COMMUNICATIONS ACROSS CULTURES

A report on Cross-Cultural Research

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CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH AND THE TEACHER

Cross-cultural research concerns itself with an almost infinite variety of human differences and spans numerous academic fields including anthropology, psychology, sociology, linguistics, non-verbal communications, biology, and others. Only a fraction of the research which has been or is being carried out relates directly to the actual process of teaching and learning in classrooms. For example, at the 1975 Conference on Issues in Cross-Cultural Research, held in New York City, there were 42 scholarly presentations; three of these directly concerned education, and only one was the product of research carried out in an American school. Why, then, should American classroom teachers take an interest in the theories and findings of cross-cultural research?

There are two related reasons. First, doubt no longer exists that cultural differences among people influence every conceivable facet of daily life. The millions of Americans, students and teachers, who attend school every day do not leave their culturally-determined characteristics outside the schoolhouse door. Their every activity in and around the school—pedagogical, extra-curricular, and social—is deeply affected by their own cultural backgrounds. Even if we focus our attention on strictly pedagogical activities, we soon find that the transmission of cognitive knowledge from teacher to learner can be hindered by cultural differences in several direct and indirect ways. For example:

1. The cognitive categories of the student may not perfectly match those of the teacher, and each may be familiar with some features of reality that are unknown to the other.
2. The personal relationship between student and teacher may become so undermined by culturally-based misunderstandings and divergent expectations that the positive atmosphere necessary for learning is destroyed.
3. The process by which the teacher expects the student to learn may be considerably different from how the student has learned to learn within his or her own culture, before coming to school.

The second reason why American teachers should concern themselves with cross-cultural research is that the overwhelming majority of public schools in the United States are, in fact,

multicultural institutions. It is probably true that no other professional group in the United States daily faces the human and practical problems associated with cultural diversity so intensely as do classroom teachers, counselors, principals, and others who work directly with students in schools. This situation is not going to change. Recent legislation and court decisions have mandated that every effort be made at the local level to ensure that minority students, specifically including immigrants, be accorded equal educational opportunities and that this be accomplished without segregating them into separate classrooms for more than a fraction of the school day.

The truth is that cross-cultural research, though often divorced from the immediate concerns of the educational community, has considerable practical relevance for classroom teachers. Understanding the ideas put forth by cross-cultural researchers may prove less difficult, however, than accepting the implications of those ideas for social and pedagogical interaction with culturally-different students. Terms such as "culturally deprived" and "culturally disadvantaged" are so frequently used inaccurately that it would be best if educational writers dropped them altogether. But, of course, there is little sense in merely dropping these terms if we continue to treat minority and immigrant students in ways that subtly convey our feeling that these students will never quite measure up until they have adopted mainstream American ways of life. Dropping ethnocentric terms from the literature is easy; changing deeply ingrained habits and values is likely to prove very difficult indeed.

PROBLEMS IN COMMUNICATIONS ACROSS CULTURES

Many speakers of the English language tend to use *culture* to refer collectively to human artistic creations such as painting, music, literature, dance, drama, costume design, and the like. Although these certainly are among the evidences of any given culture, they are scarcely the tip of the iceberg. A similar problem exists in the case of *communication*, which the popular mind assumes to refer merely to the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver. In order to understand the problems inherent in communications across cultures, we must begin by greatly broadening our understanding of these two words.

Culture and Communication

Those who assume that artistic creations are the stuff of culture will probably assume that the differences separating various cultures are more or less confined to artistic endeavor. These people are also likely to misunderstand individuals culturally different from themselves and to rationalize their own misunderstandings by referring to the other person's stupidity, bad manners, or deliberate malice. But if *high culture* and *deep culture* were as much a part of popular language as the one word *culture* is now, we would have taken one significant step towards eliminating such uncomplimentary explanations, if not also the misunderstandings themselves. *High culture* precisely designates artistic creations, while *deep culture* is a convenient term for referring to that vast and interrelated array of patterned human behaviors, values, roles, beliefs, and social expectations within which each of us is completely immersed. Because we are largely unaware of deep culture and its pervasive influence upon our every act, we do not expect, nor do we usually consciously perceive, many of the human differences that impede and misdirect our sincere attempts to communicate with other peoples. In discussing communications across cultures, our attention will be focused almost entirely on the "deep" features of each culture involved.

Similarly, we need to think of communication in new and broader ways. Perhaps a dozen attempts have been made to come up with a satisfactory definition of communication; Louis

Forsdale of Columbia Teachers College suggests this one: "Communication is any relational system, that is, any system which operates to keep things in relation to one another." This definition covers every communicative act in face-to-face human interaction—from my handing you a written note, to your detecting in my mannerisms that I am embarrassed. (The definition also is useful in considering other kinds of communication, but this report is concerned only with problems in face-to-face encounters.) Those who study human communication have moved beyond the old, simplistic view that humans communicate only, or even primarily, by means of sent and received linguistic (spoken or written) messages. Just as high culture is but a tiny portion of culture as a whole, so is linguistic communication but a small portion of the whole of interpersonal communication. Some leading contemporary communications researchers have estimated that speech is responsible for only about 35 percent of all communication in face-to-face situations, while others have made estimates as low as one percent.

