

Cross-Cultural Understanding: The American Ghost

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As long as you are unable to decode the significance of ordinary things, as long as you take the signs of your culture at face value, you will continue to be mastered by them and by those who have constructed them.
(Jack Solomon 8)

ABSTRACT:

Many people who go abroad encounter features in their host culture that they may find disturbing. Reaction to these alien aspects of the new culture can dampen the entire experience in the country, resulting in various kinds of negative reactions. To adapt positively and effectively to the host culture, it is necessary to overcome the negative responses. The best way to challenge these shortcomings is to name these negative aspects, face them, and come to terms with them. But the biggest problem is that most of this dissonance derives from *non-verbal behavior*, and therefore they are mostly insidious – are very real, but difficult to grasp.

I faced this problem ten years ago when I came to the United States from Brazil. Verbal communication was not an issue, but adapting to the culture, with its non-verbal and societal indicators, was difficult and painful. Non-verbal behavior is so deeply engrained in the communicational system that it is not often explained or acknowledged by native speakers who, most of the time, are unconscious of this phenomenon. Learning another culture, developing relationships with people you meet, communicating efficiently, and adapting to the environment is a complex task.

In this paper, I want to pinpoint some of these dissonant aspects, analyze them and demonstrate that external signs and phenomena are evidence of a frame of mind. I will discuss: (1) culture learning as a concept different from to focus, (3) action and thoughtful reflection, (4) cultural topics, and, (5) cultural relativity and values. Some cultural topics will be exemplified through what our senses perceive: (a) image, (b) sound, (c) taste, (d) touch, and (e) gesture. Kinesics, proxemics and chronemics present the most difficult problems, and are responsible for a large percent of miscommunication.

Each aspect of non-verbal communication has a code or codes. These codes are signals that have to be deciphered because they point to hidden systems of cultural belief. Furthermore, they are charged with ideological significance. As Jack Solomon states in his book, *Signs of our Time*, what we call s so pervasive that we often don't realize it exists, just as we don't notice the air we breathe. sing on some non-verbal aspects of behavior, I intend to transform into words some ltire.

Introduction

As stated in the rationale of the *Virtual Symposium*, we are dealing, in these critical times, with x multimodal processesrrelation of verbal and nonverbal communication plays a key role in understanding the meaning of communicative processes as well as in changing the educational perspective, according to new needs and behaviors.

Many works have been published in the United States concerning cross-cultural behavior. How people of other cultures view the Americans, and what they notice as different, disturbing, and inappropriate has seldom been addressed. Now is a particularly sensitive moment in time. Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, the question has been raised: Why do they hate us? The answer is not about hatred, but it is especially about the American ways of doing things and their interpretations of other countries.

I will focus on the question proposed by the Symposium: options in the process of acculturation and cross-cultural communication. Communication, mainly Non-verbal, and Semiotics. My examples will show the communicational interaction between the United States and South America, mainly Brazil.

My presentation will be in five parts:

1- Problems in cross-cultural communication and Multimodality:

The American Dream/The American Ghost;

2- The issue: non-verbal misunderstanding;

3- Real life situations;

4- Making the unconscious conscious;

5- An example of a cross-cultural class.

1. Problems in cross-cultural communication and Multimodality:

The American Dream/The American Ghost

Coming to the U.S. starts with the problem of the name itself, which most of the North Americans don't realize. Therefore I used North-American and not just American. In the United States, the country is called America, everywhere else it is the U.S. After all this is a continent divided into North, Central and South. America is the appropriation of a name by the United States. The rest of the continent is sometimes called the thion. Luis Alberto Sánchez in his book Existe América Latina? says the name is not a fiction in its essential traits. But Waldo Frank opposes the designation. He says Latin America does not exist because all countries except Haiti (French influence) were colonized by Spain and Portugal, so the region south of the border should be called Hispanic America. People may live in Hispanic America and speak Romance Languages. The language comes from the Latin imposed by the Roman Empire in a land called Hispania, before it became the Iberian Peninsula. (See Queiroz 18-24).

