

Communication as Culturally Contexted Practice: A View from Intercultural Communication

ANTHONY J. LIDDICOAT

University of South Australia

This paper explores the interrelationship between culture, language and communication and examines dimensions of the impact of culture on the act and process of communication. It will argue that instances of language use in communication (linguistic acts) are inseparable from the cultural context in which they are created and in which they are received. Culture impacts on communication at a number of levels. It constitutes a frame in which utterances are conveyed and interpreted: what is communicated depends as much on the cultural context in which the communication occurs as it does on the elements from which the linguistic act is constructed. Culture also influences how the linguistic act itself is constructed, affecting text types and the properties and purposes of textual structures. Aspects of communication such as sequencing, recipient design and impact are read within a framework of cultural understandings about valued and appropriate language use. In addition, culture has an impact on understanding the purpose of a linguistic act in instances of communication. It influences perceptions of the communicative purpose associated with particular types of linguistic acts at particular moments of interaction and also of the interactional and interpersonal value of linguistic acts. Finally culture is a feature of the form of the language which is used to construct linguistic acts. Languages are, at least in part, culturally constructed artefacts which encode conceptual understandings of the world at various levels of embeddedness. The culturally contexted nature of communication therefore imposes a problem of inter-translatability for actual instances of communication across languages and cultures and necessitates a level of particularity for each actual instance of communication.

Keywords: Communication; Culture; Intercultural

1. Introduction

The study of intercultural communication is an interdisciplinary field and the understandings of the nature of communication in this field are various and depend on the disciplinary base of the researcher. This paper does not, therefore, seek to present a coherent view of communication as conceived by those working on the intercultural, but rather to outline an understanding of what the study of intercultural communication reveals about the nature of communication through language. The aim is to examine how viewing language through the lens of intercultural communication influences how communication is understood and what elements a theory of communication would need to include. From an intercultural perspective communication comes to be seen as primarily an act of sociality: that is it is not simply the case that information is transferred from one participant to another, but rather language is used to create and maintain social relationships. The communicative reality of language lies in language as social process not in language as system, or as Vološinov states, this reality is 'not the abstract system of language forms and not the isolated monologic utterance and not the psycho-physiological act of its existence, but the social event of verbal interaction, achieved through an utterance and utterances' (Vološinov 1929, author's translation).¹ This means that we cannot view language in terms of a contrast between interactional (social) and transactional (information-exchange) discourse (cf. McCarthy & Carter 1994), but rather as a pervading social act in which information exchange may be only one of the relevant activities going on (cf. Schegloff 1995). This means that in communication 'getting the message across' is only one element of what is involved in language use. In addition, speakers are constantly invoking, interpreting and confirming social relationships through talk. Language therefore is fundamental in creating the social context in which language itself is used and constructs the ways in which participants understand the social activity in which they are engaged (Liddicoat 1997b; Schegloff 1996). Where participants share the same language and underlying cultural assumptions the social dimension of communication is interpreted on the basis of shared perceptions of the role of language in creating the social world. However, where speakers share different cultural assumptions, the possibilities of communication breakdown, or rather the misinterpretation of utterances in context, are greatly increased (Scollon & Scollon 2001).

This paper will examine some of the ways in which culture is an embedded part of communication and the ways in which the nexus of ideas—language, culture and communication—needs to be considered in developing understandings of communication which reference cultural context. The interrelationships between language and culture in communication will be discussed on the basis of the model presented in Figure 1. This model presents the language–culture interface as a continuum between aspects in which culture is the most apparent construct through to those in

¹ *не абстрактная система языковых форм и не изолированное монологическое высказывание и не психофизиологический акт его существования, а социальное событие речевого взаимодействия, осуществляемое высказыванием и высказываниями.*

Culture Most apparent		←—————→			Language most apparent
world knowledge	spoken/ written genres	pragmatic norms	norms of interaction		norms of linguistic form
culture as context	culture in general text structure	culture in the meaning of utterances	culture in the positioning of units of language		culture in linguistic and paralinguistic structures

Figure 1 Points of articulation between culture and language in communication (Liddicoat 2004, adapted from Crozet & Liddicoat 1999)

which language is the most apparent construct, but argues that regardless of the surface level appearance both language and culture are integrally involved across this continuum.

Figure 1 represents a number of ways in which language and culture intersect in communication, from the macro-level of world knowledge, which provides a context in which communication occurs and is interpreted, to the micro-level of language forms. This paper will examine these levels of interaction, although collapsing together pragmatics and interactional norms, which have considerable overlap.

2. Culture as Context

At its most global level, culture constitutes a frame in which meanings are conveyed and interpreted and at this level is the least apparently attached to language. Culture as context consists of the knowledge speakers have about how the world works and how this is displayed and understood in acts of communication. This cultural knowledge has probably been the best covered in most approaches to culture in communication (see for example, Fitzgerald 2002; Levine & Adelman 2002; Thomas 1983, 1984). However, the linguistic dimension of world knowledge is often ignored, although such knowledge of the world is associated with and invoked by language (and other semiotic systems).² This means that the message itself is not simply a sum of the linguistic elements of which it is composed but also includes additional elements of meaning which are invoked by, but are not inherent in, the linguistic elements. Culture gives specific, local meanings to language by adding shared connotations and associations to the standard denotation of terms. In this way, culture can be understood as a form of community of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999) in which certain meanings are privileged

² The current discussion focuses on language and its relation to culture and so no systematic account inclusion will be made of other semiotic systems (images, symbols, etc.), however, *grosso modo*, the ideas presented here about language may be applied to other semiotic systems.

above other possible meanings in ways which are relevant to the purposes and histories of the communities of practice.