Culture, like communication, can be thought of profitably as all the activities and artifacts of human beings that enable them to maintain their relationships with one another. These relationships are as varied as people themselves and can include strong emotions like love and hate or can be just the brief interaction between strangers. Culture and communication include everything done by humans, and as a result my definitions sound almost identical. In the final analysis, culture and communication are synonymous.

A highly readable general introduction to the concept of culture and to the countless number of ways in which cultures can differ is *Understanding Other Cultures* (1963) by Ina Corinne Brown. A more theoretical work exploring, among other things, the notion that culture and communication are synonymous is *The Silent Language* (1959) by Edward T. Hall. A valuable introduction to communication in its broadest sense is *Kinesics and Context* (1970) by Ray L. Birdwhistell.

Cultural Differences

The notion that virtually everything done by humans has communicative significance, i.e., meaning in terms of relationships, will strike some as absurd. How could the human mind begin to comprehend all the potential meanings in the buzzing confusion that surrounds us daily? Common sense seems to dictate that we

almost never need to pay careful attention to all the bits of human activity occurring within the range of our senses. Is this not because so many human actions, such as tugging an earlobe or flicking a bit of dust from our clothes, are of no consequence?

Communications researchers would agree with the commonsense view; they would also insist that there is communicative significance in a far greater range of human actions than is generally assumed. However, we seldom need to concern ourselves with all these available meanings because human actions are not isolated and idiosyncratic but rather patterned and repeated within appropriate social contexts. Were this not so, life would drive us all mad. In fact, mad is just the word we use to describe individuals who are unwilling or unable to make their interactional patterns conform with those of normal people. Such individuals—those who do not suit action to context, who are not predictable—we segregate into institutions. As for the rest of us, the highly patterned nature of human behavior frees us from exhausting moment-to-moment trial-and-error attempts to fathom the meaning of human activity. In other words, the things, events, and human behaviors that surround us are usually so regular and so predictable, so thoroughly known through past experience, that they no longer require our conscious attention. Thus freed from a concern with the meaning of, say, 99 percent of everything, we can direct our conscious attention to the remaining 1 percent, to those bits of the whole that interest us the most at any moment.

Constant social interaction over many generations is required for humans to work out among themselves stable and interrelated patterns of behavior covering all the social contexts normally encountered in one's lifetime, e.g., mealtimes, funerals, superior-subordinate interactions, chance meetings of strangers, etc. Constant social interaction is possible only within a geographical area of limited size; otherwise, the same individuals would meet face-to-face too infrequently to be able to devise, perfect, and learn standard behavioral patterns. Geographical areas of limited size are usually delineated by natural, and sometimes by political, boundaries. Within each set of boundaries, different behavioral patterns have been developed and passed on from adults to children since Homo sapiens first appeared on the planet Earth. Of course, for any given social context, the differences between the prescribed behavioral patterns of any two geographical areas may be great, small, or nonexistent depending upon factors such as geographical proximity, common ancestry, volume of trade, environmental similarity, and so forth.

Why did different behavioral patterns—different deep cultures—develop in the various areas? In the first place, geographical areas come with a wide variety of environments; the skills and values necessary to sustain life in one may be useless in another, prejudicial to life in a third. Secondly, for any given social context, numerous dissimilar patterns of behavior can be thought up by the human imagination. *Many of these theoretically-possible patterns will work equally well in practice.* For example, anyone who has read an anthropology text remembers that there is a vast variety in the way human societies have structured the interactional patterns of blood relatives and in-laws. Though many of these arrangements seem strange, even illogical, to our way of thinking, there has never been any evidence that a pattern is collapsing because it just won't work, given, of course, that environmental and social conditions have not significantly changed since the pattern was devised.

Throughout almost all of human history and prehistory, people have tended to remain during their lifetimes within the geographical area where they grew up; consequently, the differences between their behavioral patterns and those of other peoples were of little practical concern. But the advent of cheap transportation has increasingly brought individuals away from their native land and into daily contact with people who have differing behavioral patterns and expectations. The most obvious and immediate consequence of such cross-cultural contact is the inability of each to comprehend the other's spoken language. This is a problem of no small importance. But the more researchers have examined interpersonal contacts among culturally-different people, the more reasons they have found to believe that *language barriers may be the most easily surmounted of the many impediments blocking communications across cultures.*

Regarding the patterned nature of human activity within various social contexts, see *Behavior in Public Places* (1963) by Erving Goffman. The other ideas outlined above may be further pursued in the books by Brown and Hall, previously suggested, and in *The Hidden Dimension* (1966) by Edward T. Hall.

