

Cultural Clash and Language Learning: The Case of English for Asians

1. Introduction

- Learning a second/foreign language is an arduous endeavor requiring mastery in diverse factors ranging from lexis to culture.
 - (1) “Learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting.” (Brown 2007: 1)
- Practical tasks for FL/SL learners:
 - (2) a. Pronunciation, Lexis, etc. micro-level
 - b. Structure, Patterns, etc. ↓
 - c. Discourse, Pragmatics, etc. macro-level
- Discourse: thought organization, expressivity, persuasion (rhetoric) >> culturally determined
- Pragmatics: interactional strategy, politeness, appropriateness >> culturally determined
- Mastery of culture is difficult since it is deeply permeated in almost every aspect of language.
- Language reflects the culture of the speech community, and the relationship between language and culture is so close that it is often thought as practically inseparable. (cf. ‘languaculture’ Agar 1994: 60, 122; “Culture is the eraser” Agar 1994: 20; language as “a social semiotic” Halliday 1978, Halliday & Hasan 1991[1985]; culture as “collective programming of the mind” Hofstede 1991: 5)

2. Preliminaries

2.1 Speech Acts & Politeness

- Language as an act: requesting, ordering, promising, warning, inviting, greeting, congratulating, declining, etc.
- Having means of expressing politeness is widely regarded as a language universal. (cf. Face wants are universal; Goffman 1967, Janney & Arndt 1992, Holtgraves & Yang 1990).
- Actual strategies involved in expressing politeness are not uniform.
- Politeness is a particularly important component in request speech acts because the accomplishment of the speaker's intended goal depends on the addressee's compliance.

2.2 Rhetorical Structures

- *rhetoric* (< Gk *techne rhetorike* ‘art of speech’)
- Rhetoric is a discipline concerned with the skills of public speaking as a means of persuasion. (Wales 2001)
- key words in modern rhetoric: art (skill), discourse, effectiveness (in informing, persuading, motivating audience)
- Rhetoric is based on logic, and logic is evolved from culture, and thus, logic and rhetoric are not universal.

2.3 Contexts and Dimensions of Culture

[Contexts in Culture]

- High- vs. Low-context cultures (Hall 1976, 1990)
- the distinction based on how explicit the messages are and how much the context means in certain situations
- Context and message, comprising meaning, are in inversed proportion.

(3) Linguistically significant properties

High-context cultures (mostly Asian)	Low-context cultures (English)
Covert and implicit	Overt and explicit
Messages internalized	Messages plainly coded
Much non-verbal coding	Details verbalized
Reactions reserved	Reactions on the surface

[HC messages]

- HC message: Most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message (Hall 1976: 91)
- Many things are left unsaid. > economical, fast, efficient, satisfying, unifying, cohesive, long-lived, artistic
- Words & word choice are very important.

[LC messages]

- The mass of information is vested in the explicit code.
- More explicit
- Value of individual words is less important.

[Cultural Dimensions]

(Hostede 1984; <https://geert-hofstede.com>)

(4) Cultural dimensions and scores compared

Dim.			U.S.	KOR	CHN	JPN
PDI	Small	Large	40	60	80	54
	-Inequality between roles -Subordinates to be consulted	-Inequality btn levels -Subordinates to be told				
IDV	Individualist	Collectivist	91	18	20	46
	-Same value applied to all -Task over relationship	-Value standards differ -Relationship over task				
MAS	Feminine	Masculine	62	39	66	95
	-Assertiveness ridiculed	-Strong & powerful prevails				
UAI	Weak	Strong	46	85	30	92
	-Less formalization & standardization	-More formalization & standardization				
LTO	Low	High	26	75	87	88
	-Quick results expected -Why?	-Perseverance -How?/What?				
IND	Indulgence	Restraint	68	29	24	42
	-Enjoy life, have fun -Positive attitude, optimism	-Cynical, pessimistic, helpless -Indulging as wrong				

(5) a. **Koreans** (largely generalizable to Asians):