People who come to the U.S. have a dream and a hope. Hispanics leave their Central American countries and have come to the U.S. by the hundreds (if not thousands in recent years). At the immigration center, if they have a visa, they have to declare that they are Hispanics, a different e same problem. On purpose, I fill out the specific item of the questionnaire with the word ately the customs officer changes it to ere could be nothing more distant for me than Caucasus. I am an Hispanic (Brazilian) descendant of German parents, who were Europeans. In this sense, I accept that I am a European like many Americans. U.S. is largely a Europeanized America.

I ended up in a small town, Chapel Hill, in the state of North Carolina, where I volunteered at a Health Community Center. Most of the patients are Hispanics, agricultural workers who come to harvest seasonal crops and decide to stay permanently to fulfill their eam.ow English. Soon after their arrival they discover their rights in their new country. If they have a baby in the U.S., the

child will be an American citizen and as such has all the welfare benefits. On the other hand, the 'visaless' parents cannot be deported because otherwise the child would become an orphan. Therefore they are able to stay and get at least a job permit.

The American child has to follow the country's procedures. First, s/he has to eat the right food. The nutritionist has the health pyramid lined out, sugar and fat on the tip of the pyramid, carbohydrates and milk on the bottom for that age. As a volunteer I translate. After a session of questions, the nutritionist concludes that the Mexican, Guatemalan, or Nicaraguan mother is feeding the baby in a complete unhealthy fashion, although one can see that the baby is happy, healthy and sometimes even overweight. The mother gets reprimanded and has to promise she will follow the adequate diet. Powerless, she agrees to do what is said, but practically we know the child will continue eating rsion of procedure. Cultural awareness, on both sides, could help to solve this problem. The translator, in this case, has to be an instructor and explain cross-cultural differences to both parties. Being an new country demands a great deal of adjustments, and once you have made some you become a ne step forward.

What is the uses the metaphor of the Easy Rider film. The actors, Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper, are in search of freedom, dignity, audacity and pioneering. To these features one adds the Hollywood myths of beautiful mansions in Beverly Hill or Malibu, with at least two cars in the garage in an atmosphere of splendor and glory. The dreams of the Hispanics are more modest, especially for the females. The Hispanic mothers know they will have hardship in the U.S., but they will have more food on the table and more possibilities to survive than in their home countries. The husbands will adapt with difficulty and drown their frustrations in beer in the evening or on weekends. When they come home, these women know there will be abuse and that they will have to endure and hide it from American authorities at any cost. When their children grow up, they will embrace the American way of living and reject their low-class Hispanic parents. Even so, the hope of their mothers is to wait patiently to have their American Dream fulfilled, which for them is simply to have their daughters married to an American man and be able to make a decent living. America is scary, but fear can be overcome. After some time, it becomes a somewhat *familiar ghost*.

This is a long opening for my paper, but I believe narratives speak more clearly than abstract theory. In the above cases, there is a lack of verbal and non-verbal communication. When there is a translator, s/he is always viewed as a suspicious intermediary:

- (1) It is an unknown person,
- (2) The foreigners do not know if the function is to translate or to extract and reveal information that can be used against them, and
- (3) They know that the translator in whatever case is always the 'other' and, therefore, not reliable.

A possible tactic is what Goffman (in Kendon 240) calls a t cultures concentrate on a single focus of concern and cooperate to maintain a common ground. But one might say that there was really no interaction because the input came only from one of the individuals, with an apparent acceptance of the other to meet the needs.

These foreigners teractionves according to depicted conventionalized behavior they have learned from previous participants in identical situations. They added a new modality to their previous knowledge of behavior. This does not mean that the previous form has been forgotten. It was temporarily suppressed. According to Sebeok and Danesi, ate new forms all the time to help us gain new knowledge and modify previous knowledge, by and large, we literally let our cultural symbols 'do the thinking' for most of the time

2- The issue: non-verbal misunderstanding

I want to make a distinction between a *problem* and an *issue*. Whenever there is a problem you struggle and come up with a solution, which might become a new problem. If there is an issue, there is no problem, just a clarification of a miscommunication issue. Many, if not most, cross-cultural issues deal with miscommunication through non-verbal modalities. In cross-cultural communication there will always be miscommunication. In this case, there is no solution, but we can work from theories, situations, etc. and devise tactics and other strategies to deal with ongoing situations. Solutions would only be disguising a new problem.