Interpersonal Communications

Human beings communicate with each other via certain channels in addition to the written and spoken word. Now let us examine some ideas about interpersonal communication. Communications researchers hypothesize that there are two principal modes of communication: digital and analogic. Digital (or discursive) communication takes place in discrete step intervals, principally via language. Language is composed of words (including numbers) which, whether written or spoken, must be sequenced one after another. The words themselves are composed of letters or other symbols which must be placed in a certain sequence in order to make sense. For example, as I write this, I have no choice other than to proceed step-by-step, placing first one word on the page, then another and another, making my ideas known to you by discrete intervals. The symbols which I am using and the order in which I place them on this page make sense to both of us because we both have learned not only the meaning (or referent) of each term but also certain rules for their sequencing. The choice of these symbols, terms, and rules is entirely arbitrary. I could convey the same ideas in another language, or in some private code that you and I might invent. Digital communication, no matter which language, is the principal means whereby we deal with cognitive matters.

Analogic (or nondiscursive) communication involves symbols or actions which in their proportions or relations bear a similarity to the thing, idea, feeling, or event for which they stand. Common examples of manufactured analogic devices include maps, architectural plans, graphs, drawings, photos, sculpture, performed music, and so forth. Common examples of human actions with analogic meaning include mime, dance, illustrative gestures, facial expressions, postures, and so forth (we will be talking more about these). Unlike digital modes, analogic modes express simultaneous relationships and continuous functions. As an exercise in demonstrating how useful analogic modes can be, you might try standing perfectly still, using nothing but words to explain the concept spiral. It can be done (see your dictionary), but it is so much easier when waving your hands around.

Digital and analogic modes of communication have several things in common. First of all, they are both systematically patterned and generally agreed-upon by the people who use them for purposes of communication among themselves. Secondly, the symbols involved and the rules for their use may differ from geographical area to geographical area, that is, from culture to culture. True, a spiral is a spiral anywhere in the world, but the postures and gestures used to symbolize deference to a superior, for example, differ widely, e.g., we stand up, other peoples sit down; some people cover their heads, others remove head

coverings; we straighten and button our attire, others actually disrobe in the presence of a respected superior. Thirdly, both digital and analogic modes must be learned by the young. But here we encounter a key difference, for whereas language is learned primarily on the level of consciousness, the numerous analogic channels used in face-to-face communication are learned primarily on unconscious (or out-of-awareness) levels. Another difference is that the analogic channels are principally used to deal with affective matters and with the state of interpersonal relationships, instead of with cognitive ideas.

Before continuing, let us note that a few forms of communication seem to fall between the classifications digital and analogic. Musical notation is one example; sign language employed by the deaf is another. A third example, in fact, is language as spoken. Everyone recognizes that the manner in which a sentence is spoken is often more important than the actual choice of words. Here we are not merely concerned with the various possible meanings that a sentence can have depending upon which word is stressed. We are also concerned with all kinds of vocal qualities including pitch, intensity, rhythm, articulation, resonance, and so forth which provide a listener with clues about the effective state of the speaker and the state of the relationship between speaker and listener. I might point out that most individuals have a pretty good idea about what "I love you" really means depending upon subtle differences in the way the words are spoken. The study of vocal but not verbal behavior, including laughing, coughing, humming, etc., is known as paralinguistics.

The precise location of the digital/analogic dividing line need not concern us because in any case it is clear that the analogic channels of communication greatly outnumber the digital channels, even if we confine our inquiry to face-to-face interaction. On the digital side our study is limited to linguistics. On the analogic side we can study, besides paralinguistics, the use of touch, the handling of the eyes, the apportioning and use of physical space, facial expressions, gestures of the body extremities, postures, the meanings of various forms of dress (and undress) and self-decoration, general styles of body movement, the use and segmentation of time, physiological states (e.g., blushing), and even the use of the olfactory sense (which in some cultures plays an important role in face-to-face interaction).

Each culture throughout the world has developed context-specific patterns of behavior for each of the channels of interpersonal communication just enumerated above. In other words,

the prescribed patterns of behavior for each of these channels (e.g., use of words, use of touch, use of eyes, etc.), in each of the thousands of possible social contexts (e.g., weddings, business relations, etc.), may vary to a greater or lesser extent from culture to culture. Why is it, then, that we tend to assume that the principal barriers to mutual understanding across cultures will be cleared away just as soon as one individual masters merely the verbal communicative forms of the other?

A fuller discussion of the differences between the digital and analogic modes of communication is found in *Nonverbal Communication* (1956) by Jurgen Ruesch and Weldon Kees. A valuable study of the analogic modes of interpersonal communication in cross-cultural perspective is contained in *Paralanguage and Kinesics* (1975) by Mary Ritchie Key.

Anthropological View of Communication

The old view of face-to-face communication was this: One person, possessing certain cognitive information, encodes it into spoken words which reach the ears of another, who decodes it and thus receives the message. The second person may then send a message back to the first, and so on back and forth, like in the comics. Anything at all that prevents the complete message from getting through was called noise. While a simplistic theory such as this was in ascendance, it was easy for educators and others to assume that language was the only serious barrier to understanding between culturally-different teachers and students.

Psychologists took a step in the right direction when they began to pay attention to the analogic channels of communication. They understood these channels as useful for expressing the motives and emotions of individuals, and they viewed social interaction in terms of individuals acting upon each other. The individual with the most emotion or the strongest motive prevailed. Such an Aristotelian things-and-forces view of human behavior found—and still enjoys—much favor in the United States, for it is part of our cultural style to be intensely interested in causes and effects, and to view individuals as masters of their own actions and destinies.