World knowledge is by nature embedded and complex, but its operations can be seen through specific instances of communication in which assumed shared world knowledge is fundamental to the message being communicated. This can be seen, for example, in various ways of understanding the term 'sacred site'. The term invokes particular theoretical and ideological resonances in various communities of practice. Among anthropologists, a sacred site is a location connected with ritual practices or religious significance. It is a neutral descriptive term applying across cultures and times. Thus sacred sites may be found within contemporary Western cultures as legitimately as in traditional cultures: St Peter's basilica in Rome is as much a sacred site as a West African initiation site or the birthplace of the god Rama at Ayodhya in India. In Australian legal and political discourse, whether professional or lay, the term 'sacred site' enlists other associations and attributions which have evolved in relation to indigenous land claims. The Australian use of the term 'sacred site' embeds within it the anthropological notion of religious space, but with different connotations. In this context, a sacred site is specific to the indigenous culture and is not used of the religious spaces of other groups. Moreover, the designation of a sacred site carries connotations of ownership and/or dispossession, with implications for land use and for contestation in black-white politics. While an anthropological sacred site is determined by the association of ritual practices or religious belief, in the context of Australian land rights legislation a sacred site is not so much understood from its purpose as an indication of ownership.

The deployment of the term 'sacred site' in an actual instance of communication (Figure 2) illustrates the complexities within meaning in use. In this cartoon, the term 'sacred site' is located within an elaborate network of signification, some



Figure 2 'But it's already a sacred site', Ron Tandberg, *The Age*, 19 September 1996

linguistic others non-linguistic. The communicative success of the cartoon involves reading beyond superficial instances of meaning to construct an elaborate, and largely 'unstated' textual meaning. In reading this cartoon, the term 'MCG' is particularly important and here the denotation 'Melbourne Cricket Ground' is itself potentially misleading, as the relevant sport is not cricket but Australian rules football. This is indexed by the four vertical lines of the goal posts inside the stadium and by the striped beanies worn by the white couple. The invocation of the MCG and football is a culturally contexted lamination of a place and an event—the grand final of the football season is traditionally played at the MCG. The cartoon, therefore, brings into association sport and religion, invoking the identity function of Australian rules football and the group attachments, which are sometimes likened to a religious devotion (for example in Atkinson 1981). The cartoon is also contextually related to black–white politics by the colouring of the characters, invoking the politically sensitive nature of 'sacred sites' and contested understandings of ownership. The text 'But it's already a sacred site' is therefore located with reference to competing claims for land ownership between indigenous and colonial populations. The word 'already' establishing an antecedent claim for the sacredness of MCG in relation to the 'innovation' of land claims based on previously dormant (or suppressed) associations with sacred sites.

The text in Figure 2 is heteroglossic (Bakhtin 1965, 1981): there are multiple voices present each of which contributes elements to the meaning communicated. The act of communication consists in invoking and recognizing these multiple voices. Each meaningful element is meaningful in its relationship with other elements and through the unexpressed voices invoked through the forms used in communication.

The different constructions of 'sacred site' invoked in Figure 2 are not inherent in the dictionary meaning of the words themselves but rather grow out of the contexts of use and resulting cultural associations attached to the word. In this sense, the debate between linguists about the differences between lexical and encyclopaedic knowledge and their relevance to definition is problematic for an understanding of language in communication (Peeters 2000; Wierzbicka 1985, 1995). That is, while decontextualized meanings may be of relevance for the study of lexical semantics, such meanings are not encountered in actual instances of communication in which context itself invokes and validates aspects of meaning beyond strict denotation. In fact, Wierzbicka (1985, 1995), a strong supporter of the separation of lexical and encyclopaedic knowledge, recognizes that at least some 'encyclopaedic knowledge' must be included in the explication of lexical entries. For example, her definition of 'mouse' (Wierzbicka 1995) includes features such as timidity, being chased by cats and being pests which would go far beyond definitions proposed by other lexical semanticists. As Bakhtin (1981) argues, discourse always represents a worldview—when language is used in communication, it is used within and for this worldview and the worldview is as much constitutive of the message as the linguistic forms and their 'agreed meanings'.

3. Culture in Text Structure

The intersection of culture and communication is not simply one of the content or meaning of messages, it also applies to the forms of messages, and the ways in which these forms are evaluated and understood. In a given society the forms used in communication will have a tendency to be perceived as belonging together to form a class (i.e. genre), with each class being understood as a type of communicative event (Hymes 1974; Saville-Troike 1989). Texts³ like other parts of language are cultural activities and the act of communicating through speaking or writing is an act of encoding and interpreting culture (Kramsch 1993). Culture interacts with the forms of communication in three broad ways:

- the (oral and written) genres which are recognized and used;
- the properties of the textual features used in communication; and
- the purposes for which these textual structures are used.

Text types (or genres) can be considered a mapping of language forms onto recognizable types of communicative activity (Liddicoat 2008). For a particular genre to have importance it must have some sort of prominence within its culture. That is the particular communicative events which comprise the genre must be replicated with a reasonable frequency or have a particular cultural noteworthiness in order to constitute a genre. Within a culture, members recognize the function and purpose of a text from the textual characteristics which are regularly associated with the text. This means that the forms of a text are cues as to how texts are to be understood and responded to and help to locate individual texts within. Malinowski (1960) indicates that genres are socially and culturally significant and have an important function in the maintenance and cohesion of the culture. Oring (1986) goes on to say that genres are formed by the cultural traditions of the community. In viewing genre as culturally contexted, genre ceases to be simply text, but becomes activity (Shopen 1993). The implications of culturally oriented perspectives for genre analysis are that any study of genre must see genre as culturally situated, culturally defined and culturally defining.