As a theoretical example, issues of *cultural orientation*, *perception*, *values*, and *culture shock* provide an adequate insight.

Cultural orientation

A migrant or any foreigner who comes to the U.S. needs a *cultural orientation*. The individual has to be provided with a model for understanding and predicting the results of intercultural encounters. What can this model do? It can make the newcomer aware of how the other culture speaks, acts, negotiates and makes decisions. This does not mean that it is intended for the newcomer to learn how to imitate the native, it is only a survival device. In Rome the Romans do not have a cultural accent or flaw.

A cultural orientation model helps to organize and process information:

(1) Once information is given, the receptor can choose to accept or ignore it. It depends if s/he is open-minded or close-minded. The open-minded person wants to know more before making a decision, the closed-minded tends to have a *preconception*. Most cultures are closed-minded. They think what they know is best (Morrison x-xi);

(2) Information processing can be done by association or abstractly. By associating, the individual compares the new information with a previous experience. By thinking abstractly, the individual is able to extrapolate and deal with a new situation with a different insight.

In organizing and in processing information, it is advisable for the instructor to follow three steps. S/he can deal with:

- (a) Cultural knowledge,
- (b) Focal knowledge,
- (c) Strategic knowledge.

The instructor should make sure the learner has the cultural knowledge to deal with the information. Cultural knowledge varies within a community, but there are some shared characteristics that are shared worldview (Encyclopedia of Semiotics 157). In the focal knowledge, s/he has to be aware of the situation. The knowledge has to be put into a specific content to transform it into focal knowledge, so that it can be dealt with strategically. Strategic knowledge is the awareness of changing circumstances and a deliberate calculation of appropriate responses (Encyclopedia 158, also see 159-160).

Perception

Communication takes place both at the interpersonal-intercultural levels and at the collective cross-cultural levels. Communication is only possible through the perception of signs. For the features of communication to become meaningful, they have to be perceived as signs. What we perceive in the act of perception is the percept, which is directly perceived in the perceptual act. According to Peirce, the percept comprises sensory and qualitative elements that are unconscious because it is mentally constructed. The percept:

- (1) contributes to something positive,
- (2) obliges the perceiver to acknowledge it, and
- (3) furnishes no reason or pretext for such an acknowledgement, even though there is no way of avoiding it (Peirce 7.618).

When we go to another country, the elements of our identity, and our points of stability are threatened. They are undermined by foreign percepts. These elements, however, are not foreign. We are the foreigners, because we have left everything familiar behind. Emotions are provoked, and we respond to these feelings. Our perception will then have gathered enough percepts to try to interpret them, but the problem is that our perceptions are filtered through the vision and experience of the host country. Thus, there is an individual perception and an interpretation. This interpretation is reinterpreted by the other culture which provides a preconceived roster of

Values

Next to perception, value is the most meaningful element in the process of communication. The principal value of any culture is survival. The process of cultural growth implies struggle, a relative disorder. Value is a logical construct comparable to culture. One cannot observe a value in operation. However, behaviors can be observed and they reveal either acceptance (if it can be justified morally, by reasoning, or on the basis of aesthetic statements), or desirability (understood in normative terms that imply opposing dichotomies such as right/wrong, like/dislike, can/must, or by selection (choice of alternatives). Value differences can cause miscommunication, especially when each party feels strongly enough about its own values and neglects or refuses to value somebody else's. A trivial misunderstanding leads to a negative image that leads to social isolation, ending up in a non-communication. There is the he blind leading the blind a situation, it is necessary to separate:

- (a) one's actual observation from one's interpretation,
- (b) the concrete facts from the abstract generalization made on the basis of information, and
- (c) objective situations from subjective states.