The anthropological view of communication is not necessarily antithetical to the psychological view, but reaches somewhat different conclusions because instead of looking at individuals, anthropologists look at groups. This style of observa-

tion has led to explanations which are almost never couched in cause-and-effect terms. *Instead, a communicative field or context is seen in which all group members, through their complementary performances of certain roles, contribute to the maintenance of the patterns of behavior prescribed by their culture.* The traditional behavioral performances for each of the numerous roles that one is expected to play in life is what one learns as he or she grows up and becomes enculturated. One might learn new roles from time to time as an adult as well. Researchers favorable to the anthropological view of communication focus their attention largely on the culturally-prescribed patterns of group interaction, paying less attention to the role being played at any moment by any specific individual. This is because they assume that another individual similarily enculturated would play that role in a similar fashion. The anthropological view is, in short, a systems view of communication.

The individual, however, is by no means neglected by the anthropological view. First of all, while enacting a traditional role of a prescribed program for a specific context, the individual may perform in a distinctive personal style. Secondly, the individual is capable of refusing to perform a conventional role and may instead deliberately act either in an innovative or in an out-of-context manner. In these cases, however, the anthropologist could say not that this individual has caused the others around him or her to perform in new ways, but rather that he or she has influenced or manipulated the communicative context, altering it either into another context also provided for by the culture or into an ambiguous context.

With regard to affective states, the anthropological view maintains that emotions are felt by group members whenever the communicative context alters from its previous character. The alteration may be due to an individual's out-of-context or innovative performance, or to the disturbing occurrence of some external event. If the alteration is merely from one conventional context to another, the emotions felt will tend to be fleeting because the participants will not find it difficult to fall into different but customary roles and patterns of behavior. But if the alteration is to an ambiguous context, that is, to a state of affairs not well defined and provided for in the culture's repertoire of contexts (or, if provided for, not well known to the participants in the group in question), the emotions felt will tend to be strong and will persist until the participants are able to eliminate the unknown or incongruous features in the situation and to restore

some conventional state of affairs. In the cases where the contextual alteration has been drastic, as in cases where loved ones have been lost or war has disrupted life, emotions may run high until whole new roles are learned and integrated with those of others.

A shorthand way of saying that groups attempt to maintain traditional patterns of behavior in known social contexts is this: Groups attempt to maintain social order. Researchers who look at the total communicative context increasingly believe that social order is maintained and, when necessary, restored by means of the various analogic channels of communication, only rarely with an assist from the linguistic channel of communication. The maintenance of social order via the out-of-awareness analogic channels frees the linguistic channel and conscious thought processes for other purposes such as the discussion of ideas and the designing and construction of things (the artifacts of a culture). But for our purposes, another implication of this theory is paramount. Since culturally-different people will have differing conceptions of social order in certain social contexts, and since social order in all cultures is largely maintained via out-of-awareness channels of communication, it is almost inevitable that sooner or later cross-cultural encounters will shift into ambiguous contexts and inexplicable misunderstandings accompanied by heightened emotional states.

The leading exponent of the anthropological view today is Albert E. Scheflen, whose profusely illustrated book, *Body Language and Social Order* (1972), goes into much more detail than is possible here. See also his more advanced work, *How Behavior Means* (1974). For additional insight into the function of the analogic channels, read *Problems in Cetacean and Other Mammalian Communication* (1966) by Gregory Bateson (see full reference in the bibliography). An outstanding article in which the anthropological point of view is specifically related to problems in classroom interaction is *Nonverbal Communication and the Education of Children* (1972) by Paul Byers and Happie Byers (see full reference in the bibliography).

Analysis of an Unsuccessful Relationship

Now that we have briefly outlined some of the major theoretical ideas regarding culture and communication, let us apply the theory in the analysis of a cross-cultural encounter that

dissolves into an inexplicable misunderstanding. I am going to select an example involving people from two cultures whose patterns bear many significant similarities and few stark differences because American school teachers are not being asked to accept into their classrooms Mongolian nomads and Australian aborigines, but rather students from places that have felt American influence for several decades. Let us examine, for example, what can happen when an American comes face-to-face with someone from Great Britain.

During World War II, romances frequently developed between British women and American soldiers stationed in Great Britain. The process of getting acquainted and establishing a romantic interest was, of course, greatly facilitated by the shared language. Frequently, these romances ended in misunderstanding. What happened?

From the anthropological point of view, we should begin by noting that the American man and British woman shared not only language, but also a deceptively similar understanding of the nature of the social context in which a young man and a young woman share one another's company while dining, dancing, attending the theater, partying with friends, or whatever. Their ideas about what constitute appropriate patterns of behavior within such a social context were similar enough to enable an American man and a British woman to have little initial difficulty in doing what we Americans would label "dating."

