Verbal Communication

Intercultural Communication

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To start with . . .

Verbal communication, in this case, refers to the way people speak including:

- Topics of conversation
- Involvement
- Directness
- Structure
Topics of conversation

- When having a conversation, people from different countries with different cultural backgrounds will have different understanding of what topics are considered polite and impolite.
- In North America, some “safe” topics in conversation when people meet each other for the first time include family, work, school, and sports (and weather)

exp: - Do you have any brothers or sisters?
  - Where do you work?
  - What school do you go to?
  - Do you like sports?
  - Where do you come from?
  - Where do you live?
Some personal or private topics considered impolite to ask include a person’s salary, age (not to children), politics, and religion. It is also impolite to ask unmarried people “Why are you single?” or a married couple “Why don’t you have any children?”
What do you think about the following questions?

- What does your wife do?
- Do you believe in God?
- How much money do you earn?
- How many children do you have?
- Why aren’t you married?
- Do you like baseball?
- How old are you, Mr. Smith?
- Are you a Democrat or Republican?
- How much was your watch?
Involvement

• Involvement in conversation is often tricky and culturally sensitive because it may potentially cause wrong judgment and misunderstanding.

• According to Tannen (1990), in relation to involvement in conversation, there are two types of cultures, namely “high involvement” and “high considerateness.”

• People from “high-involvement cultures” like Russian, Italian, Greek, Spanish, South American, Arab, and African tend to talk more, interrupt more, expect to be interrupted, talk more loudly at times, and talk more quickly.

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Those from “high-considerateness cultures” including many Asian cultures like Chinese and Japanese often speak one at a time, use polite listening sounds, refrain from interrupting, and give plenty of positive and respectful responses to their partners.

An example: Japanese students being silent when asked during discussion.
Directness vs. Indirectness

- Talking about directness may have to do with “politeness” and often reflect cultural values (consider accepting or refusing an invitation or an offer)
- Directness here means “getting to the point”
- It can also be influenced by gender (especially in the case of requesting, criticizing, offering opinion, and expressing emotion)
- Indirectness, in some cases, can be intended to “save someone’s face”
- Directness and indirectness may be realized in different ways based on certain situations and influenced by many variables (age, closeness, gender, power relation, etc.)

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Conversational Structures

- North American way of conversing is like playing a ping-pong game
- In contrast to this is typical Japanese conversation, which is like a bowling game
- Can you figure them out?
To wrap things up . . .

• Understanding and valuing differences in the way people speak is one of the ways to avoid conflict and misjudgment.

• People from different cultural backgrounds may use different styles of conversing; consequently, the meanings they convey may also vary and culturally bound.

• “Intercultural Communication” attempts to direct YOU to be aware of differences, to be wise, and to be cleverly responsive to different cultural situations.

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References:

That's all for today...