In other words, one must separate the facts from interpretation and conclusions, otherwise, there will be conflict, dissonance and disorientation known as hock.untering ways of doing, organizing, perceiving, or valuing things which are different from their own and *threaten* the basic, unconscious belief that the encultured customs, assumptions, values and behaviors are rightKohls 63-68).

Culture shock

Culture shock is not sudden but rather cumulative. It results from a lack of verbal and non-verbal communication. Cultural differences are a function of assumptions and expectations. A message is decoded erroneously. In this kind of communication, there is a major premise (an assumption) and a minor premise (the information) and the conclusion will be the obstacle instead of the adequate transmission of the message. There is a syllogistic process in detecting the meaning inherent in such situations: mptions which act as the context for interpreting the manner of the overt message. This silent assumption is the major premise. The message is the minor premise and the meaning is the conclusion of the syllogism. In a sense, the message is the raw material for the interpretation by the receiver. The interpretation depends upon the silent assumptions which remain unexpressed either because they are unconscious or because the communicators assume them to be self-evident and universally understood, therefore not needing to be expressed: taken for granted in the situation the dialogue takes place

Let us start with an example:

Issue: Friendship/acquaintance

The apparent openness of the U.S. people, when introducing themselves, leads to an expectation which is eventually frustrated. At first sight, there is a friendly behavior, and the next time s/he might say not even this, and walk away. The Latino and Brazilian reaction is astonishment. The misunderstanding derives from two factors:

- (a) U.S. citizens tend to be friendly and kind when introduced,
- (b) The necessity (demand) for friendship and socialization is not among their priorities.

Brazilians in their country will always act in a friendly and kind manner, and will talk to you even if they are late for an appointment. Socialization is a priority for them, so when saying farewell there is the habit of inviting you to come over to their place with the expression *apareçam* (show up). But this does not really mean that you are invited. The boundaries between acquaintance and friendship are precise in the U.S., but they are blurred in Brazil. Therefore, U.S. friendliness is often mistaken and interpreted as friendship.

The tactic is to touch the issue, show a situation, describe it, and come up with possible tactics. But, last and not least, try to *make the unconscious conscious*.

Let us analyze other situations in more details. I have mentioned my own story. Now I would like to share the tragic experience of the Lee family and a positive outlook on some selected examples on doing business abroad.

3- Real life situations

The Lee family

Anne Fadiman in her book The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down narrates the struggle of a Hmong child, her American doctors, and the collision of two cultures (sub-title of the book). The Hmong are people inhabiting the mountainous regions of southern China and adjacent areas. The Lees are a refugee family from Laos. Their daughter Lia has been diagnosed with a severe case of epilepsy. The family takes her to a small county hospital in 1982 in Merced, California. Both parents and doctors want to do what is best for her, but their cultural perspective and understanding of the American doctors treat her according to the system they were educated in. The welfare bureaucracy and the medical technocracy is contrary to the ancient spiritual traditions of the Laos people. In this vast cultural gap, doctors could not give appropriate meaning to the symptoms they detected. The doctors called it a seizure. In fact, two cultures collided, to the accompaniment of squeaking brakes and breaking glass.

Lia's soul had gone through the *hu plig* ceremony—installation of the soul—but when Lia was three months old, her sister Yer slammed the door. The noise made by the door made her soul, instead of installing itself, flee her body and it got lost. The resulting symptoms are called *gaug dab peg*, which means seizure, a privilege, because their child was special. So this was not perceived by them as a medical problem, but as a blessing. It meant that the child would have shamanic powers when she grew up. She would become a *txiv neeb*. The seizures were spirits in her. The Greeks had already called epilepsy *epilepsia* to take this divine aspect of the disease away. It could be divine, but it was a disease, and therefore it had a cause.

In spite of the beliefs, the parents took her to the hospital to stop or attenuate the seizures. When they went for the first time to the hospital, there was no translator and nobody had ever dealt with that language and culture. Lia's symptoms were cough and a congested chest. According to the radiologist she had pneumonia or tracheobronchitis.