The cross-cultural communicational problem which undermined some of these relationships involved kissing, an action with analogic communicational significance. For the American man, a kiss was considered appropriate in early and merely friendly stages of a relationship; for the British woman, a kiss was considered appropriate only in later and more serious stages. So when the man attempted to kiss the woman on, say, the second date, the social context—as she was prepared to understand it—seemed to be altered abruptly. Considered in isolation from other analogic clues, a kiss on the second date suggested to her either the new context out-on-a-date-with-an-impudent-male, or the new context serious-romantic-involvement-on-short-acquaintance. The ambiguity lay not in being kissed per se, but in being kissed by a male whose total performance throughout all his analogic channels was similar, but not identical, to that of the British men with whom she had previously gone out.

It is important to keep in mind two facts. First, the male actually intended no change of context, but only intended to affirm and promote the existing context of friendship. Secondly, the male's analogic channels were hardly dormant before and after he kissed the female; his eyes, his facial expressions, his gestures, his postures, his physical proximity, his paralanguage were all actively available for her to interpret from moment to moment. As she had never visited America and had virtually no previous experience with American men, she was unprepared to interpret all his analogic clues to mean affirmation-of-friendship. The kiss therefore could only be understood by her as though it had been bestowed upon her by a British male on the second date, that is, as an out-of-context performance. In the absence of clear analogic clues as to the nature of the (imagined) new context, the context for her became ambiguous. In terms of the anthropological view, the ambiguous context was generated because the two individuals had differing and mutually unfamiliar conceptions of the social order in which they lived.

We may imagine that in some cases this particular species of cross-cultural misunderstanding was straightened out. For one thing, the participants were peers, and for another, they spoke the same language. These factors made it more likely that they would be able to air their conflicting assumptions freely about the social order and to attempt to make complementary adjustments in their behaviors and expectations.

These two ameliorative conditions are not usually present when cross-cultural misunderstandings invade the classroom. Some culturally-different students speak English poorly, and the student-teacher relationship is of necessity conceived of in a subordinate-superior framework. Furthermore, it is hardly likely that the students would have the knowledge and insight required to discuss such matters intelligently, with possible exceptions among some high school students. In my opinion, the burden of communicating falls almost entirely upon the classroom teacher. It is his or her responsibility to understand the nature of cross-cultural problems, to know specific ways in which mainstream American culture differs from the student's, and to adjust his or her own behaviors and expectations accordingly. Obviously the whole school routine cannot be turned upside down in pursuit of this important goal.

An outstanding article in which a misunderstanding between two American subcultures is carefully and revealingly analyzed is *Orality and Literacy as Factors of "Black" and "White" Communicative Behavior* (1974) by Thomas Kochman (see full reference in the bibliography).

Conclusion

Culture, which refers to all those prescribed and complementary patterns of behavior that enable people to establish and maintain relationships with one another successfully and to sustain life in their natural environment, is what makes each one of us a human being. Culture makes life possible. In this sense, no normal human being is culturally deprived. Furthermore, the patterns of behavior learned and employed by one human being are not in any absolute sense superior to those of another, but merely different. This is not to deny that relative to social or environmental context, one set of patterns may be more practical or more effective than another. In this sense, it is true that anyone may be momentarily disadvantaged when interacting in an unfamiliar social or environment context. The effects of this type of disadvantage in severe cases have been termed "culture shock." But this is in no sense to conclude that one culture is, on the whole, inferior to another.

For those tens of thousands of teachers who interact daily with students that were not enculturated in the same culture or subculture as themselves, they should consider the following:

1. The term culturally different should be used to refer to these students, replacing culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived.

2. The problems arising in schools because of miscommunication between culturally-different teachers and students should no longer be thought of as anyone's fault. Fault implies culpability through ineptness, neglect, or deliberate intent. The facts are that cross-cultural misunderstandings occur (a) because culturally-different people have divergent conceptions of social order, (b) because social order is largely maintained via the out-of-awareness analogic channels of communication, and (c) because the enculturation process normally prepares one to relate successfully only to others who employ their analogic channels in an identical or highly similar fashion in the many contexts of daily life.

3. The native or home culture of a child should never be disparaged in any open or subtle manner. That culture has special value and utility for the child; to belittle it is to undercut the very foundations of the child's humanness. It would be more reasonable to think of such children as culturally advantaged, seeing that, having mastered many features of one culture, they now have the opportunity to master another. What American child has the

chance to acquire such broadness and flexibility in human relations?

4. Teachers should always keep in mind the fact that human communication employs numerous channels, most of them operating on out-of-awareness levels. The assumption that successful relationships are to be expected among people who share the same language is often unrealistic. Shared language may merely facilitate the establishment of a relationship, thereby deepening the sense of disappointment or anger when an out-of-awareness discrepancy generates misunderstanding.

SOME FINDINGS OF CROSS–CULTURAL RESEARCH

Linguistic Research

The amount of effort that has gone into linguistic research far exceeds what has gone into any other field of communication. From the great mass of theories and findings, I am going to discuss briefly two recent and educationally-relevant research efforts.

An obvious problem in communications across cultures, even in cases where the interactants speak the same language, occurs when a word used by both does not denote the same object or idea. British and Americans will have different ideas, for example, on just what is a "teaspoon." Translations also can be misleading: Spanish "amigo" and German "Freund" both translate into English as "friend," but the three words do not have precisely the same meaning.

