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Speech Codes Theory Applied to Problematic Situations in Intercultural Communication

A Six-Step Iterative Training Cycle

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Abstract

In this article, we propose a six-step iterative training cycle for intercultural trainers and trainees to understand the cultural codes underlying conflict in intercultural communication. We offer this training cycle, grounded in speech codes theory and ethnographic research methods, as a complementary alternative to traditional prescriptive cultural values approaches. Speech codes theory is a descriptive theory that conceptualizes culture as a system of norms, premises, and symbols about communication that is shared by members of a given speech community. Further, we argue that a corollary of understanding speech codes through our six-step iterative training cycle is the development of emic intercultural communication competence and sensitivity.

Keywords: *Speech codes theory; Intercultural communication; Problematic situations; Training cycle; Intercultural communication competence; and Intercultural communication sensitivity*

Introduction

This article proposes speech codes theory (SCT) (Philipsen 1992; 1997; Philipsen et al. 2005) as a sensitizing framework to train trainers or trainees (henceforth, TR to refer to both) to identify, describe, interpret, and understand the cultural foundations of intercultural communication conflict from "the native's point of view" (Geertz 1983:55). Philipsen (1992) conceptualizes communication as a local practice instilled with and guided by the cultural particularities of a given speech community. A speech community includes those individuals who share, understand, and use local communication practices. And, the use of these communication practices is what constructs the community's own boundaries (Chaney 1982).

Predicated on ethnographic research methods, SCT will teach TRs to inquire about these local communicative practices and their respective culturally-specific meanings as they occur in context. TRs should note, however, that SCT does not serve as a quick remedy to intercultural conflict nor does it equip an individual with tools to solve a short-term dispute. Rather, SCT allows TRs with anticipated long-term and sustained intercultural contact (e.g. expatriates and travelers) to develop a skill set to identify the underlying cultural codes of intercultural communication conflict situations and thus cultivate communication competence.

We argue that SCT can be used as an alternative and complementary interpretive training tool to prescriptive "culture-as-shared values approaches" (Zaidman 2001:409). However, since the former is grounded in the ethnography of communication, it will yield richer descriptions and more locally-

grounded interpretations of intercultural communication conflict situations than the latter, which typically draws from the social science paradigm to test the relationship between general cultural values, self construals, and communicative behavior during conflict (e.g. Brew & Cairns 2004; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey 2003).

We understand conflict as a "problematic situation" characterized by: (1) interdependence of those in conflict; (2) incompatibility of goals or means to achieve the same ends; (3) the perception that the situation will negatively impact the relationship between those involved; and (4) the need to resolve the situation (Cahn & Abigail 2014:3-4). However, we narrow this definition down to implicit and explicit "problematic *communication* situations." Cahn and Abigail argue that whenever there are "two or more competing responses to a single event" (p. 4), problematic situations arise. In our case, we claim that when these competing responses are grounded in different cultural codes of communication, the problematic situation becomes an intercultural one. The outcome of using SCT, the concept of speech community, and a communication-based understanding of conflict is a more nuanced understanding of what counts as *intercultural* communication conflict.

The following vignette, constructed from field notes gathered during a five-year period of ethnographic participant observation in Spain, illustrates the type of intercultural communication conflict situations that SCT can help TRs analyze:

Two close friends and work colleagues, Rafa and James, are at a restaurant arguing over who will pay the bill. Eventually, Rafa, decidedly approached the bar, asked for the bill, and paid for for it. James, feeling defeated in his attempts at paying, but also thankful for his friend's action, said:

> *— "Muchas gracias Rafa! (Thank you very much!)"*
>
> *— "No seas idiota! (Don't be stupid!)" Rafa responded while playfully, but forcefully, pushing James out of his way."*

James was perplexed by Rafa's answer and thought to himself:

> *— "A mere 'you're welcome' or 'don't mention it' would have been enough."*

He was upset by what he considered an inappropriate response to his expression of gratitude.

At first blush, it may seem obvious to interpret Rafa's unexpected acknowledgment of James' expression of gratitude as blunt and insulting. According to Placencia (2011), Spaniards' infrequent use of mitigation in their ways of speaking may be perceived as "direct and brusque" (p. 90). This is not to say that Rafa did not accept James' gratitude, but as Hickey (2005) explains, expressing gratitude among some Spaniards may not entail a verbal "thank you." In this sense, Rafa simply rejected James' "thank you" as a way to express gratitude. From Rafa's viewpoint, saying "thank you" was unnecessary and inappropriate because it was his initiative to pay and also because he and James are close friends. Consequently, saying "thank you" undermined Rafa's identity as James' close friend and, hence the nature of their friendship. From James' perspective, since U.S. Americans are more likely to say "thank you" to mitigate negative and positive face threats (Lee & Park 2010), especially with close friends, Rafa's "don't be stupid," then, holds the opposite effect: it undermines his identity as Rafa's close friend.

This scenario illustrates the discomfort and tension that some Spaniards may experience in very specific contexts and relationships (e.g., close friendships and family relationships) if they are recipients of verbal expressions of gratitude. What makes this an intercultural communication conflict situation is not Rafa's and James' national cultures, but the clash between their respective cultural codes for expressing gratitude, which reciprocally threaten their relationship and identities. Accordingly, TRs can apply SCT via our training cycle to understand the cultural foundations of intercultural conflict through the analysis of different codes of communication, and the social relationships, and identities that these enact.

In the next section of the article, we critically review a body of scholarship on intercultural communication conflict grounded in the shared-cultural-values approach and explain how SCT can overcome two of its weaknesses. Second, we elaborate on the propositions of SCT within an intercultural communication conflict context. Third, we describe the SCT six-step iterative training cycle. Finally, we argue that the knowledge, understanding, and application of our training cycle is a step toward developing intercultural communication sensitivity and competence.