Lia's family performed a healing ceremony with the sacrifice of a pig and chicken. But Lia was

not cured and the soul did not come back. The doctor's failed because the medicine had not been administered correctly. The Lees, Lia's parents, could not read. They did not blame the doctors, but were sad because her soul had not returned. America was a *ghostly* experience for them. For 'others,' United States is as strange as any other foreign country.

Knowledge had been taken for granted by the doctors. Fademan says, from the vaunted American ideal of assimilation, in which immigrants are expected to submerge their cultural differences in order to embrace a shared national identity, for the family's difficulties was the fact that the Lees were really *resist* assimilations not to lose their Hmong ethnicity, but to save it because it had been threatened in China. Migration had not been their choice. It was a way of survival, so the Lees can be called

The preservation of the Hmong culture was possible for one generation. They continued eating hot soup with vegetable, rice and some meat, and speak Hmong, whereas their children already savor a hamburger, and can speak English.

This narrative invites reflection on several concepts referring to cross-cultural differences and on what can be done to avoid misperceptions and misunderstandings in similar situations. Whose fault was it? Nobody's and everybody's. We might judge any behavior from a self-centered perspective, taking into consideration values and beliefs entangled with our origin, education, professional experience and social environment. Distancing oneself and observing the process may allow us to analyze from a less judgmental point-of-view and contribute to the human oneness of this world.

If the Lees had had introductory education, it would have been their responsibility to stop the doctor. They were asking for verbalization. But verbalization cannot take place without translation, in this case. They acted on non-verbal confusion, which cannot be done until the verbal is cleared up. Confusion prevailed and misunderstanding took center stage.

Doing business in cross-cultural communication

In cross-cultural understanding, education plays a main role. In the case of Hispanics, they are sometimes illiterates in their own language. Coming to the U.S., not being able to understand, makes them silent people. This muteness is often misinterpreted and judged.

A very different situation from the previous ones is cross-cultural understanding when doing business. People dealing in this setting are aware of the necessity to have skills to meet foreign demands as to perception, orientation and good will from both sides.

I am going to concentrate here on the cultural differences between the U.S. and Brazilians. A historical background shows that from the time of discovery the roots of these cultures have been very different and, as a consequence, the system of symbols, values and meanings operative within them could not be more diverse. Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese, who came to Brazil not to build a new life, but to plunder the land and extract from it natural values such as wood and precious stones. The first inhabitants were adventurers, thieves, marginal people in society, who lived according to circumstances and on whatever life had to offer on a daily basis. Some U.S. citizens descend from the Puritans, who had a temperance and self-denial. They believed that and spiritual grace were intimately related (177). These beliefs created a certain lifestyle that allowed them to take advantage of the opportunities for economic development, leading to the Industrial Revolution at the end of the nineteenth century.

The culture of the two countries developed in different directions. By culture, I basically mean the body of knowledge concerning appropriate and inappropriate patterns of thought and behavior of a group. If we compare the two cultures, we will see two different kinds of organizational systems. To access them, one can take into account either an exchange value which measures cultural

products of dissimilar nature or a comparative value in which cultural products of a similar nature are measured (Rector 1986: 188). Culture is communication within a system of structured significations. According to Eco *should* be studied as a communicative phenomenon based on signification systems (Eco 1976: 22).

Both culture and communication have to be taken into account when dealing with the three major forms of doing business:

- (1) contact during a short trip,
- (2) establishing relationship to build up a business, and
- (3) moving to another country.

All three procedures demand orientation, which is the adjustment or adaptation to a new environment, situation, customs and set of ideas. These procedures also demand individual awareness of the objective world in its relation to the self. It is a mistake to take for granted that adjustment will come with time. As this is not the case, many companies doing successful business give their employees some type of orientation before going abroad.[1] In order to prosper, new or growing enterprises require a special combination of business, marketing, legal and regulatory, cultural skills and knowledge. Businessmen learn how to avoid some of the basic mistakes, which are pointed out by the American Department of Commerce for export. These mistakes include:

- (1) lack of qualified consultancy for creating export and lack of an international marketing plan for starting the operation,
- (2) insufficient care in the selection of foreign distributors,
- (3) difficulty of dealing with international distributors on the same basis as with domestic distributors, and
- (4) lack of available service or maintenance of the product.