Research is probing even deeper into this kind of linguistic problem, however, as demonstrated by Clifford Hill of Teachers College, Columbia University. Hill has been researching the linguistic description of spatial relations among bilingual students in Niamey, Niger. In that part of sub-Saharan Africa, able youngsters whose native language is Hausa or Djerma attend schools where they are expected to speak French. Hill has discovered that native speakers of French (and, incidentally, of English) typically assume that any object without an intrinsic front and back (e.g., a solid-colored ball) is facing toward the person perceiving it, while speakers of Hausa and Djerma typically assume that such an object is facing away from—that is, in the same direction as—the person perceiving it. Thus, when requested to touch the "back" of the ball, the native French speaker responds by touching the far side, while the native of Niger touches the near side. This cross-cultural discrepancy would not be of any practical consequence if the Nigerien students, while learning the French language, also learned to reverse their native assumption regarding the meaning of front and back. Hill's research, however, gives us no reason to conclude that a Nigerien student necessarily uses only the indigenous assumptions about spatial relations when speaking Hausa or Djerma, and only the Western assumption about spatial relations when speaking French.[1]

A great deal of research has been conducted in order to understand the differences in the language usage patterns of Black and white Americans, and many of the findings are immediately relevant to inner-city teachers. Thomas Kochman of the University of Illinois, who has done extensive and outstanding work in this field, points out that many teachers and other educators operate under the assumption that so-called nonstandard English is deficient in vocabulary as well as in logic, grammatical consistency, and the ability to expand sentences (e.g., through embedding and conjoining). Such a belief has led some teachers not only to belittle Black English openly, but also to ignore Black English in a single-minded effort to teach Black youngsters to express themselves elaborately and logically in formal, grammatical, vocabulary-rich Standard English. We have already discussed the possible effects of disparaging any features of a child's home or native culture. With regard to language, the findings of Kochman and others show that nonstandard English is defined not by the quantity or quality of vocabulary, nor by the presence or absence of logical progression of thought, nor by the degree of sentence expansion possible, but by the grammar employed. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that the grammatical patterns of nonstandard English are not irregular and inconsistent, but merely different from the patterns used in Standard English. Any vocabulary item, whether learned in an unabridged dictionary or on the street, can be used by a speaker of any dialect of English; any, though erudite or vulgar, can be expressed in nonstandard as well as Standard English.

Research has disclosed that whether speakers of any dialect of English express themselves in an intimate, casual style, or in an elaborate, formal style, is not a function of the dialect being spoken (i.e., of the grammatical rules being employed), but rather is a function of the social context in which the utterance is being made (e.g., seminar or beach party) and/or of the topic being discussed (e.g., nuclear physics or favorite hit tunes). It is unfortunate, says Kochman, that the Black child possesses a significantly large other vocabulary which the teacher regards as merely slang and therefore not worthy of credit (on tests or otherwise), especially since the child in many cases knows the meaning of many objectively identical terms (e.g., "cut out") in both the nonstandard and the standard dialects. Kochman's research clearly suggests that Black culture places a higher value on oral proficiency than does white mainstream culture: "If the total lexical banks of Black and white children were compared instead of just

conventional lexical items, Black children would appear better by comparison than they presently do."[2]

Nonverbal Research

Nonverbal research deals with the numerous analogic channels of human communication, each of which requires at least as much thorough attention as the linguistic channel in order to be understood in relation to itself and all other channels. Relatively few individuals, however, are devoting themselves to this field of study. Furthermore, not all nonverbal researchers are specifically interested in the cross-cultural implications of nonverbal behavior. In the following paragraphs, I will outline, channel by channel, a few of the more interesting findings of researchers who have looked at nonverbal behavior in cross-cultural perspective.

We have defined paralinguistics as the study of human vocal behavior as distinguished from verbal behavior. A paralinguistic feature as innocent as the loudness with which one normally talks can have implications cross-culturally. Mary Ritchie Key reports that First American children sometimes feel that their white teachers talk too loudly, and that they have interpreted the teacher's normal tone of voice as indicating anger or meanness.[3] Weston La Barre notes that hissing has a wide variety of culturally-specific connotations. Among Americans, hissing is considered impolite and, when used, indicates contempt. Latin Americans, on the other hand, routinely attract a waiter's attention by hissing; Japanese hiss (by suddenly breathing inward) as a sign of politeness to social superiors; the Basuto of South Africa applaud by hissing. La Barre also reports that laughter may indicate amusement in many cultures, but not in all. In parts of Africa it is used to express wonder, surprise, embarrassment, or even discomfiture.[4]

Kinesics is the study of gesture, or, as it is popularly called, body language. This exceedingly rich field of study can be subdivided in a number of ways; we will confine ourselves to examining a few known cross-cultural differences in the use of emblems and illustrators. An emblem is a nonverbal act which—like an umpire's hand signals—has a specific verbal meaning or translation, and which is most often used when verbal communication is difficult or impossible. Perhaps the most famous example of a cross-cultural misunderstanding of an emblem occurred when Khrushchev, while visiting the United States, gave the hands-clasped-above-the-head gesture often used by victorious boxers in

America. We took this to be a nonverbal equivalent of "We will bury you!", but he apparently intended it as a friendly gesture of international brotherhood.[5] Visitors to Great Britain who imitate Churchill's V-for Victory hand signal but unwittingly turn the back of their hands (instead of the palm) toward an observer might find themselves in difficulties—merely reversing the hand turns this emblem into a gross insult. In Portugal, my wife and I once turned and walked away in presumed obedience to the vehement hand motion of a tavern owner; later we discovered that he had been earnestly motioning to us to enter his establishment.

