

EIC Ch. 5, pp. 136-153

As an English major and Linguistics concentration with a Spanish minor, language is a huge interest for me. I was really interested to see what all the text would cover. I was actually surprised to see that Spanish was the 2nd most spoken language in the world. I think I was just under the impression that the Asian languages covered the first few spots. However, there are a large number of Spanish speaking countries. While I tend to gravitate towards pragmatics and semantics, I found the phonology of the vietnamese language really interesting. Their word “ma” has 6 different meanings that changed based on tone alone. I’m not sure that we have any words in English that really match this level of variation based on tone. In terms of pragmatics, language is so incredibly interesting because the literal definition of a word or sentence is sometimes completely irrelevant. One of the best examples of this is when someone in English asks if you know where something is. They are truly asking if you can tell them where that object or place is. Even if a person knew what the sentence meant, a non-native speaker may not know how to accurately answer the question. Another example is if a person mentions something about the temperature in a room, they usually are mentioning it because they want something about it to be changed- hotter/cooler. These pragmatics are aspects of a language that can be really difficult for someone to adapt to.

Verbal Communication Styles and Cultures

This was another reading that really stressed the importance of intercultural communication. I mentioned this is the last discussion board post, but the world is so incredibly science, technology, engineering, and math dominated right now. While, of

course, these fields are necessary and relevant in a technology based society, there is still a need for humanities. The rise of international business leads directly into an increased need for students who studied and have experience in intercultural communication. Language is an especially important part of this. I found the description of the Chinese essay structure to be really interesting. This circular writing style is fairly contradictory to the standard English model. While it is beneficial to the reader to provide some background info, the majority of the paper ought to be solely related to the thesis argument at hand. An American reading a Chinese essay may struggle trying to find the important details and may view the essay as having too much fluff. It can be viewed even as ineffective if the culture of the essay is not taken into consideration. There is also a high level of importance when it comes to face to face intercultural communication, whether this be socially or professionally. A person from a high context culture will be much more direct with their intentions, and it is important to recognize that as the receiver of the speech. On the other hand, it is also important to recognize how that the way you speak also needs to be taken into consideration.

Polite Lies

I really enjoyed reading this narrative. These personal insights into people's culture are really open and honest, and I have found there I can make a connection much easier to the person and the culture. Even in terms of pleasure reading, I tend to gravitate towards personal memoirs and autobiographies because of the desire to connect with someone's personal life and further connect to their story. For this author, I found it so interesting that there is such intense linguistic variety between English and Japanese. I

know the culture as a whole is expected to be fairly “demure,” but I had no idea that there were such strict rules when it came to the language. I also didn’t know that there was such extreme gendering in the language as well. While the US tends to have some rules about women and language when it comes to swearing or being overly direct, women still are breaking this mold constantly. Based on the reading, this is simply not an option in Japan. Even for children, they are not allowed to be changing the language for their personal beliefs. I would be really interested to see how an American child would adjust to this culture. I’m sure they would be considered so rude. I work as a preschool teacher, and children talk *constantly*. But, they’re kids. That’s what they are taught to do. They are taught to speak up and ask questions and be curious and inquisitive. I can’t imagine how an American child might struggle in many different cultural settings.

Hai and Lie

This reading regarding the linguistic variation of the Japanese translation of yes and no was another great example of how many languages have such a rich pragmatic aspect. I can only imagine the struggles I would have trying to remember when it is appropriate to use which version of which response. I find myself to be a very direct person, and I think that I wouldn’t be making many friends in Japan. However, this is also where the importance of studying intercultural communication comes into play. Hypothetically, if I travel for business to Japan to work with an English speaking company, I don’t need to know the Japanese language. However, there would be such value in me learning small details of the language such as Hai and Lie in order to connect better with my business

counterparts. Additionally, understanding that Japan has a fairly indirect culture will help you interact with Japanese in restaurants, at the bus station, and in the workplace.

While it may be beneficial to learn a good bit of the language, the basics of the intercultural communication can also be really important. I did think about how we have a bit of the use of *Hai* in English. When we are in a conversation or speaking to someone on the phone, we often nod or reply with “mhm” as a way to remind the other speaker that we are listening and that we are interested in this conversation. I do think that this depends on the listener though and that not everyone follows this custom.

Nobody's Son

This was another personal narrative that I enjoyed reading. I am doing my Ethnography study on Mexican culture so this was an interesting insight into the culture. As an English major, I have read a lot of books and studied a lot of literature. With a lot of African American literature, specifically that of authors who are mixed, has a heavy theme of double consciousness. This theme is echoed in this reading as well. The author truly has two identities and two cultures that he has grown up with and has struggled to connect the two. I think one of the most interesting parts about this reading is that there are so many references to the idea of the “other.” The idea of a “them” or a “they.” There is always someone on the other side. Even if the word wasn’t necessarily supposed to have a negative connotation, there is still a divide and still a separation between the people groups. Language used as a division can be really hard to overcome. Words stick with people for years and years. And, of course, the connection to the fact that so many of our words are borrowed words. Words and language can

either be a way to divide people or a way to bring cultures together. Many people know that English is a difficult language, but don't know that it has to do with the varying roots of the language. It is an undeniable fact that English has roots in cultures across the world, and it is something that ought to be brought to light more often.

Going Beyond Words

I found this reading to have the clearest definition of high context and low context communications in cultures. While I understood from the previous readings, this just had the clearest lay out for the difference between solely verbal communication vs the need for paralinguistic features. This reading also referenced a scene from *The Joy Luck Club*. I had read this novel last spring for my World Lit class. It referenced a cultural mistake one of the American husbands made with his Chinese mother in law. This book had a lot of intercultural difficulties as the mothers were all Chinese women and the daughters were all Chinese Americans. Each of the girls had these American tendencies that their mothers really struggled to understand and viewed them as rude and as though they were distancing themselves from their mothers. In reality, they had just grown up so differently from their mothers. I think this happens a lot, even cross generationally. So many people grow up in a certain way, and struggle greatly in new situations. I am currently tutoring an Italian ESL student, and I am working on figuring out the idiosyncrasies of her culture vs what may just be because of her speaking ability. When it comes to something like this, or dealing with anything cross culturally, it is really about the process of understanding. There are things each of don't understand

right now, but it matters that each of us are making an earnest effort and are open to learning and being taught.