This means that, while some genres exist in all or most cultures as recognized patterns of purposeful communicative behaviour (e.g. stories, conversations), not all genres, however, are found in all cultures. This is most obviously encountered when genres are 'exotic' in the sense of being located within worldviews which differ substantially from one's own. In some cultural contexts for example, magic spells may be a common and recognizable form of text with its particular textual features which communicate its purpose and social function. Evans-Pritchard (1929), for example, describes a form of magic spell among the Zande which is creative, in that spells are constructed at the moment of use, but which also has a regular form. In order to produce and recognize a magical spell, a Zande speaker must have access to the linguistic practices of spell casting as a purposeful communicative form. The presence

³ Text is used here in the sense of any form of language production, whether spoken or written.

of such a genre implies a cultural context in which the spell is considered to be a relevant communicative act. In societies which do not accept the role of magic, such acts are unlikely to constitute a recognizable genre or if recognized as a genre, it will be one for which knowledge of textual features and the nature of well-formedness will be very limited for most members of the society.

The magic spell is a genre for which absence appears to be logical: a culture which does not accept the worldview on which the text type is based is unlikely to have the text type. At the same time, people who do not believe in magic can recognize the activity being undertaken in a spell. In this way, spells are less problematic instances of culturally dependent language use than many other text types as the cultural embeddedness and the motivations for the communicative act are accessible and relatively obvious, even if the underlying principles are not accepted. However, there are genres which exist in some cultures, for which recognizing communicative purpose is much more problematic for those who do not share the genre. One example of such a problematic genre from the perspective of an English language reader is the Chinese genre 意境 *yijing*, a form of artistic or literary criticism which develops an imagistic response to text to capture the mood, state or significance of an artwork. In some ways, the genre parallels Western criticism in that it is a response to a work, but the imagistic nature of the text is frequently seen by Western readers as highly problematic because of its subjectivity (Shen 1989). The flavour of this text type can be seen in the brief excerpt of a response to Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, shown in example (1).

- (1) I saw three climbers (myself among them) winding up the mountain in silence 'at the dead of night', absorbed in their 'private thoughts'. The sky was full of blocks of clouds of different colors, freely changing their shapes, like oily pigments disturbed in a bucket of water. All of a sudden, the moonlight broke the darkness 'like a flash', lighting up the mountain tops. Under the 'naked moon', the band saw a vast sea of mist and vapor, a silent ocean. Then the silence was abruptly broken, and we heard the 'roaring of waters, torrents, streams/Innumerable, roaring with one voice' from a 'blue chasm', a fracture in the vapor of the sea. It was a joyful revelation of divine truth to the human mind: the bright, 'naked' moon sheds the light of 'higher reasons' and 'spiritual love' upon us; the vast ocean of mist looked like a thin curtain through which we vaguely saw the infinity of nature beyond; and the sounds of roaring waters coming out of the chasm of vapor cast us into the boundless spring of imagination from the depth of the human heart. Evoked by the divine light from above, the human spring of imagination is joined by the natural spring and becomes a sustaining source of energy, feeding 'upon infinity' while transcending infinity at the same time (Shen 1989).

This text does not at first look like a scholarly criticism of a literary work when viewed within a Western academic tradition; rather it is likely to appear to be a form of creative writing. The text's form and the recognized purposes for the Western academy are not easily brought into alignment.

In the French academic tradition the *explication de texte* is similarly a text type which has no direct parallel in the Anglo-Saxon tradition.⁴ The *explication de texte* is a work of literary criticism which aims to explain the artistry and effect of a text through a detailed analysis of the language of the text, often with a word-by-word focus (Lecerclé 2004). The *explication de texte* is essentially a pedagogical tool, but has wider applications in French literary studies. The aim of an *explication de texte* is effectively to reveal as much of the significance of a textual element as possible and the resulting text may be considerably long, even though the stimulus is relatively short. A somewhat extreme example is found in Derrida (1992), which devotes some 80 pages to the explication of the word 'yes' in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Because of its micro-level approach and the resulting proliferation of minutiae in the critical response, the *explication de texte* is often criticized by English writers for its 'pedantic prolixity' and 'unnecessary detail', as Legouis (1957) noted. As with the Chinese example above, the textual form does not easily align with the cultural assumptions of the English-speaking academy.

The cultural impact on text types concerns not only which genres exist in a culture but also the ways in which genres themselves are constructed. Even where genres themselves are shared between cultures, the ways in which each genre is constructed may vary. Each culture has different ways of organizing text and these ways of organizing form part of a value system of aesthetic and intellectual judgments. That is, the criteria for what constitutes a 'good' written or spoken text vary together with understandings of the nature of logic, coherence and clarity.

The influence of such cultural constructions can be exemplified by differences in understandings of the construction of academic texts. In the English academic tradition, digressions are stigmatized as poor writing and are seen as defects of style, coherence and/or clarity and indications of lack of intellectual focus or discipline (Johns 1985; Stevens 1979). This does not mean that digressions are not possible in English academic style; however, such digressions are treated as departures and intended digressions are commonly introduced by a formula such as 'if I may digress (for a moment)'. This formula, which in form seeks permission for the reader to perform some action, signals the potential accountability of the action and an awareness of the deviation from accepted norms. The addition of 'for a moment' minimizes the digression and its impact on the reader. The prefacing of the digression and its mitigation indicate that the digression has the status of a dispreferred act (Atkinson & Heritage 1984; Bilmes 1988) in English academic writing. In a number of academic cultures, however, digression is a valued part of writing, which can show intellectual breadth or stylistic elegance. In German academic prose the *Exkurs*⁵ is a central feature of writing in which the reader provides information necessary for moving a reader

⁴ The relatively recent English literary technique of *close reading* is similar in its approach, especially in its application to Biblical exegesis, but does not necessarily have the same textual structures or communicative purposes.