An illustrator is a nonverbal act accompanying speech which helps to make the meaning or denotation of the spoken words clear. One common example would be pointing the index finger in the appropriate direction while saying "over there." But not all peoples use a pointed finger to indicate location or direction. Some use the head, some the eyes, and some the lips; in such cases, although the equivalent of "over there" in the foreign language might be fully understood, the location referred to could remain a mystery to the nonverbally "illiterate" traveler.[6] Among certain Spanish-speaking peoples, one must give attention to the manner in which the hand is used to indicate the height of living beings. Holding the hand horizontally at the proper height above the ground is appropriate for reference to animals, while holding it vertically (thumb up) is appropriate for humans. To use the mode appropriate for animals when describing a human is to make a pointedly uncomplimentary nonverbal statement.[7]

The study of touch or tactile behavior is known as haptics. Those who have travelled through Africa know that it is quite common there to see grown men walking together hand-in-hand. The interpretation which Americans may be tempted to put on this behavior is false; most of us have learned by now that Frenchmen who kiss in greeting are not necessarily homosexuals, and the same applies to Africans who hold hands. In the United States there is an assumption that tactile contact carries sexual overtones in most social contexts other than where fighting is taking place place or a legitimate occupational role (e.g., barber, dentist) is being performed. Sidney Jourard has provided some figures which convincingly demonstrate how variable the quantity of touch can be across cultures. He watched pairs of people conversing in coffee shops in San Juan, Paris, London, and Gainesville, Florida, counting the number of times the conversants touched in one hour. His totals were: San Juan, 180; Paris, 110; London, 0; Gainesville, 2.[8] Findings such as this have special relevance for the educator and

should lead to more research because a large number of Puerto Rican students immigrate to the United States each year. I do not know of any study which has specifically concerned itself with the possible detrimental effects of a student's changing from school in a high-touch culture to school in a low-touch culture.

Cultural notions about the proper use of the eyes have attracted the attention of several researchers, and it is now accepted that there are wide variations cross-culturally in eye behavior. One of the most frequently mentioned differences involves the Hispanic and American conceptions of the proper use of the eyes by a child who is being reprimanded. American children are expected to demonstrate their respect for the disciplinarian by looking her or him in the eye; within many Hispanic cultures the same attitude is demonstrated by the child's staring at the floor. Countless classroom misunderstandings must have resulted from this disparity. With regard to the use of the eyes during ordinary face-to-face conversation, the patterns of mainstream white Americans fall somewhere between those of the Arabs (who tend to maintain intense and prolonged "eyeball-to-eyeball" contact) and those of many Blacks (who largely avoid looking at the face of their interlocutor). Some theorists have suggested that the old notion of many whites that Blacks are shiftless and timid may have arisen because the culturally prescribed eye behavior of the Blacks was being interpreted by the whites in terms of the whites' own culturally-specific expectations. Blacks, on the other hand, have been prone to interpret the faceward gaze of conversing whites as a deliberate attempt at dominance.[9]

Proxemics is the study of how people deal with physical space, and the person who has long been on the forefront of proxemics research is Edward T. Hall.[10] The classic example of culturally-based dissimilarity in the way people handle space involves the North and South American conceptions of normal conversational distance. Our Latin neighbors are used to standing significantly closer to one another than we are. So, when a Yankee and a Latin meet and talk, we can observe a kind of dance in which the Yankee slowly moves backwards while the Latin keeps closing in. Their chat may be friendly on the surface, but it is probable that the Yankee is increasingly feeling that the Latin is pushy or even sexually motivated, while the Latin is growing more and more distressed about the cold and distant manner of his North American friend.

A more complex problem involving the use of space was uncovered several years ago when Melvin Alexenberg of Teachers College became involved with the educational problems of Israel. Much cross-cultural contact occurs in Israel because both Oriental Jews (from the Middle East and North Africa) and Occidental Jews (from Europe and America) have immigrated to that state. Alexenberg found that in the Israeli schools, which were organized on the European model and staffed largely by Occidentals, Oriental children usually failed. He discovered a number of cross-cultural conflicts underlying this problem, including the fact that classroom arrangements were conducive to "frontal lessons" of the kind so common in American schools (i.e., students in orderly rows of separate desks, faced by the teacher). Oriental Jews, not only in schools but also in places of worship and elsewhere, are unaccustomed to this pattern, preferring instead seating-in-the-round. Alexenberg believes that seating arrangements possibly may be tangible evidence of a whole range of fundamental cultural differences in learning, perceptual, and social styles. In seeking ways whereby all Israeli students could be effectively served by the schools, he has experimented with an "Integral Structure" which involves, among other things, an open classroom approach.[11]

Other Research

Two other representative pieces of research should be discussed which do not fall neatly into the linguistic and nonverbal categories that have been discussed above. The first study takes us into the domain of learning styles, while the second gives us a glimpse into the activities of those in the vanguard of cross-cultural research.