The issue becomes more complicated once the business is established, and people are sent abroad to take care of it. It is not only a question of the businessman adapting to the new working environment, but also the adaptation of the family to the new living conditions. Families often break up due to lack of awareness of the foreign reality and to their attempt to impose their home values onto the new environment. The result is excessive stress.[2] Several enterprises help companies to deal with this issue.[3] Recognizing the complexity of the changing world marketplace, these enterprises deal with the increase of intercultural business effectiveness through individualized cross-cultural training, language practice, and worldwide assistance in logistics.

Seven crucial steps in the process of cross-cultural adjustment can be considered:

- (1) pre-departure anxiety,
- (2) fascination on arrival,
- (3) initial culture shock (two or four months after arrival, when the exotic becomes commonplace),
- (4) surface adjustment (when they learn how to function, about six months after their arrival),
- (5) mental isolation (when homesickness sets in),
- (6) integration and acceptance (when acculturation takes place, but homegrown values are still retained—these will always be interfering in one way or another), and
- (7) return anxiety (the same process as before going overseas re-emerges).

What are the strategies to be successful in this process? To begin with, trying to know the self, which implies a self-concept, a self-acceptance, a self-disclosure and a self-monitoring procedure. Every individual has a self-evaluation and a self-appraisal. As a consequence there is a self-acceptance, by being satisfied with oneself, with one's virtues, vices, and with one's abilities and limitations. There also comes a time for self-disclosure, that is, a process of revealing something significant about oneself to another individual or to a group, something that would not normally be known to

them. In this case, there might be a bias that operates in the self-attribution process and leads one to take credit for positive consequences and to deny responsibility for the negative consequences of self-behavior. Finally, one has to convey a strong self-image to others in interpersonal interactions in order to give the most favorable impression.

The self does not exist as a perceived as an organizing, structuring process. Knowledge develops by the individual's practical involvement with the world and his or her interpretation of information about himself or herself obtained from other people selves:

- (1) the perception of actual attributes of the self,
- (2) the perception of ideal attributes, and
- (3) the perception of attributes one ought to possess.

According to Noonan, the identity of the self can be discussed from a simple view, which holds that a person exists as a separate entity and that personal identity cannot be analyzed. It can also be discussed from a more complex view that personal identity consists of observable onan 116).

These facts are in most cases expressed through a symbolic form. Klapp argues that:

[...] there is a disturbance of symbolic balance behind the identity problem of modern times, because people fail to pay attention to symbols. [...] If symbols are disturbed, meanings are disturbed. And if meanings are disturbed, then the entire human being is disturbed. When symbols are disturbed to the extent that they no longer give reliable reference points, then society fails to supply an adequate basis to the construction of identity. Reference points help people locate themselves socially, realize themselves sentimentally and declare who they are. (Rota 9)[4]

4- Making the unconscious conscious

The three elements of misunderstanding are *verbal (linguistic)*, *vocal (paralinguistic)* and *non-verbal*. The verbal is conscious because we hear what we say, the other two signs are unconscious therefore a major issue in cross-cultural misunderstanding.

(a) One of the disturbing verbal features is the foreign *accent*. What do advise? Forget it. As long as people can understand you, don't feel uncomfortable. On the contrary, use it as an advantage for asking for help or explanation. Feeling uncomfortable as a foreigner is another issue.

(b) Two of the vocal elements that can be misinterpreted is the *loudness (pitch of voice)* and *overlapping*.

Pitch of voice

Latinos and Brazilians in general tend to use a higher pitch of voice, which is interpreted by Americans as speaking too loud or shouting. Comments such as you screaming at me don't raise their voice when speaking in public whereas in most of the Latin countries people speak louder, which is perceived by Americans as tied as showing lack of education. Albert states that Latinos/Latinas can be considered Dionysian, that is, very expressive of their emotions. They are perceived to speak louder and more than Anglo-Americans...