⁵ The word 'digression' used in English to translate terms such as the German *Excurs* has a pejorative connotation which is not present in the original term. The translation of such rhetorical practices as 'digression' therefore introduces the evaluative parameters of English.

towards a conclusion by providing theoretical or ideological background, by qualifying the arguments in some way, or by providing additional information or for entering into polemic with another author (Clyne 1987). That is, the *Exkurs* is a site for engaging in acts of scholarship and for contextualizing one's own work within a community of debate. The *Exkurs* also requires as a stylistic feature another rhetorical act frequently stigmatized in English—repetition. Clyne (1987) argues that, following an *Exkurs*, a restatement of aspects of the main argument of the text is required to maintain the logical progression of the argument. Repetition, therefore, is a textual feature used to clarify text structure with its own purpose and stylistic logic. This means that, within the German cultural tradition, 'digression' and 'repetition' are elements of good writing.

Japanese writing has a similar digressive structure, known as 起承転結 (*kishou-tenketsu*), which involves introducing a point (起 *ki*), elaborating the point (承 *shou*), changing to a tangentially related sub-theme (転 *ten*) and concluding (結 *ketsu*). In this structure, the third element *ten* is digressive, but here the digression is, for an English speaker, quite extreme as the impact of the *ten* is associated with the disparity between the ideas in this part of the text and those of the other sections. Reproducing an extended text is not possible here, but example (2) illustrates the format in a brief text.

(2)

昔は書物の中から情報を取り出して保存したい時には、それを手で書き取ったものである。うっかりすると書き誤ることもあった。

今は複写機が利用できるので、新聞、雑誌、書物などから、文字も図も誤りなく、しかも素早く写し取ることができる。

ところで、旅をする時に感じるのだが、車で駆け回ると、少ない時間で多くの場所に行けて便利だが、行った土地の様子があまり印象に残らない。これに対して、自分の足で歩くと、景色や人々の様子を身をもって感じ取ることができる。

情報を集める場合も同じで、機械で写真するのは誰かに便利だが、自分の手で書き取ったほうがよいことも多い。必要な情報がいつまでも記憶に残って、あとの利用に役立てることができる。

In olden times, copying information by hand was necessary. Some mistakes were made. 起 (*ki*) Copying machines made it possible to make quick and accurate copies. 承 (*shou*)

Travelling by car is convenient, but one has little impression of localities. Walking makes it possible to enjoy the localities firsthand. 転 (*ten*)

Although copying machines are convenient, copying by hand is sometimes better. Information remains in one's memory longer and can be used later. 結 (*ketsu*) (Maynard 1998).

This essay illustrates well the (apparent) disconnection between the *ten* and the prior text and the resolution of the disconnection in the concluding *ketsu*. The change from talk about copying to talk about travelling is not a necessary link and the impact of the abrupt change is cognitively dissonant. The ability of an author to relate quite disparate ideas shows intellectual depth and stylistic elegance within the Japanese

cultural tradition, but the *ten* section usually seems an irrelevant tangent in English prose translations.

In much English-language discussion of writing across cultures, the phenomenon described above is often referred to as a culture's 'tolerance of digression' (Noor 2001); however, this construction is actually a culturally contextualized misrepresentation of what is happening in these texts. First, *Exkurs* and *ten* do not carry the negative connotation of *digression* and secondly, the stylistic feature is not tolerated but rather valued. That is, these digressive structures are considered as enhancing the text and the scholarly persona of the author, while the idea of 'tolerance' would suggest simply that they do not mar the text. The comparative valuing here reflect what de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) call a problematic interplay of efficiency and effectiveness in evaluating texts. In de Beaugrande and Dressler's categorization, an efficient text is one which conveys its information in a way which is easily accessible: it is simple, clear and transparent. An effective text is one that has a positive impact on the reader: it is interesting, creative or intriguing. An efficient text may not be an effective text in that its lack of complexity may make it uninteresting for the reader. In Japanese and German prose, it appears that effectiveness has traditionally been the more valued dimension in developing texts, while English writing values efficiency.⁶ These stylistic features of text appear to parallel a further distinction between cultures in the location of responsibility for ensuring that a text is understandable and understood. Hinds (1987) refers to this as a typological distinction in genre between writer responsible and reader responsible styles. Writer responsibility is the notion that the writer is responsible for ensuring that the text is clear, coherent and comprehensible to the reader and results in more overt structuring and more textual effort being devoted to the establishment of shared knowledge between the reader and writer. Reader responsibility on the other hand, allocates to the reader the responsibility for making meaning from the writer's text. This means that texts typically have less overt structuring and greater levels of assumption of shared knowledge.

A text, whether written or spoken, is a performance of communication. The argument so far has attempted to indicate that this performance is not simply an act of communication, but a cultural construct located within a frame of expectations, values and assumptions. This frame influences which sorts of acts of communication will be seen as typical or normal, which will be valued, and which will be seen as well executed. Choices made within this frame are meaningful and aspects of organization will signal different things about the text and the person who produced it within a particular framework, which in turn will affect how the text is understood.

⁶ The contemporary use or otherwise of *kishoutenketsu* structures varies according to disciplines and other contexts which influence values and perceptions of text (Liddicoat 1997a).