One excellent study in the subject of learning styles must be mentioned because it underscores the fact that the highly verbal approach to learning common in mainstream American schools is not the only valid method by which knowledge may be transmitted to children. In this study, Susan U. Philips of the University of Pennsylvania observed First American children in an Anglo-run school at the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon. One of her research tasks was to understand why the children showed great reluctance to participate in verbal interactions in the classroom; it was rare for them to volunteer to speak and equally rare for them to speak when called upon directly. Furthermore, when they did speak, they tended to use the minimum number of words to answer, and did so in such a soft

voice that they could scarcely be heard. Philips found that in their own homes and community, the First American students customarily acquire the various skills of their culture (e.g., hunting, tanning, beadwork) in a sequence of three steps. First, the child over a period of time watches and listens to a competent adult who is performing the skill. Secondly, the child takes over small portions of the task and completes them in cooperation with and under the supervision of the adult, in this way gradually learning all of the component skills involved. Finally, the child goes off and privately tests himself or herself to see whether the skill has been fully learned; a failure is not seen by others and causes no embarrassment, but a success is brought back and exhibited to the teacher and others. The use of speech in this three-step process is minimal, being confined to corrections and question-answering on the part of the adult. Even the final demonstration of success seldom involves verbal performance.

When these same children go to school, they find themselves in a situation where the high value placed on verbal performance is only the first of their cross-cultural hurdles. Perhaps even more disconcerting for them is the fact that acquisition and demonstration of knowledge are no longer separate steps, but are expected to occur simultaneously. Furthermore, this single-step process takes place via public recitations, the assumption apparently being that one learns best by making verbal mistakes in front of one's peers and teachers. Finally, the children have little opportunity to observe skilled performers carrying out these tasks, for the other children who perform publicly are as ignorant and unskilled as they. Under such circumstances, it is small wonder that these First American students demonstrate a propensity for silence.[12]

Another interesting topic on the forefront of cross-cultural research concerns human rhythms and their possible variations from culture to culture. Human biological rhythms include everything from the monthly menstrual cycle to heart and lung pulses to brain waves that only can be detected by electronic equipment. It is the latter which principally have interested a handful of researchers such as anthropologist Paul Byers of Columbia Teachers College.

Byers studies cross-cultural interaction in classrooms by means of film; the films are viewed hundreds of times at different speeds, including frame-by-frame. Such tedious and time-consuming research yields fascinating results, not only in terms of what is observed, but also in terms of questions which need to be answered about what is observed. For example, in an article which

the reader is urged to consult firsthand,[13] Byers and Happie Byers discuss a filmed interaction involving four nursery school students—two Blacks, two whites—and an experienced white teacher. Detailed observation of the two films (there were cameras operating simultaneously at opposite ends of the room) reveals that the Black children were less successful than the white children in establishing both eye-contact and physical contact with the white teacher. As Byers and Byers phrase it: "Although this behavior may be summed up by a casual observer as 'the Black child gets less attention,' it is more useful to see that there is a mismatching or difference in communication systems."

The authors go on to raise a number of questions about levels of communication, about conflicting expectations in terms of flow of events, low-level cues, and timing, and about several related matters. In an excellent article published a few years later,[14] Byers and Byers begin to suggest some possible answers to such questions. They report that there is growing evidence that all human action and interaction has a biological base in a rhythm of 10 cycles per second that is commonly observed among the various brain waves. Specifically, bursts of motor activity—that is, onsets of muscular activity of all kinds—seem to fall repeatedly on certain beats within this rhythm. For example, some peoples appear to initiate motor activity on a beat or cycle falling every four-tenths of a second. In interaction with others from their own culture, such people tend to fall into a shared rhythm, beginning their muscular movements (including those related to speech) together on the same four-tenths-of-a-second beat.

Paul Byers likes to use the term "in synch" to describe this observable tendency. Although the brain waves which appear to underlie this phenomenon are biological in origin, Byers does not seem to be suggesting that human rhythms are biologically determined, that is, determined by heredity. Rather, the way in which one's brain-based rhythms are patterned is related to the culture in which he or she is raised. More research will have to be carried out before a definitive statement can be made regarding this new feature of the old heredity-environment argument.

Meanwhile, Byers and Byers point out that communication on all levels is much easier for individuals who can easily fall into synchronized rhythms, and that the comfortable feelings that result appear to have a physiological (electrical and/or chemical) basis within each person's body. On the other hand, when people get together who do not structure their biological rhythms identically and who therefore cannot get in synch with one

another, uncomfortable feelings (in modern slang, "bad vibes") result and communication becomes more difficult. This is more likely to occur when the interactants come from different cultures (although in this theory there certainly is room for consideration of individual differences in rhythm structuring). Whether or not any given individual can get in synch with someone from a culture with a different rhythm pattern is thought to depend upon factors such as his or her sensitivity and flexibility, as well as upon the degree of difference between their rhythmic styles.

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