

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

WEEK 6:
LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
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Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- ▶ Define language and intercultural communication.
- ▶ Explain the relationship between language and culture.
- ▶ Identify language barriers in intercultural communication.
- ▶ Discuss how language expresses identity and power.
- ▶ Suggest strategies for effective intercultural communication

Introduction

- ▶ Language transmits Culture
- ▶ The value of language cannot be ignored in Intercultural Competence as it is used as a tool for communication.
- ▶ Communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people create shared meanings.

Intercultural Communication

- ▶ To understand intercultural communication events, you must first study the more general processes involved in all human communication transactions.
- ▶ Intercultural Communication is a symbolic, transactional and interpretive process where individuals from different cultures exchange shared meanings.
- ▶ The shared meanings can only be expressed through language

What is Language

- ▶ The term “language” may refer to spoken and written language (verbal codes) and nonverbal codes (e.g., body movements).
- ▶ Language is a structured, symbolic system of words, signs, or gestures used to convey meaning, while communication is the broader process of exchanging this information, thoughts, and emotions.
- ▶ Language can also be seen as a way of life that includes one’s thinking and all other forms of mental activity.
- ▶ It is a tool for Communication

What is language?

- ▶ Language as a System of Communication:
- ▶ Complex Rule-Governed System:
- ▶ Meaning-Making Entity:
- ▶ Expression of Identity:
- ▶ Representation of Thought

Characteristics of Language

- ▶ Arbitrariness
- ▶ Discreetness
- ▶ Systematic
- ▶ Displacement
- ▶ Productivity
- ▶ Cultural transmission and Learnability

Components of Language

- ▶ Phonology
- ▶ Morphology
- ▶ Semantics
- ▶ Syntactics
- ▶ Pragmatics

Nature and purposes of Language

- ▶ Referential Function of Language
- ▶ Expressive Function
- ▶ Affective Function of Language
- ▶ Transmission of Culture
- ▶ Phatic Function
- ▶ Recording Function
- ▶ Identifying Function of Language
- ▶ Poetic Function

Language and Meaning relationship

Complexity

- ▶ 1. Language has two meanings
- ▶ 2. Language changes with time
- ▶ 3. The meanings of words are in people
- ▶ 4. Meanings can change depending on how a word is used in a sentence
- ▶ 5. Languages do not remain pure, they are affected by other languages around it

Language and Communication

Understanding the Relationship Between Language and Communication

1. Language is the Primary Tool of Communication
2. Communication is the Broader Process
3. Language Shapes Communication Outcomes
4. Language Reflects Culture and Influences Communication
5. Communication Without Language is Limited

Language and Culture

- ▶ **Language and culture are closely connected.** Language is the main tool people use to express ideas, beliefs, values, traditions and identity.
- ▶ Culture, on the other hand, is the shared way of life of a people, including their values, norms, customs, beliefs, symbols and practices.
- ▶ Language is a system of symbols, sounds, words, and rules used for communication. It allows people to:
 - ▶ share ideas
 - ▶ express emotions
 - ▶ preserve knowledge
 - ▶ build relationships
 - ▶ pass culture from one generation to another
- ▶ Language may be spoken, written or signed. It is not just vocabulary and grammar; it also includes tone, style, silence and context-shaped meanings.

Relationship Between Language and Culture

▶ 1. Language expresses culture

Some cultures have many respectful forms of greeting because respect for age and social status is highly valued.

▶ 2. Language preserves culture

Culture is passed from one generation to another through language. Oral traditions, stories, songs, proverbs, myths and written texts preserve the history and wisdom of a people.

3. Language shapes thought and worldview

- ▶ The language people speak influences how they see and describe reality. Different languages may focus on different aspects of life, such as relationships, time, respect or nature.

Relationship between Language and Culture

4. Culture shapes language use

- ▶ Culture determines:
- ▶ what is appropriate to say
- ▶ how to say it
- ▶ when to speak
- ▶ when to remain silent
- ▶ who may speak to whom
- ▶ how respect is shown in communication

Example:

In some cultures, children are expected to speak very respectfully to elders and in others, communication is more informal.

How Language Reflects Culture

Greetings

- ▶ Greetings differ from culture to culture and reflect cultural priorities.

Forms of address

- ▶ Language shows how people treat age, rank and status.

Politeness

- ▶ Cultures differ in what is considered polite or rude.

Proverbs and idioms

- ▶ These reflect cultural wisdom, humour and worldview.

Language as a Carrier of Cultural Values

Language communicates major cultural values such as:

Respect

- ▶ Some languages have special words or grammatical forms used to show respect.
- ▶ **Individualism or collectivism**
- ▶ Some cultures encourage personal expression, while others emphasize group harmony.

Time orientation

- ▶ Language may reflect whether a culture values punctuality, patience, tradition or future planning.

Gender roles

- ▶ In some cultures, language reflects distinctions in roles and expectations for men and women.

Functions of Language in Culture

1. Communication

- ▶ It helps people interact and understand one another.

2. Socialization

- ▶ People learn cultural norms through language from parents, teachers, peers and society.