4. Culture and Pragmatics and Interactional Norms

Moving to the level of pragmatics and norms of interaction, the effect of culture on communication can be seen more immediately in intercultural communication than perhaps it can be in the case of text structures. Here, the effect of culture is on what 'equivalent' units mean in contexts of use, and the sorts of interactional trajectories which are established by them. The culturally based nature of meaning in language use is seen in example (3), which features an exchange in English between an Australian child and his French mother.

- (3) 'Thank you'⁷
 Son: Hi Mum thanks for picking me up.
 Mother: Thanks for picking you up! Did you think
 I wasn't going to come? But I'm your Mum;
 of course I was going to come. It's dark and you're
 little. Of course I was going to pick you up.

This example shows a trajectory in which a child thanks his mother and the mother reacts negatively. The issue leading to contention revolves around the meaning of *thanks for picking me up* to the participants. Within an Australian cultural frame, the thanking here is a mark of appreciation for something that has been done for one's benefit. It shows gratitude for the mother's action. Within this frame, the anger in the mother's response does not make sense: expressions of gratitude do not typically occasion expressions of anger. Within a French framing however the meaning of the *thank you* is potentially different. Thanking is here not an automatic acknowledgement of something which is done by another for one's benefit, especially between intimates. Rather in close relationships thanking is reserved for unusual or unexpected actions—things which are additional to the normal relationships between people. Within the French cultural context therefore, the son's thanking is hearable as an indication that *picking me up* is not an expected act, but rather something remarkable or unusual—something this child had not expected of the mother. The mother's reaction is not to the thanking but rather to the construction of the act that is being appreciated as in some way abnormal, and concurrently of the mother as the sort of person who would not normally pick up her son at night. The thanking here is therefore hearable as an implied criticism of the mother. The conflict here is motivated by perceptions of what counts as an appreciable act (see Button 1987). For the son, any beneficial act is appreciable but for the mother this is not the case.

Many similar issues have been analysed in the context of cross-cultural pragmatics, which have shown that the contextual understandings of syntactically equivalent utterances vary according to the culture through which the utterance is interpreted. For example, Wierzbicka (1991) notes that the Australian English and Polish sentences in examples (4) and (5) have different meanings, although in form they are translation equivalents.

⁷ My thanks to Chantal Crozet for providing this piece of data.

(4) Why don't you close the window?

(5) *Dlaczego nie zamkniesz okna?*

The English version is usually interpretable as a polite request form framed indirectly as a suggestion, while the Polish sentence would 'imply stubborn and unreasonable behaviour on the part of the addressee' (p. 33). That is, although at the level of word-for-word translation the two sentences may be the same, in the cultural contexts of the utterance, they are different. Similarly, the sentences in examples (6) and (7) differ in terms of their politeness.

(6) Pass me the book.

(7) *Passe-moi le livre.*

The plain imperative in example (6) is considered in English to enact a relatively low level of politeness with limitations in terms of the social relationships in which it would be typically deployed, while the French equivalent in example (7) could be used in a significantly wider range of contexts (Béal 1990, 1994). In fact, the form *passe*, which is the *tu*-form of the verb, encodes a close social relationship which would make example (7) a more natural formulation of the request. In comparison the forms in examples (8) and (9) involve very different transformations in the politeness level.

(8) Could you pass me the book?

(9) *Pourrais-tu me passer le livre?*

The English version in example (8) is hearably politer than that in example (6), but could nonetheless be used with a very wide range of interlocutors from intimates to superiors for a wide range of request types (Wierzbicka 1991). The French version in example (9) is contextually quite restricted in that it implies a close interpersonal relationship (*tu*) and a conditional imperative implying a high degree of politeness. Such constructions could normally only be used in contexts in which non-intimates who use *tu* as a group solidarity form were to make a request which involved a significant level of effort of the addressee or which could legitimately be refused.⁸ The use of the construction for requesting the passing of a book is a problematic mismatch between form and context (Béal 1993).

There is a similar cultural influence on the trajectories of communication launched by particular utterances across languages. Examples of this can be seen in considering the trajectories launched by routines in social interaction, such as the English *How are you* commonly found in greeting sequences. Such utterances have

⁸ One context in which such *tu*-form conditionals are found is in chatrooms or blogs in which *tu* is used regularly, even by those communicating for the first time, in a form of anonymous egalitarianism. In such contexts, the hyper-politeness of the conditional may offset the interpersonal closeness implied by *tu*.

conventionalized responses which function more as ways of negotiating conversational entry and managing interpersonal relationship than as exchanges of information (Sacks 1975). In English the default response to *How are you* is a positive assessment (*fine, okay, good, etc.*) which effectively closes down the sequence and projects the possibility of beginning a new activity. If a default response is not given, the trajectory proceeds differently. Both of these trajectories are found in example (10).

(10) [Tel11:1–8 (Liddicoat 2007)]

Kay: Oh hi = How're you,

a → Sue: 'Kay, n you,

b → Kay: Sstressed.

Sue: Stressed, = wha's a matter.