- attention to the powerful
- development of politeness/honorification systems
- avoidance of self-praise
- reliance and favoritism sought
- pessimistic routines
- group-oriented language
- non-assertive, down-toning expressions

b. **Americans** (largely generalizable to English speakers)

- attention to self
- egalitarian language
- "sell yourself"
- attention to accomplishment/result
- "pleasure-oriented"
- individual-oriented language
- assertive expressions

3. Three Illustrative Cases of Cultural Differences

3.1 Politeness Formulae in Request Speech Acts

- Rhee (2009): linguistic analysis of politeness formulae (High- vs. Low-context languages)
- Situation types: Money lending; Putting out cigarette; Window closing; Directions to the subway; Stepping aside

(6) English speakers

- Could/Would you please lend me some money?
- I wonder if you could lend me some money.
- Would you mind lending me some money, if you have some available?
- I'll appreciate it very much if you could lend me some money.
- Would you kindly stop smoking?

(7) Korean speakers

- coysonghaci-man ton com pily-ecwu-si-lswuiss-us-eyyo?
be.sorry-but money a.little lend-BEN-HON-can-HON-POL.END
'I'm sorry, but is it possible to lend me some money?'
(Lit. (I'm) sorry, but (is it) possible to lend a little money for me?)
- kwaynchan-usi-myen ton com pily-ecwu-si-lswuiss-us-eyyo?
be.alright-HON-if money a.little lend-BEN-HON-can-HON-POL.END
'If you are okay, is it possible to lend me some money?'

(8) Chinese Speakers

- 不好意思，你能借点儿钱给我吗？
Bùhǎoyìsi, nǐ néng jiè diǎnr qián gěi wǒ ma?
(Lit. No good talk, can you lend a little money to me?)
- 我能不能向你借点儿钱？
Wǒ néngbunéng xiàng nǐ jiè diǎnr qián?
(Lit. Could I or could I not borrow a little money?)
- 你可不可以借我点儿钱？
Nǐ kěbùkěyǐ jiè wǒ diǎnr qián?
(Lit. Can you or can you not lend money to me?)
- 不好意思，让我过去一下，好吗？
Bùhǎoyìsi, rang wǒ guòqù yíxià, hǎo ma?
(Lit. No good talk, let me pass a little, OK?)
- 麻烦您，让我过去一下。
Máfan nín rang wǒ guòqù yíxià。
(Lit. Bothering you. Allow me to pass a little.)
- 请让我过去一下，好吗？
Qǐng rang wǒ guòqù yíxià, hǎo ma?
(Lit. (I) request. (You) let me pass a little, OK?)
- 请让一下。
Qǐng rang yíxià
(Lit. (I) request. (You) let me pass a little.)

(9) Japanese Speakers

- a. moushiwake gozaimasenga chotto okane-wo kashite itadakemasuka/itadakemasenka?
 ‘Excuse me, but can you lend me a little money?’
 (Lit. I have no excuse, but is/isn’t it possible to lend me a little money for me?)
- b. sumimasenga, chotto tabako-wo kesite itadakemasuka/itadakemasenka?
 ‘I’m sorry, but can you put out the cigarette?’
 (Lit. I’m sorry, is/isn’t it possible to put out cigarette a little for me?)

