

Verbal Communication

Intercultural Communication

Riesky, English Department UPI

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 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*

...

- 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.)

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.

References:

- Levine, D.R. and Adelman, M.B. 1993. *Beyond Language*. Cross-cultural communication. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.



**That's all for
today...**