Language and Culture:
A Comparative Study

语言文化比较研究

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前　言

　　回首人类的历史进程,不难发现不同国家和地区的有着不同文化背景的人们寻求相互之间的了解乃至理解的过程从未停歇过。从我国来看,自西学东渐和新文化运动,尤其是改革开放以来,跨文化交际由于政治、经济、科教等方面的现实需要而日趋频繁和重要。进入二十一世纪以来,"地球村"这一概念更是深入人心,不管有心还是无意,多数人都被卷入滚滚的全球化浪潮之中。跨文化交际成为许多人日常生活的现实部分。了解跨文化交际活动也具有了前所未有的现实性和迫切性。

　　尤其对于经常涉及跨文化交际的外语学习者来讲,了解中西文化,是语言学习必修的一部分。语言是文化的载体,更是文化的一部分,语言中处处显示着文化的影响,文化中处处渗透着语言现象。因而,学习一门语言,从一定意义上来讲,就是在接触一种崭新的文化,不了解这种语言背后的文化,就难以或者不可能掌握这门外语。

　　高等学校英语专业教学大纲也明确指出:英语学习包括学习语言知识和相关专业知识。要注重扩大学生的知识面,增强对文化差异的敏感性,提高综合运用英语进行交际的能力。专业学习包括文学课程、语言学课程和相关文化课程三个板块。社会文化课程的目的在于使学生了解英语国家的历史、地理、社会、经济、政治、教育等方面的情况及其文化传统,提高学生对文化差异的敏感性、宽容性和处理文化差异的灵活性,培养学生跨文化交际能力。

　　正是出于以上考虑,我们编写了这本中西语言文化对比的入门性教材,以期使语言学习者在学习本教材之后能够对中西语言文化的多方面有一个初步认识,培养文化差异意识,进而为语言的高级学习打下良好的文化基础,提高跨文化交际的实际能力。

　　在本书的编写过程中,我们认真学习、借鉴并批判吸收了大量国内外同类教材的长处,结合我们的教学心得,探索在全面和深入、通俗性和学术性之间找到一个平衡点,力求做到以浅近平实的文字说清较为复杂的学术问题。本书适用于英语专业本科高年级学生的教学使用,或非英语专业学生选修,同时也可作为广大英语学习者和各类涉外工作人员的参考书。

本书的一个特点是在每一章节的起首都先给读者留出一些启发性的思考问题，使读者带着问题有针对性地阅读和学习，以求提高学习的效率。另外有些章节还精心选择了一些典型的实例分析，使读者在理论学习之后，应用于实践，一方面可以有利于对理论的消化吸收，一方面可以学以致用。每章末还给有需要和有能力的读者提供了进一步阅读、学习和思考的问题，以求对本领域达到更全面和深入的了解和认识。

　　在编写过程中，许多同仁对此书的编写给予热情支持和建议。值此书付梓之际，我们真诚感谢所有在本书编写和出版过程中给予关怀、帮助和支持的同仁和部门。

　　尽管我们在编写过程中慎之又慎，力求精准和完善，限于编者水平，书中疏漏、不妥乃至谬误之处仍在所难免，在此我们真挚地期待广大同行和读者不吝提出宝贵的意见和建议。

作　者
2007 年 7 月

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Unit 1 Introduction:
The Era of Intercultural Communication

He who knows himself and others will also recognize that East and West cannot be separated.

———Wolfgang Geothe

A Journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.

———Lao Tze

Warming-up Questions
1. Why do we say that the world is a global village today?
2. Is intercultural communication part of our life today?

The world seems to be shrinking. We have increased our mobility until distances no longer matter. We can take a jet plane and be anywhere within hours. No place, however remote, can escape us. Even the moon is within our range of travel. We have become a mobile society. This mobility places us in contact with people from other cultures. And when we meet, we need to communicate. This communicative behavior is called intercultural communication. It occurs whenever a message sender is a member of one culture and a message receiver is of another.

One of the ways in which we could describe the phenomena of intercultural communication happening everywhere would be to call them an example of global culture. By this we mean that the event was not one to be contacted in just one local or national culture but across all cultures. McLuhan (1962) characterized today's world as a "global village" because of the rapid expansion of worldwide transportation and communication networks. We can now board a

plane and fly anywhere in the world in a matter of hours. Communication satellites, sophisticated television transmission equipment, mobile phones and the World Wide Web now allow people throughout the world to share information and ideas at the same time. It is now possible for a person in one country to communicate with a person in another country within seconds.