(10) Linguistic devices in politeness formulae

English	<i>Would you...?</i> <i>Could you...?</i> <i>I wonder if...</i>	<i>would</i> <i>could</i> <i>please</i> <i>mind</i> <i>excuse</i>
Korean	<i>-e-cwu-si-lswuiss-us-eyyo?</i> ‘be possible to do X for me’ <i>-e cwu-si-keys-eyo?</i> ‘will do X for me?’ <i>-ecwu-seyo</i> ‘do X for me’ <i>coysonghaciman</i> ‘I’m sorry, but...’ <i>kwaynchan-usi-nyen</i> ‘if you are okay’ <i>mianha-ciman</i> ‘I’m sorry, but ...’	<i>com</i> ‘a little’ <i>cwu-</i> ‘give’ <i>coysongha-</i> ‘be guilty, feel deep regret’ <i>kwanchan-</i> ‘not be bothersome’ <i>mianha-</i> ‘be sorry’
Chinese	<i>-ma?</i> <i>X bù X</i> ‘X or not X’ <i>X yí X</i> ‘[emphatic] X’	<i>bù-hǎo-yìsì</i> ‘no good talk’ <i>méifàn</i> ‘bother’ <i>qǐng</i> ‘request, behest’ <i>yíxià</i> ‘a little’ <i>dǎnr</i> ‘a little’ <i>bāng</i> ‘help’ <i>ràng</i> ‘allow’
Japanese	<i>-masuka?</i> ‘to be (respective)’ <i>-masenka?</i>	<i>moushiwake</i> ‘humble excuse/pretext’ <i>gozaru</i> ‘humbly exist’ <i>chotto</i> ‘a little’ <i>itatau</i> ‘humbly receive’,

- Observations:

(11) [Commonality]

- a. Requester’s advance gratitude (e.g. *I will appreciate it very much if...*, ‘I will be thankful if you...’)
 b. Requester’s tentativeness of the requesting action (e.g. *I wonder if*, ‘Would there exist a way to...’)

(12) [Differences]

High- and low-context cultures utilize profoundly different persuasion strategies.

- a. Intrapersonal (power & volition; e.g. *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*) vs. Interpersonal (interaction & benefaction; e.g. *cwu-* ‘give (K)’, *qǐng* ‘request (C)’, and *bāng* ‘help (C)’, *kudasaru* ‘give (J)’, *morau* ‘receive (J)’, and *itadaku* ‘receive (J),’
- b. Appreciation (*appreciate*) vs. Apology (‘sorry’)
- c. Personal feelings (*please*) vs. Quantity (‘once’, ‘a little’; e.g. *yíxià* ‘once (C),’ *dǎnr* ‘a little’, *com* ‘a little (K)’ and *chotto* ‘a little (J).’
- d. Speaker-internal enabling forces (can) vs. Speaker-external enabling forces (‘there exists a way to the state for x to come about in the future’)

3.3 Verbosity (Informativity vs. Affectivity)

- Economy and clarity are important variables determining the level of elaboration
 - (18) a. Bréal (1964 [1900]): Avoidance of Difficulty, Securing of Clarity
 - b. Langacker (1977): Signal Simplicity, Maximal Informativeness
 - c. Slobin (1977): "Quick & Easy", "Clear"
- Redundancy is largely avoided (but is tolerated or practiced often in Korean)
 - (19) a. The girl is cute.
 - b. The girl is a cute girl.
 - c. The girl is a cute girl who is pretty.
- Observations on verbosity in speech/writing
- Cultural norm in Korea often requires the sacrifice of information for the sake of politeness, whereas one in English-speaking culture does the reverse. (lexico-grammatically & rhetorically)
- Korean letters almost invariably contain pleasantries.

[e-mail messages]

(20) From an English-speaking colleague

Dear Seongha,

Our *even* paper has just appeared and I take this opportunity to thank you once more for your help but also to wish you the very best for the current crisis!

John

(21) From a Korean colleague

(Original)

선생님 잘 지내시지요?

일전에 예쁜 따님이랑 점심 잘 먹었습니다. 자녀분들을
둘 다 이렇게 다 키워 놓으셔서 마음이 편안하시겠어요.

다름이 아니라 여름에 한국에서 하는 학회가 있으면
abstract을 내고 신청해 볼까 하는데 어디서 그 정보를
얻어야 할지 모르겠습니다.

너무 늦지 않았는지 걱정이네요.

혹시 정보가 있으시면 좀 알려 주시겠어요?

바쁘실 텐데 귀찮은 부탁 드려 죄송합니다.

감사합니다.

김xx 올림

(Trans., SR)

How are you, Professor?

