrust.

Stereotypes

Human nature, according to an intercultural communication article on the practical advice website Sideroad.com, can lead one to make assumptions about other people; some cultures use stereotypical images to reaffirm these assumptions. Though some stereotypes may stem from factual observations, many build on personal beliefs and fears that individuals may hold. To communicate effectively across cultural boundaries, communicators must put stereotypes and assumptions aside.

Eye Contact

In the United States, communicators tend to maintain direct eye contact with others during one-on-one communication, and make sporadic eye contact with an audience when communicating with large groups. Though direct eye contact may symbolize respect in Western cultures, according to the communications book "Intercultural Communication: A Reader," other cultures view it differently. Native American and some Eastern cultures, for example, consider direct eye contact disrespectful, and a failure to understand these cultural norms regarding eye contact can create significant intercultural communication obstacles.

Time

Different cultures maintain markedly different approaches to time, and communicators who don't understand a culture's time orientation may experience difficulty building relationships in that culture. Though Americans view time as a commodity, other cultures take a much more lax approach to the subject; some Latin cultures, for example, expect parties to be as much as 30 minutes late when conducting business. Communicators from a culture that views time as a

commodity must refrain from becoming upset when a party from another culture arrives late, as the late communicator may view such frustration as insensitive, demanding and offensive.

How to overcome the barriers

Meetings should be run to expose your employees to other cultures. Introducing employees who will be working together in a non-threatening environment enables a good working relationship long term. Learning about another culture's language, rules and norms for acceptable behavior helps prepare your employees to deal with situations as they arise. Changing preconceptions can lead to more conducive working relationships

Coach employees to mediate conflicts related to cultural misunderstandings. Provide opportunities for employees to respond to situations from viewpoints different than their own. Divide a group of people into pairs to conduct role-playing exercises that allow participants to acknowledge culture difference exist. Encourage each pair to think about a conflict they have experienced recently due to cultural differences. Have each participant describe what they might find offensive or unusual. Let each participant suggest how the problem would be handled in their own culture. Together, have the participants develop a resolution to the problem. Have each pair report to the larger group on their experiences.

One should use non verbal communication as use hands, arms, legs, gestures, facial expressions and everything else your charades experience has taught you. Even in our own language and culture we do not always use language to express fright, frustration, anger or joy. Emotions transcend linguistic barriers.

sometimes we share common words and we do not know it. Additionally people from different cultures will have a passive knowledge of English gained through the media. Try saying the word slowly or with a different pronunciation. if there are others around you do not be shy to ask for their assistance. It is often possible to find a willing translator.

One should listen attentively and carefully. There is a difference between "listening" and "hearing". Active listening means hearing with proper understanding of the message that is heard. By asking questions the speaker can ensure whether his/her message is understood or not by the receiver in the same terms as intended by the speaker.

We can conclude that intercultural communication plays an important role in providing proximity. There is an urgent need to develop intercultural communication skills. Since the professionals have been working closely with different cultures, it is very important to learn how to develop intercultural relationships.

Works Cited:

- Lauring, Jakob (2011). "Intercultural Organizational Communication: The Social Organizing of Interaction in International Encounters". *Journal of Business and Communication*
- Gudykunst, W. & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication*, 4th ed. New York: McGraw Hill
- *Journal of Applied Social Psychology: Intercultural Study of Personal Space: A Case Study*
- Ellingsworth, H.W. (1983). "Adaptive intercultural communication", in: Gudykunst, William B (ed.), *Intercultural communication theory*, 195-204, Beverly Hills: Sage
- Cohen R, *Negotiating Across Cultures: International Communication in an interdependent world*, United States Institute of peace, 2002.
- [www .utexas.edu/utpress](http://www.utexas.edu/utpress)