We are living in a time of a continuously accelerating knowledge revolution. This has resulted in shorter time periods between major impacting technological inventions. In less than a single lifetime, jet aircraft, televisions, transistor radios, hand-held calculators, cellular phones, computers, and the Internet have appeared and radically changed our lives. Rapid, inexpensive global communication and travel are a reality. On the down side, information overdose is now a common problem. People in many nations have 24 hour access to news and entertainment in many forms and vast databases of information are as close as the nearest desktop computer.

The rate of globalization accelerated during the past decades. Major contributing factors in making the world a smaller place were the spread of Internet and email access as well as massive international travel. Every year, millions of people travel to other countries on business trips or visit other parts of the world as tourists. Frequent international travel is by no means limited to one nation. It has become common for people in the industrialized parts of the world. Moreover, images, values, and tastes from the Western World are now flooding virtually into all nations via television and movies.

When we list the benefits of these developing communication links in the examples provided above, there may also be other aspects that may worry or concern us. People all over the world are faced with the same environmental issues, such as pollution or AIDS, which affect all cultures. It has become clear that pollution or disease does not observe geographic and cultural boundaries. Nations are beginning to realize that we must work together to solve these problems or face common disaster.

Also, as the population of the world has increased, it has become more difficult to remain detached and isolated from global tensions and conflicts. When people of different nationalities and ethnic origins, who frequently speak different languages and hold different convictions, attempt to work and live together, conflicts can easily arise.

Sometimes, we find intercultural communication difficult. Even if we overcome the natural barriers of language differences, we may fail to understand and to be understood. Misunderstanding may even become the rule rather than the exception. If we are unaware of this significant role culture plays in communication, we may place the blame for communication failure on those "other people". This is unfortunate because our problem is really culture and the difficulty of communicating across cultural boundaries.

We choose to study language and culture because culture plays a very important role in our communication and because often as we go about our daily lives we do things and think things almost automatically—without perhaps having the time to analyze or evaluate fully some of the foundations for our thoughts and actions. We hope to demonstrate how these elements of culture and language phenomena are, not only to our understanding of our own lives but also to the understanding across the globe.

1   Culture

The word culture has many different meanings. For some it refers to an appreciation of good literature, music, art, and food. For a biologist, it is likely to be a colony of bacteria or other microorganisms growing in a nutrient medium in a laboratory dish. However, for anthropologists and other behavioral scientists, culture is the full range of learned human behavior patterns. The term was first used in this way by the pioneer English Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in his book, *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871. Tylor said that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Since Tylor's time, the concept of culture has become the central focus of anthropology.

Culture is a powerful human tool for survival, but it is a fragile phenomenon. It is constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds. Our written languages, governments, buildings, and other man-made things are merely the products of culture. For this reason, archaeologists can not dig up culture directly in their excavations. The broken pots and other

artifacts of ancient people that they uncover are only material remains that reflect cultural patterns—they are things that were made and used through cultural knowledge and skills.

There are very likely three layers or levels of culture that are part of our learned behavior patterns and perceptions. Most obviously is the body of cultural traditions that distinguish our specific society. When people speak of Italian, or Japanese culture, they are referring to the shared language, traditions, and beliefs that set each of these peoples apart from others. In most cases, those who share your culture do so because they acquired it as they were raised by parents and other family members who have it.

The second layer of culture that may be part of our identity is a sub-culture. In complex, diverse societies in which people have come from many different parts of the world, they often retain much of their original cultural traditions. As a result, they are likely to be part of an identifiable sub-culture in their new society. The shared cultural traits of sub-cultures set them apart from the rest of their society. Examples of easily identifiable sub-cultures in the United States include ethnic groups such as Chinese Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans. Members of each of these sub-cultures share a common identity, food tradition, dialect or language, and other cultural traits that come from their common ancestral background and experience. As the cultural differences between members of a sub-culture and the dominant national culture blur and eventually disappear, the sub-culture ceases to exist except as a group of people who claim a common ancestry. That is generally the case with minority Americans in the United States today. Most of them identify themselves as Americans first. They also see themselves as being part of the cultural mainstream of the nation.