3. Identity formation

- ▶ Language helps people identify with a group, community, tribe, nation or profession.

4. Education and transmission

- ▶ Language is used to pass on knowledge, customs and values.

5. Cultural continuity

- ▶ Language keeps culture alive over time

Language and Identity

- ▶ Language is strongly tied to identity. The way people speak may show:
- ▶ ethnic background
- ▶ nationality
- ▶ education level
- ▶ social class
- ▶ religion
- ▶ region
- ▶ age group
- ▶ Accent, vocabulary, and dialect often signal group belonging. Because of this, language can create pride and belonging, but it can also lead to exclusion or discrimination.

Language as Identity

- ▶ Language is one of the strongest markers of identity. It reveals where people come from, which groups they belong to, and how they see themselves. Accent, dialect, vocabulary choice, and even silence can communicate identity.
- ▶ A person may use one language at home, another in school, and another in the workplace. This demonstrates that language is not only about communication but also about social belonging and adaptation.

Culture and Meaning

- ▶ Words do not always mean the same thing in all cultures. Meaning is shaped by cultural context.
- ▶ **Example:**
A phrase such as “come and visit us” may be a real invitation in one culture, but just a polite expression in another.
- ▶ This is why intercultural misunderstandings can occur even when people use the same language.

Language Variation in Culture

Language exists in different forms, such as:

- ▶ dialects
- ▶ slang
- ▶ formal language
- ▶ informal language
- ▶ professional jargon
- ▶ youth language
- ▶ These variations reflect social and cultural differences within a society.

The Role of Nonverbal Communication

Culture affects not only spoken language but also nonverbal communication, such as:

- ▶ gestures
- ▶ eye contact
- ▶ facial expressions
- ▶ body posture
- ▶ tone
- ▶ silence
- ▶ personal space

Example:

Maintaining eye contact may show confidence in one culture but disrespect in another.

Language, Culture, and Intercultural Communication

In intercultural communication, people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Their language choices and interpretations are influenced by culture. Effective intercultural communication requires understanding that:

- ▶ words carry cultural meanings
- ▶ communication styles differ
- ▶ politeness rules vary
- ▶ silence may mean different things
- ▶ misunderstanding is possible unless people listen carefully and ask for clarification

Barriers Related to Language and Culture

Stereotyping

- ▶ Assuming that all people from a culture speak or behave the same way.

Ethnocentrism

- ▶ Judging other languages or communication styles using one's own culture as the standard.

Translation problems

- ▶ Some words and ideas do not translate exactly from one language to another.

Language prejudice

- ▶ Discriminating against people because of accent, dialect, or grammar.

Misinterpretation of symbols

- ▶ Gestures, humour or expressions may mean different things in different cultures.

Importance of Studying Language and Culture

Studying language and culture helps learners to:

- ▶ understand others better
- ▶ reduce prejudice
- ▶ communicate more effectively
- ▶ build intercultural competence
- ▶ appreciate diversity
- ▶ avoid conflict and misunderstanding

Examples of the Relationship Between Language and Culture

▶ Example 1: Greetings

- ▶ In many African cultures, greeting is an important sign of respect and social connection. Failing to greet properly may be seen as rude.

▶ Example 2: Respect for elders

- ▶ Some languages have polite forms used only when speaking to older people or people of higher status.

▶ Example 3: Idioms

- ▶ An idiom in one culture may not make sense in another because it is based on local experience.

▶ Example 4: Silence

- ▶ In some cultures, silence shows thoughtfulness and respect; in others, it may be seen as lack of interest.

Key Points to Remember

- ▶ Language and culture are inseparable.
- ▶ Language reflects cultural values and beliefs.
- ▶ Culture shapes how language is used and understood.
- ▶ Language preserves and transmits culture.
- ▶ Communication problems often arise when people ignore cultural meaning.
- ▶ Understanding language and culture improves intercultural communication.

Barriers to Effective Intercultural Language Use

- ▶ Many barriers interfere with understanding across cultures. These include:
- ▶ assuming everyone shares the same meaning
- ▶ using idioms and slang that others do not understand
- ▶ judging accents negatively
- ▶ stereotyping speakers
- ▶ failing to listen carefully
- ▶ interpreting another person's communication style as wrong rather than different
- ▶ These barriers can lead to misunderstanding, conflict, exclusion, and prejudice.

Improving Intercultural Communication Through Language

To improve communication across cultures, communicators should:

- ▶ speak clearly
- ▶ avoid unnecessary jargon
- ▶ show patience
- ▶ clarify meanings
- ▶ respect language differences
- ▶ listen actively
- ▶ remain open-minded
- ▶ adapt speech to the audience and setting
- ▶ Intercultural communication competence is not the absence of difference, but the ability to manage difference effectively and respectfully.

Conclusion and Lesson summary

- ▶ Language is one of the most powerful tools in intercultural communication. It can create bridges of understanding or barriers of misunderstanding.
- ▶ To communicate effectively across cultures, people must move beyond words and learn to understand the cultural meanings, identities and values behind language use.

References

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Thank you

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