At arrow a, Sue's response to the question ('Kay,) is a default response and she moves to a next activity in the same turn—a reciprocated question. At arrow b, Kay's response, a prosodically heavily marked *sstressed*, is not a default and the resulting trajectory is that the non-default becomes a topic for further talk. That is, responses to *how are you* questions can launch different interactional trajectories and also retrospectively reinterpret routines as non-routine ways of speaking—routines are routines because of the ways they are performed not because there is an interaction requirement that they be so (Schegloff 1986). The recognition of turns at talk as launching routine sequences is culturally related in that identical utterances may be seen as potentially launching routines in one culture but not in another. For example, in German interactions, the question *how are you* is not commonly found in greeting sequences and where it does occur is typically treated as launching a topic for talk (Taleghani-Nikazm 2002). In this sense, there is no default answer to the question and the trajectories which follow the question are less demarcated. Béal (1992) has shown a similar issue for the question *did you have a good weekend* in Australian–French interaction. She demonstrates that in Australian English, the question is a routine which normally receives a default answer, while in French it is considered an information seeking question and generates considerable topical talk.

In all of the cases discussed here, the interpersonal and interactional meaning of any particular utterance is not determined solely by its linguistic composition. Instead each element is understood within a cultural framework which guides the process of interpretation. The communicative value of any utterance is then not strictly a property of language, but of language in its cultural context.

5. Culture and Linguistic Form

From an intercultural perspective, linguistic form is not simply a structural feature of language but rather 'every language embodies in its very structure a certain world view, a certain philosophy' (Wierzbicka 1979). Acts of communication are made up

of structural elements: lexicon, morphology, syntax, etc. Each of these forms part of a culturally contexted code of meaningful elements which embed any utterance within a particular cultural frame. The influence of culture on linguistic forms is best recognized in the lexicon, in which words are seen as embodying culturally contexted conceptual systems. Lexical items are used to organize a social and physical universe and to construct patterns of similarity and difference between categories.

In English, pronominal second person reference is done using a single pronoun form *you*. This use constructs the second person in a monistic way in which all potential second persons are second persons in the same way. Such a monistic category is a culturally contexted one which sets aside other ways of constructing the social world invoked by second person pronouns. French requires that the category be at least a two part one between *tu* and *vous*. The *tu-vous* distinction not only embodies difference between singular and plural which are absent from English,⁹ but also indexes aspects of interpersonal relationship on which other practices may be contingent (Gardner-Chloros 1991; Liddicoat 2006; Morford 1997; Peeters 2004). European Spanish further subdivides the category by separating number and social deixis entirely with a fourfold division between *tu*, *usted*, *vosotros* and *ustedes* in which the social relationship of the speaker to the addressee is always linguistically relevant. For a French or Spanish speaker, talking to an individual, it is impossible to construct second person reference independently from social categorization of one's interlocutor in relation to self.

Such grammaticalization of social deixis is not restricted to pronouns and relative social relationship may be a feature of the linguistic encoding of socially relevant processes. For example, the single English verb *give* indexes an action in which the interpersonal dimensions and relationships involved in the act of giving are not conceptually salient. In Japanese the same act of giving between human beings is a fundamentally relational act encoded in four¹⁰ different ways:

- くれる *kureru* where the direction of giving is from other to self and the other is allocated a higher social status;
- 上げる *ageru* where the direction of giving is from self to other and the other is allocated a higher social status;
- 下さる *kudasaru* where the direction of giving is from other to self and the other is allocated a higher social status, with the relative social distance between giver and receiver increased; and

⁹ Although the number distinction is marked by either optional features (*all of you*) or in some dialects as a grammaticalized plural such as *youse* or *you all*.

¹⁰ There is in addition a fifth possibility やる *yaru* which is used for giving from a human to a non-human, as in giving dogs bones or plants water. Moreover, the discussion here refers to the 'normative' or 'canonical' explanation for the use of verbs of giving. Actual practice in Japanese is more complex. For example, *kureru* may be used with others who are status-equals, while the verb *itadaku* is commonly used with others who are of higher social status. These verbs can also be used strategically, so, for example, one can use *itadaku* with a friend (status-equal) if receiving a particularly important favour, not to signal status per se, but rather to convey one's appreciation (Haugh 2008 personal communication).

- 差し上げる *sashiageru* where the direction of giving is from self to other and the other is allocated a higher social status, with the relative social distance between giver and receiver increased.

In Japanese, the single unitary action of English *give* is a complex set of actions which cannot be understood without indexing the interpersonal relationships between giver and receiver (Yamada 1996). The Japanese semantic field relating to giving is therefore one in which social relationship is fundamentally implicated.

In addition to lexical differences which index culturally relevant social relationships, lexical differences can also encode aspects of similarity and difference between entities. This is most notably the case in the grouping together of things into folk taxonomies. Goddard (1998) notes, for example, that the range of biological categories in Yankuntjatjara and English is based on quite different distinctions. In Yankuntjatjara, edibility is a key dimension in folk biological taxonomies: the salient categories are *kaku* 'edible creature', *mai* 'edible plant' and *wama* 'edible sweet stuff', while in English terms such as *animal* and *plant* are used without relation to the uses to which they may be put. The Yankuntjatjara system therefore requires a familiarity with the use to which things will be put as a basic classificatory feature which is absent in English and English generic categories do not therefore easily map onto the Yankuntjatjara worldview. Such biological distinctions do not exist only at the macro-level of categorizations but are also found in quite low level distinctions in which some languages treat entities as being the same while others treat them as different. For example, the Latin word *mus* covers the same semantic range as both *mouse* and *rat* in English, that is what are encoded as two different, although related, animals in English are considered one in Latin. In Italian, like English, there are two words *topo* and *ratto*, although in actual use just one word—*topo*—is used to cover the full semantic range—the distinction between the two is potentially available but not salient (Eco 2003). Eco also notes that *topo* has some of the metaphoric extensions associated with both *rat* and *mouse* in English. The same grouping of mouse and rat as a single category is also found in other languages, such as Japanese, Malay and Thai, while French and Spanish have developed a separation between rats and mice not found in their parent language.