The third layer of culture consists of cultural universals. These are learned behavior patterns that are shared by all of humanity collectively. No matter where people live in the world, they share these universal traits. Examples of such "human cultural" traits include:

☆ Communicating with a verbal language consisting of a limited set of sounds and grammatical rules for constructing sentences.

☆ Using age and gender to classify people (e. g. , teenager, senior citizen, woman, man).

☆ Classifying people based on marriage and descent relationships and having kinship terms to refer to them (e. g. , wife, mother, uncle, cousin).

☆ Raising children in some sort of family setting.

☆ Having a sexual division of labor (e. g. , men's work versus women's work).

☆ Having a concept of privacy.

☆ Having rules to regulate behaviors.

☆ Distinguishing between good and bad behaviors.

☆ Having some sort of body ornamentation.

☆ Having entertainments.

☆ Having some sort of leadership roles for the implementation of community decisions.

While all cultures have these and possibly hundreds of other universal traits, different cultures have developed their own specific ways of carrying out or expressing them.

(1) Culture is an adaptive mechanism

Culture has been a highly successful adaptive mechanism for our species. Over the last several hundred thousand years, we have developed new survival related cultural skills and technologies at a faster rate than natural selection could alter our bodies to adapt to the environmental challenges that confronted us. The fact that cultural evolution can occur faster than biological evolution has significantly altered the effect of natural selection on humans. One consequence of this has been that our bodies have essentially remained those of warm climate animals. We have not needed to develop thick fat layers and heavy fur coats in the cold regions because our culture provided the necessary warmth during winter times.

(2) Culture is learned

Human infants come into the world with basic drives such as hunger and thirst, but they do not possess instinctive patterns of behavior to satisfy them. Likewise, they are without any cultural knowledge. However, they are genetically predisposed to rapidly learn language and other cultural traits. New born humans are amazing learning machines. Any normal baby can be placed into any family on earth and grow up to learn their culture and accept it as his or her own. Since culture is non-instinctive, we are not genetically

programmed to learn a particular one.

Every human generation potentially can discover new things and invent better technologies. The new cultural skills and knowledge are added onto what was learned in previous generations. As a result, culture is cumulative. Due to this cumulative effect, most high school students today are now familiar with mathematical insights and solutions that ancient Greeks such as Archimedes and Pythagoras struggled their lives to discover.

Cultural evolution is due to the cumulative effect of culture. We now understand that the time between major cultural inventions has become steadily shorter, especially since the invention of agriculture 8,000~10,000 years ago. The progressively larger human population after that time was very likely both a consequence and a cause of accelerating culture growth. The more people there are, the more likely new ideas and information will accumulate. If those ideas result in a larger, more secure food supplies, the population will inevitably grow. In a sense, culture has been the human solution to surviving, but it has continuously compounded the problem by making it possible for more humans to survive. In other words, human cultural evolution can be seen as solving a problem that causes the same problem again. The ultimate cost of success of cultural technology has been a need to produce more and more food for more and more people.

(3) Cultures change

All cultural knowledge does not perpetually accumulate. At the same time that new cultural traits are added, some old ones are lost because they are no longer useful. For example, most city dwellers today do not have or need the skills required for survival in a wilderness. Most would very likely starve to death because they do not know how to acquire wild foods and survive the extremes of weather. What is more important in modern urban life are such things as the ability to drive a car, use a computer, and understand how to obtain food in a supermarket or restaurant.

The regular addition and subtraction of cultural traits results in culture change. All cultures change over time—none is static. However, the rate of change and the aspects of culture that change varies from society to society. For instance, people in Germany generally seem eager to adopt new words from other languages, especially from American English, while many French

people are resistant to it because of the threat of "corrupting" their own language. However, the French are just as eager as the Germans to adopt new technology.

Change can occur as a result of both invention within a society as well as the diffusion of cultural traits from one society to another. Predicting whether a society will adopt new cultural traits or abandon others is complicated by the fact that the various aspects of a culture are closely interwoven into a complex pattern. Changing one trait will have an impact on other traits because they are functionally interconnected. As a result, there commonly is a resistance to major changes. For example, many men in North America and Europe resisted the increase in economic and political opportunities for women over the last century because of the far ranging consequences. It inevitably changed the nature of marriage, the family, and the lives of all men. It also significantly altered the workplace as well as the legal system and the decisions made by governments.