Overlapping

Latinos and Brazilians in their conversation overlap when speaking. This is considered a rican wait for people to finish their sentence and thought before answering or giving further input. Americans take their turn, the other party only starts speaking when the previous is finished. This is misinterpreted as rude, uneducated, and bothersome, depending on the receiver. In both cases, we

suggest to bring the issues to awareness. Ask the foreigner to lower the voice and to speak.

(c) The main aspect of communication that interferes in establishing a satisfactory relationship is non-verbal communication. We can hear our voice and make adjustments, but we cannot see our body, what it does, and how it communicates. The non-verbal aspect of cross-cultural behavior includes the following senses: (1) sight (visual signs), (2) hearing (auditory signs), (3) gestures (kinetics) and touch (haptics), (4) smell (olfactory signs), and (5) taste (gustatory signs). These senses interact with time (chronemics) and space (proxemics). The interrelation of verbal and nonverbal communication plays a key role in understanding the meaning of communicative processes.

I am only going to give a few examples of the aspects mentioned above.

Sight: eye contact

In the U.S. you face a person when interacting, yet when you are walking in the streets you would not touch people, because that would be interpreted as. In Latin American cultures have high contact communication. When walking in the streets, people tend to look at a passer-by with no second intention to this act. Therefore, when I first arrived in the U.S., in a small town, and I reacted by me as

Time

Time is a major issue for U.S. business people. Money, *directly* to your goal. *Directness* is an American trait, often interpreted negatively by foreigners. It is mistaken for lack of sociability, and rudeness. Making money is different in Brazil. The rule tends to be: first socialize and then do business. Therefore, a business breakfast would never function in Brazil. A business lunch sometimes exasperates foreigners, because during the meal the conversation might deal with everything but business. The meal was just an introduction for business which will take place later on, in the perception of Brazilian businessmen.

Chronemics shows that time can be a cultural value. There is a *scientific* time accepted as a universal value (the hour has sixty minutes). This kind of time breaks culture into centuries, seasons, months and minutes. Then there is a *technical* time, a precise way of measuring time established by a group of people, which is non-emotional, logical and conscious. This formal time considers the way a culture chooses to order events, the cycles it recognizes and, the concept of duration. A meeting starts at 2 p.m., lasts one hour, and then there is a 15 minute coffee-break. The same way the order is established, it can be changed according to the groups' decision. But there is an informal time, an unconscious way each culture perceives time. This is the *cultural* time. Words such as a minute?

Informal time includes punctuality. U.S. citizens accustomed to punctuality respond negatively to the South-American pattern of non-punctuality. The reason is that in the U.S. punctuality is a fixed value, whereas in South-American countries it is a displaced value. Life is not precise, so circumstances are taken into account. To arrive fifteen minutes late is acceptable. In fact, it is not considered late, but just a displacement of the initial time. Therefore, U.S. businessmen should not be upset if the date of a deadline is met a couple of days later. It is not a lack of efficiency, it is a different time value. Americans will be pleased (or maybe not) to go to a party, where the invitation states the starting time, but not the ending (it will finish whenever the last guest leaves). The relativity of time is responsible for quality in lifestyle, and a lot of the rigidity in U.S. time is interpreted as pressure by other countries. Furthermore, Albert says that: significant for those interacting with Latino/as, they tend to be polychronic [...] in their orientation towards time use, that is they focus more on relationships and less on schedules than Anglo-Americans

Being on time was a *ghostly* feature for me. When teaching in Brazil, the students and the teacher can arrive up to 15 minutes after the class started. In my first semester in the U.S. I used this procedure. It was surprised when in the evaluation sheet at the end of the semester several students marked that ntal chair had to explain it to me because it is a value that is not expressed, it is implicit and part of the cultural commonsense knowledge in the U.S.

5- An example of cross-cultural class

In most teaching situations the professor preaches, and the students listen. The professor is the subject, the students are the object. In the twenty-first century, this kind of transmission of information is not effective anymore. Students go to the internet and interact with the system. Students have to interact with their teacher. They are in fact the subject of learning. How do they know they know? Only by doing so. Research on learning shows that unidirectional communication is not as effective as dialogue.