A while ago, I had a good time enjoying lunch
together with your beautiful daughter. I'm sure
you are happy with the thought that you have
made both of your children grown so well.

**Putting aside other matters, the reason I am
writing you is that** I am considering submitting
an abstract for a conference this summer in Korea,
if there is any, but I don't know where I can get
information about that. I'm fearing that it might
be already too late to do that. Could you kindly
let me know if you have such information?

I'm sorry to bother you, since I know you are
busy. Thank you.

Respectfully, xxx Kim

[Academic writing]

(22) Korean student's draft in MA thesis

... Comparing with the earlier teaching method, the most significant change is that in recent teaching method, we have started to realize the importance of affective factors. In other words, the teachers and the researchers started to realize that affective factors obviously affect the learning. More precisely, if the students feel comfortable or relaxed when they learn, they would be able to do better. ...

[Public announcements]

(23) a. 지금 거신 전화번호는 없는 국번이거나 결번이오니 다시 확인하신 후 걸어주시기 바랍니다.

b. Lit. The number you dialed just now is either of non-existent prefixes or a missing number. We hope that you call again after checking the number.

c. Eng. We're sorry. The number you dialed is not in service.

(24) a. 지금 열차가 들어오고 있습니다. 승객 여러분께서는 안전선 밖으로 물러나 주시기 바랍니다. 안전을 위하여 열차의 문이 열린 후 질서 있게 탑승해 주십시오.

b. Lit. The train is pulling in now. We hope that the passengers step back behind the safety line. For your safety, please board the train in an orderly manner after the train doors are open.

c. Eng. Train arriving. Please stay behind the yellow line.

(25) a. 이 역은 승강장과 전동차 사이의 거리가 넓습니다. 내리고 타실 때 발이 빠질 염려가 있사오니 조심하여 주시기 바랍니다.

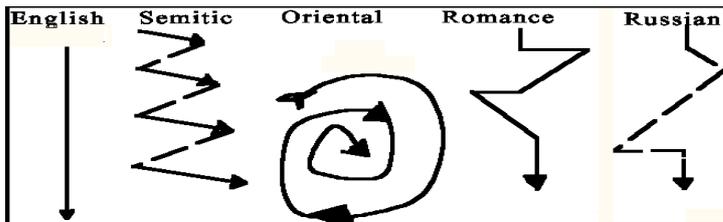
b. Lit. The gap between the platform and the train is big at this station. There are unfortunate possibilities of your feet falling into the gap when you get off or board the train. We hope you exercise caution.

c. Please watch your step.

4. Discussion and Implications for FL Learners

4.1 Contrastive Rhetoric

(26) Cross-Cultural Differences in Paragraphing Strategies (Kaplan 1966)



- Connor (1996: 9):

(27) Contrastive Rhetoric = L1 pattern transfer + culture specific language patterns + audience-oriented communication/persuasion + variation + discourse types + culture-embedded activity + translatability

- Rhetorical structure in general: Orientation-Complication-Resolution-Coda (Martin & Rothery 1986)

- English rhetorical structure:

Connor (1987): Situation-Problem-Solution-Evaluation

Choi (1988): Claim-Justification-Conclusion

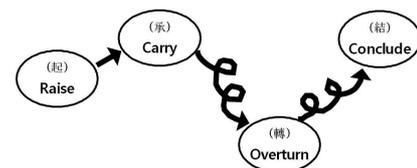


- Korean (& Asian) rhetorical structure:

Rhee (2006): Rise-Carry-Overturn-Conclude (起承轉結)

Eggington (1983, 1987): indirectness and non-linear development

Hinds (1990): language with delayed introduction of purpose



4.2 “Thinkers vs. Feelers”

- All audience-directed utterances/writings comprise information components and affect components (thought & feeling). (cf. “ideational” & “interpersonal” Halliday & Hasan 1976; “propositional” & “expressive” Traugott 1989)

[Politeness]

- Linguistic politeness is one of the major topics of pragmatics (Lakoff 1973, 1975; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech 1983)
- Politeness is an important component of the affect.
- Politeness includes an element of appropriate social and interactive behavior, consideration and concern for the feelings of other people and some reference to ‘face’ (Harris 2010: 327) and is strategic conflict avoidance (Kasper 1990). Face-Threatening Acts (Brown & Levinson 1987) need to be counterbalanced by appropriate doses of politeness (Kasper 1994).