(4) Cultural behaviour is unconscious

The way that we interact and do things in our everyday lives seems "natural" to us. We are unaware of our culture because we are so close to it and know it so well. For most people, it is as if their learned behavior was biologically inherited. It is usually only when they come into contact with people from another culture that they become aware that their patterns of behavior are not universal.

The common response in all societies to other cultures is to judge them in terms of the values and customs of their own familiar culture. This is ethnocentrism. Being fond of your own way of life and condescending or even hostile toward other cultures is normal for all people. Alien culture traits are often viewed as being not just different but inferior, less sensible, and even "unnatural. " For example, European cultures strongly condemn other societies that practice polygamy and the eating of dogs-practices that Europeans generally consider to be immoral and offensive. Likewise, conservative Moslem societies, such as Afghanistan, consider European women highly immodest and immoral for going out in public without being chaperoned by a male relative and without their bodies covered from head to toe so as to prevent men from looking at them. Ethnocentrism is not characteristic only of complex

modern societies. People in small, relatively isolated societies are also ethnocentric in their views about outsiders.

2 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication study is defined here as the area of study that attempts to understand the effects of culture on communication. Intercultural communication as a human activity is not new. On a small scale, intercultural communication undoubtedly occurred long ago when culturally diverse people first encountered. For instance, in China, the "Silk Way" meant the contact between the Chinese merchants and the westerners. Within the past few centuries, however, the number of interactions has greatly increased due to the increase of technology and transportation.

It was not until after WWII, however, that an understanding of intercultural interactions became important to government officials and scholars in the US. Since its beginning the United States had been relatively geographically isolated and it was not highly involved in international entanglement. WWII changed that. WWII moved the US toward global awareness and interaction. At the end of the war, the United States was the largest economy still left intact and thus began to offer assistance to the rebuilt Europe as part of the Marshall Plan. With the success of the Marshall Plan, US leaders began to offer the US's economic and scientific expertise to aid underdeveloped countries. Unfortunately, many of their attempts as communication across these cultural boundaries were superficial and sometimes dominated by economic theories of development that cast some doubt upon cross-cultural communication theories of social change. One of the major reasons for this failure was found to be the misunderstanding of communication and culture. People in the US had become "cultural illiterates".

One of the direct results was the recognition for the need of cultural information. From 1946 to 1956, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) conducted training courses to train foreign service diplomats and other staff members. Anthropologists, linguists and other scholars such as George Trager, Edward Hall and so on joined the training staff to help diplomats

interact more effectively in intercultural situations. " Intercultural communication grew out of the need to apply abstract anthropological concepts to the practical world of foreign service diplomats at FSI. "

The first stage of intercultural communication study began in the 1950s mainly with the work of Edward Hall. His book The Silent Language (1959) marked the birth of intercultural communication. The book analyses the relationship between communication and culture.

The understanding of intercultural communication that were developed by Hall and others in the 1950s were by the 1960s being applied not only to the training of FSI diplomats, but also to business people, immigrants, missionaries, international students and Peace Corps volunteers. Thus, the ideas developed for understanding peoples from other cultures could be used to deal with the inter-ethnic or racial issues within the US. The events of the 1960s provided a rich practical research environment in which to test (through training) the ideas used in intercultural communication study. By the 1970s, the intercultural reality of the world societies elevated intercultural communication to a topic of significant academic merit.

In the late 1970s, several lines of intercultural communication research seemed to be coming together. In 1983, Gudykunst edited the first text on intercultural communication theory *Intercultural Communication Theories*, which stressed the need for theory development and offered several theories to be used in research. Another volume followed in 1988, *Theories in Intercultural Communication* continued this theme. The intercultural communication field mushroomed during the 1970s. This period resembled an intellectual brainstorm with scholars roaming all over the field.

At the present time, as is true of communication studies in general, intercultural communication is more involved in describing and defining specific instances than in the development of any general theory. Culture was seen as the larger umbrella under which communication was covered. Culture was described as a "blueprint", "road map" (Hall, 1976), and even "collective