The cultural division of the conceptual space can become quite complex and applies not simply to concrete entities such as animals. In Nishnaabemwin (Valentine 2001), the equivalents of the English verb *break* involve distinctions relating to the form of the thing broken and the nature of the process of breaking. The system is based around four root forms, which are related to the shape of the thing broken: *baashk*—'break a three-dimensional object', *bookw*—'break a stick-like object', *bak*—'break a string-like object' and *biig*—'break a cloth-like object'. Each of these is further specified by morphemes which demote the nature of the process of breaking, for example, *baashkaw*—'break a three-dimensional object with an instrument', *baashkshiin*—'drop and break a three-dimensional object', *baashkim*—'break a three-dimensional object with the teeth', *baashkzaw*—'to heat a three-dimensional object and have it break'. In this case, the English language concept *break* is not a

unitary conceptual element in Nishnaabemwin but rather subsumes a number of independent concepts.

These examples reveal that linguistic forms are culturally embedded elements which represent different conceptualizations of the world of experience. This means that the relationships between the forms of two languages are not simply those of translation equivalence (Eco 2003; Venuti 2006) but rather involve a remapping of the world of experience onto linguistic forms. The result is that a translation does not capture with fidelity the meaning of the original but rather of necessity adds or omits information which is salient and fundamental to the understanding of a meaning in the languages involved. This means that even at the most basic level, intercultural communication becomes an engagement with a conceptually different construction of experience.

6. Conclusion

The argument made in the paper is that communication, when viewed from the perspective of intercultural communication, involves complex interrelationships between language and culture. These interrelationships apply at all levels of language in use and they are central, not peripheral, features of the communication process. This has important implications for how communication can be understood in that it does not privilege any of the dimensions of code, message and context, but rather locates communication fundamentally at the intersection of these. Communication is the use of a culturally shaped code in a culturally shaped context to create and interpret culturally shaped meanings. Such a view of the interrelationships of language and culture entails that culture is not viewed simply as 'noise' in the communication system affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of communication, but rather as a constituent element of the system itself. Such a view of communication does not conflict with an idea of locally created, recipient designed talk (see for example Nevile & Rendle-Short this volume) but rather adds an additional layer of context to the account. It is a layer of context which may be invisible in interactions between members of the same social group, but it is a layer which may become interactionally salient, and attended to by participants, in instances of interaction across social groups.

It is in the intercultural that the interrelationship of language and culture become most obvious as these throw into relief the differing ways in which language and culture are played out in instances of communication. In intracultural communication, issues of culture tend to become invisible because assumptions, values and categories tend to be shared. This does not however mean that culture is absent or irrelevant to communication in such contexts. Viewing communication from an intercultural perspective reveals that communication is not simply the creation of messages using the available lexical and grammatical items of a language. Rather each lexical item and their grammatical arrangements invoke cultural knowledge which is always present and which is intrinsic to rather than additional to the meanings

communicated. Meanings therefore reside both within and outside language, but the boundaries between what is in and out are extremely fuzzy.

The perspective of intercultural communication reveals that the interrelationship between language and culture is both broad and complex. There is no aspect of communication that can *a priori* be excluded from the ambit of cultural construction. Moreover, culturally embedded language practices are engaged with a value system in which judgments are made about the nature of the communication, and consequently of the communicator. Intercultural communication is not therefore simply communication which takes into account a series of identifiable dimensions of cultural difference, but rather communication that is continually mindful of the multiple possibilities of interpretation resulting from the possible presence of multiple cultural constructs, value systems and conceptual associations which inform the creation and interpretation of messages.

References

- Atkinson G 1981 *Courage Book of VFL Finals* Melbourne: Five Mile Press.
- Atkinson JM & J Heritage 1984 'Preference organisation' in JM Atkinson & J Heritage (eds) *Structures of Social Interaction* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 53–56.
- Bakhtin MM 1965 'Слово в романе' *Вопросы литературы* 8: 84–90.
- Bakhtin MM 1981 *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Béal C 1990 'It's all in the asking: a perspective on cross-cultural communication between native speakers of French and native speakers of Australian English in the workplace' in A Pauwels (ed.) *Cross-cultural Communication in the Professions in Australia* Melbourne: ALAA. pp. 23–52.
- Béal C 1992 'Did you have a good weekend: or why there is no such thing as a simple question in cross-cultural encounters' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 15: 23–52.
- Béal C 1993 'Les stratégies conversationnelles en français et en anglais. Conventions ou reflet de divergences culturelles profondes?' *Langue française* 98: 79–106.
- Béal C 1994 'Keeping the peace. A cross-cultural comparison of questions and requests in Australian English and French' *Multilingua* 13: 35–58.
- Bilmes J 1988 'The concept of preference in conversational analysis' *Language in Society* 17: 161–182.
- Button G 1987 'Moving out of closings' in G Button & JRE Lee (eds) *Talk and Social Organization* Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters. pp. 101–151.
- Clyne M 1987 'Cultural differences in the organisation of academic texts: English and German' *Journal of Pragmatics* 11: 211–247.
- de Beaugrande R & W Dressler 1981 *Introduction to Text Linguistics* London: Longman.
- Derrida J 1992 *Ulysse Gramophone: deux mots pour Joyce* Paris: Editions Galilée.
- Eckert P & S McConnell-Ginet 1992 'Think practically and look locally: language and gender as community-based practice' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21: 461–490.
- Eco U 2003 *Mouse or Rat? Translation as negotiation* London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson.
- Evans-Pritchard EE 1929 'The morphology and function of magic: a comparative study of Trobriand and Zande ritual and spells' *American Anthropologist* 31: 619–641.
- Fitzgerald H 2002 *How Different Are We? Spoken discourse in intercultural communication* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Gardner-Chloros P 1991 'Ni tu ni vous: principes et paradoxes dans l'emploi des pronoms d'allocation en français contemporain' *Journal of French Language Studies* 1.