[Interpersonality, Intersubjectivity, Expressivity]

- Subjectivity and intersubjectivity (cf. Traugott & Dasher 2002); Language may encode objective information and certain linguistic forms may signal subjectivity or intersubjectivity.
- Differential intersubjectivity foci: Transactional vs. Interactional views of Language (Rhee 2006, 2009)
transactional (English): information-oriented; tolerant with paraphrasing; thinkers
interactional (perhaps most Asian languages): affect-oriented; resistant to paraphrasing; feelers
- Verbalization for symbolic uses vs. Verbalization for presymbolic uses (“noises for noise’s sake” “The prevention of silence is itself an important function of speech.”; Hayakawa & Hayakawa 1990[1963]: 57)
- Feelers: Indirect expressions are favored; Affect-oriented expressions are favored; Long, round-about, even redundant expressions are favored.

4.3 Verbosity

- decency and reticence: Social superiors are expected to talk little in Korean (Asian) contexts. cf. high-context culture
 - (28) a. K. *cemcanh-* ‘gentle, decent, decorous’ < *celm-cianh-* [be.young-not] ‘not frivolous, not talkative, not moving around,...’; *kwamwuk* (寡黙) ‘reticence’, positive quality
 - b. C. Confucius in Analects (論語 16:4) 孔子曰: 「... 友便辟, 友善柔, 友便佞, 損矣。」 (The Master said: “... Friendship with the deceptive, friendship with the unprincipled, and friendship with **smooth talkers** are harmful.” Trans. A. Charles Muller, <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/analects.html>)
 - c. J. *mukuchi* (無口) ‘reticence’, *kamoku* (寡黙), *mukon* (無言) largely associated with manliness, and perceived as a favorable personality trait; largely negative when associated with women. cf. men withholding emotion desired/required
- politeness and service: Service-providers, entertainers, social inferiors eager to please their superiors are expected to talk much in Korean (Asian) contexts. cf. Hall’s high-context culture; Verbosity is perceived as service-provider’s language, and thus characteristic of polite speech.
- verbosity, fluency, and competence: In FL learning situations, speakers talking much are perceived as fluent and competent (cf. CLT; Canale & Swain 1980, Hymes 1985; accuracy and fluency). In assessments, sheer volume of production is often taken as an important gauge of competence.

5. Summary & Conclusion

- All linguistic representation is shaped by the rhetoric.
- Rhetoric is based on the logic of the language user.
- Logic is based on the culture.
- Language use is fundamentally constrained by the culture of the language user's speech community.

(29)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian cultures tend to draw on interpersonal strategies, emphasizing affect. • Asian cultures tend to use non-linear, roundabout, circular rhetorical structure. • Koreans (maybe extendable to other Asians) tend to perceive verbosity as polite. • Koreans (maybe extendable to other Asians) tend to be feelers, prizing interpersonal relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English-speaking cultures tend to draw on transactional strategies, emphasizing information. • English-speaking cultures tend to use linear, straightforward, blunt rhetorical structure. • English-speakers tend to appreciate simplicity and belittle complexity and verbosity. • English-speakers tend to be thinkers, prizing transactional relationship.
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- Asian FL learners need to be aware of cultural differences in the states of affairs of English-speaking cultures and Asian cultures that shape the languages and language use.
- Cultural awareness is vital to FL learning.
- True bilingualism is impossible without the multicultural mind.

Abbreviations: BEN: benefactive; END: sentential-ending; HON: honorific; POL: polite

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