I have been giving teraction. Below is an example of a hand-out that exemplifies one possibility on how to proceed. Generally, I teach students going abroad.[5] I focus on interaction, which can only be done through dialogue. I divide the students in pairs or in smaller groups. Open questions are made one at a time (focused interaction). I call these learning tasks. Students share some of their answers. Cultural orientation is provided, by using description, and prescription—a model to organize and process that specific information. Once the unconscious is brought to consciousness, the theory is added to the issue. Feelings are also emphasized. How do you feel about this issuen allows values to surface. Last but not least, s moree.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND BRAZIL

INTRODUCTION

Our objective is:

- to identify experiences with cross-cultural differences;
- to define cultural verbal, vocal and non-verbal differences;
- to discuss behavior and its boundaries;
- to notice differences in perception and values;
- to become aware of culture and communication when doing business;
- to have a better understanding of cross-cultural communication.

LEARNING TASK # 1

a. How many have been to a Portuguese speaking country? Spanish? Abroad?
What differences have you noticed?

Theory

Language: *lingua/linguagem*

Differences can be verbal, vocal and non-verbal

Verbal: accent
Vocal: overlapping
Non-verbal: gestures

Differences in using senses

Vision: eye contact, gaze
Hearing: loudness, pitch of voice
Touch: closeness, bumping into each other
Taste: food
Smell
Main differences at arrival: sound and smell

b. Tell which of the above you find more difficult to deal with?

LEARNING TASK # 2

a. Consider this situation:

You are in a hurry, you have only 30 minutes; the person arrives 10 minutes late. How would you feel?

b. Even being late, he wants to have a coffee first and chat about the football game last Sunday. What would you do?

Different concepts

Time: punctuality, early/late, *um momentinho*, *um instantinho*)

Space: home/street, privacy

Rules: yes/no, perhaps, direct/indirectness

Relationship: boundaries (*macho*, *mulata*, racial issues), friendship/acquaintance

LEARNING TASK # 3

a. Consider this situation:

You go to a party. Something embarrassing happens. Share your experience. Tell us how you felt and what you would you change if a similar situation came up.

Habits

Eating: meals (time), drinking coffee and tea (*cafézinho*), eating in public, drinking from the bottle, calling the waiter, tipping, alcohol/smoking, gifts when invited, favors.

Driving and parking.

Dress code: at work, parties and at the beach, fashion and body conscious.

LEARNING TASK # 4

Greeting

Long names, informality

Doctor = doutor,

Senhor, senhora, madame

Como vai?
Vou bem, obrigado/a.
E você? E o senhor? Vou bem, também. Obrigado.
E a senhora?
Mais ou menos.
Adeus. Até logo

a. Greet your colleague.

Gestures

[Performing gestures]

Como vai? Oi.

Adeus. Até logo.

Cumprimento

Sim, positivo

Não, negativo

Mais ou menos

Tanto faz

Não sei

Rápido

Boa sorte (fazer figa)

O.K.

Dar uma banana

b. Greet your colleague using gestures.

Summary

Inadequate communication comes from:

Linguistic insufficiency, insecurity, lack of knowledge, pressures, identification issues.

Be relaxed. Get used to creativity and improvisation. When in doubt ask.

Chaos is but a new order.

Conclusions

As I stated in the beginning, cross-cultural communication is not a problem, but an issue.

Therefore, no solution is given, only tactics, suggestions and possibilities of behavioral changes.

Some of the conclusions are:

- make the unconscious become conscious;
- explain the meaning of vocal signs;
- make newcomers aware of the significance of non-verbal signs;
- celebrate clarity over confusion.

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[1] Many years ago, I had the opportunity to work as a consultant for Contact Marketing International in Washington D.C.

[2] This also happens with graduate students who go abroad as a couple. While they are studying, or at least one member of the family is getting a degree, they return to their country they often get a divorce

[3] International Orientation Resources, Illinois.

[4] Klapp believes that the U.S. suffers from the people to create meaningful symbols.

[5] This class was given January 2002 at the Kellogg School of Management, Evanston, Illinois, to a group of business students going to Brazil. I had two hours for my teaching.