- Goddard C 1998 *Semantic Analysis: a practical introduction* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hinds J 1987 'Reader responsibility versus writer responsibility: a new typology' in U Connor & RB Kaplan (eds) *Writing across Languages: analysis of L2 text* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. pp. 141–152.
- Holmes J & M Meyerhoff 1999 'The community of practice: theories and methodologies in language and gender research' *Language in Society* 28: 173–183.
- Hymes DH 1974 *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: an ethnographic approach* Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Johns AM 1985 'Summary protocols of "underprepared" and "adept" university students: replications and distortions of the original' *Language Learning* 35: 495–512.
- Kramsch C 1993 *Context and Culture in Language Education* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lecerle J 2004 'Explication de l'explication' *Ranam: recherches anglaises et nord-américaines* 37: 9–25.
- Legouis P 1957 'Marvell and the new critics' *The Review of English Studies* 8: 382–389.
- Levine DR & MB Adelman 2002 *Beyond Language: cross-cultural communication* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Liddicoat AJ 1997a 'Texts of the culture and texts of the discourse community' in Z Golebiowski & H Borland (eds) *Academic Literacy Across Disciplines and Cultures* Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology. pp. 38–41.
- Liddicoat AJ 1997b 'Interaction, social structure and second language use: a response to Firth and Wagner' *Modern Language Journal* 81: 313–317.
- Liddicoat AJ 2004 'Reimagining culture in language teaching: theory and practice' in B Bartlett, F Bryer & D Roebuck (eds) *Educating: weaving research into practice* Brisbane: School of Language, Cognition and Special Education, Griffith University. pp. 48–66.
- Liddicoat AJ 2006 'Learning the culture of interpersonal relationships: students' understandings of person reference in French' *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6: 55–80.
- Liddicoat AJ 2007 *Introduction to Conversation Analysis* London: Continuum.
- Liddicoat AJ 2008 *Discourse, Genre and Rhetoric: the French verb in research writing in science and technology* Munich: Lincom Europa.
- Malinowski B 1960 *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maynard SK 1998 *Principles of Japanese Discourse* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy M & R Carter 1994 *Language as Discourse: perspectives for language teaching* London & New York: Longman.
- Morford J 1997 'Social indexicality in French pronominal address' *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 7: 3–37.
- Noor R 2001 'Contrastive rhetoric in expository prose: approaches and achievements' *Journal of Pragmatics* 33: 255–269.
- Oring E 1986 'Folk narratives' in E Oring (ed.) *Folk Groups and Folk Genres* Logan, UT: Utah State University Press. pp. 121–145.
- Peeters B 2000 'Setting the scene. Recent milestones in the lexicon–encyclopedia debate' in B Peeters (ed.) *The Lexicon–Encyclopedia Interface* Oxford: Elsevier Science. pp. 1–52.
- Peeters B 2004 'Tu ou vous?' *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 114: 1–17.
- Sacks H 1975 'Everyone has to lie' in M Souches & BG Blount (eds) *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Use* Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters. pp. 57–80.
- Saville-Troike M 1989 *The Ethnography of Communication* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Schegloff EA 1986 'The routine as achievement' *Human Studies* 9: 111–151.
- Schegloff EA 1995 'Discourse and an interactional achievement III: the omnirelevance of action' *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 28: 185–211.

- Schegloff EA 1996 'Issues of relevance for discourse analysis: contingency in action, interaction and co-participant context' in EH Hovy & D Scott (eds) *Computational and Conversational Discourse. Burning issues* Heidelberg: Springer Verlag. pp. 3–38.
- Scollon R & SW Scollon 2001 *Intercultural Communication: a discourse approach* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Shen F 1989 'The classroom and the wider culture: identity as a key to learning English composition' *College Composition and Communication* 40: 459–466.
- Shopen G 1993 'Semantics as a resource for teaching critical literacy' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 16: 1–18.
- Stevens ND 1979 'Writing for publication' *Collection Management* 3: 21–29.
- Taleghani-Nikazm C 2002 'A conversation analytical study of telephone conversation openings between native and nonnative speakers' *Journal of Pragmatics* 34: 1807–1832.
- Thomas J 1983 'Cross-cultural pragmatic failure' *Applied Linguistics* 4: 91–112.
- Thomas J 1984 'Cross cultural discourse as unequal encounter: towards a pragmatic analysis' *Applied Linguistics* 5: 226–235.
- Valentine R 2001 *Nishnaabemwin Reference Grammar* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Venuti L 2006 *The Translator's Invisibility: a history of translation* London: Routledge.
- Vološinov VN 1929 *Марксизм и философия языка* Leningrad: Priboj.
- Wierzbicka A 1979 'Ethno-syntax and the philosophy of grammar' *Studies in Language* 3: 313–383.
- Wierzbicka A 1985 *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis* Ann Arbor: Karoma.
- Wierzbicka A 1991 *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: the semantics of human interaction* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wierzbicka A 1995 'Dictionaries vs encyclopaedias: how to draw the line' in PW Davis (ed.) *Alternative Linguistics: descriptive and theoretical modes* Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 289–315.
- Yamada H 1996 'On Japanese verbs of giving and receiving' *Journal of Language and Literature* 3: 103–119.

Copyright of Australian Journal of Linguistics is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.