Intercultural Communication Conflict Research

The existing literature on intercultural communication conflict is vast and it is mainly grounded in the culture-as-shared-values approach (Zaidman 2001). The foci of this body of scholarship are varied and include interpersonal relationships (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey 2003), organizational communication (Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda 1996), leadership and management studies (Sharma & Sehrawat 2014), and face-negotiation theory (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey 2003), among others. This array of studies has accumulated a plethora of evidence that explains the force of national cultural values and other constructs like self-construals (Gudykunst et al. 1996) to determine specific conflict management styles. One strength of this body of scholarship is its power to predict what cultural values trigger certain communicative behaviors. For example, Brew and Cairns (2004) posit that “the individualist–collectivist dimension predicts that people in individualist nations such as Australia prefer direct, explicit communication strategies in managing conflict…” (p. 331). But aside from the value of predicting communicative behavior, we have identified two general weaknesses that characterize these studies and that SCT can help overcome: (1) their understanding of culture as general shared-group perceptions, or what Hofstede et al. (2010) call the “software of the mind”, and (2) their use of surveys as their main data collection tool.

The first weakness of this research tradition is the operationalization of culture “as a pattern of learned, group-related perception—including both verbal and nonverbal language attitudes, values, belief system, disbelief systems, and behavior” (Singer 1987:3). These perceptions are codified into different values or dimensions such as individualism, collectivism, masculinity, and femininity, among others (Hofstede et al. 2010). This notion of culture fails to explain "variations within a culture or variations among cultures that share a broad value" (Zaidman 2001:410). In other words, this research tradition produces knowledge claims that generally offer a panoramic view of the relationship between culture and communication. As an example, Zaidman astutely explains that these types of studies cannot account for the differences between the high-context communicative practices that, in theory, both Japanese and Indians share. Additionally, he argues that the effects of globalization render these general cultural-values approaches unable to explain how global nomads manage conflict. For example, a Japanese business manager who has learned how to use low-context communication abroad.

In addition to Zaidman's (2001) critique, Brew and Cairns (2004), in their study of intercultural conflict in the workplace, explain that though the cultural values approach "may provide useful guidelines by which to make general macro-level predictions about groups of people from particular cultures, they may be less accurate when dealing with micro-level issues in personal interactions in multicultural workplaces" (p. 332). Therefore, a culture-as-shared-values approach to explaining intercultural communication conflict styles casts a net whose mesh is too wide to catch the very specific cultural norms and premises that can be interpreted from situations such as the introductory vignette.

Alternatively, SCT offers a micro-level focus that captures the specific communicative enactment of culture defined as “a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct” (Philipsen 1997:126) that is “deeply felt by, commonly intelligible, and widely accessible” (Carbaugh 1988:38) to the members of a speech community. So, when TRs analyze an intercultural communication conflict situation, they should pay heed to interlocutors’ communicative conduct and to the “kinds of local knowledge people deploy to talk about—to characterize, interpret, or rationalize” (Philipsen 1997:125) such conduct.

The second weakness of the culture-as-shared-values approach concerns the use of quantitative surveys to collect data. For example, Holt and DeVore’s (2005) investigation on intercultural conflict uses the Rahim

Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, which describes the dependent variable—conflict management styles—in terms of a 5-point Likert-type index of agreement. The use of these inventories to account for communicative patterns and their relation to group-shared cultural values is very useful, but only to identify a general trend. TRs' use of these general trends (e.g. Spaniards are a collectivist culture) to apply them to concrete interactional situations (e.g. our introductory vignette concerning two friends, Rafa and James) is methodologically problematic. This macro-to-micro transfer of knowledge can generate essentialist descriptions and misinterpretations (Bennett 2013) of intercultural communication conflict situations. For example, since Spain is a collectivist culture, not saying "thank you" to friends and family members after they have voluntarily performed a favor a might be incorrectly interpreted as rude, because collectivism, as a cultural value, is too broad to explain the specific cultural norms and premises that guide and justify this particular communicative practice (e.g. The recipient of a favor voluntarily performed by close friend should not express gratitude explicitly because that would threaten their friendship).

The actual design of the surveys in these investigations can lead to problematic interpretations of the data. For example, if several respondents answered that they "highly agree" with the item "I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my peers" (from the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory), their response could hypothetically be interpreted as an "avoidance conflict management style" typical of "collectivist" societies whose goal is to protect the harmony of the group. The issue with these types of surveys is that they are close ended and the justification for choosing their items is not recorded by participants. Hence, in the previous example, the motivation to avoid expressing differences in open discussion could answer to the need for group harmony (more typical of a collectivist society) or as Baxter, Foley, and Thatcher (2008) explain, to the need to protect challenges to the self to preserve its uniqueness and autonomy (more typical of individualist societies). Unless surveys are triangulated with another form of data collection to elaborate on some of the choices made by participants, surveys alone, in some cases, may lead to cultural misinterpretations.

In light of these limitations, we propose a six-step iterative training cycle informed by SCT and ethnographic methods such as participant observation (Spradley 1980) and ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979) to elicit the specific cultural norms that guide certain communicative behaviors in conflict situations and the cultural premises that warrant them. Next, we elaborate on SCT as a descriptive framework to interpret intercultural communication conflict situations before presenting the six-step iterative training cycle for TRs.

Speech Codes Theory Applied

Speech codes theory, as explained previously, is an etic framework that allows its users to generate emic meanings pertaining to communication practices within and across speech communities. In consonance with Bennett's (2013) axiom that "coherent theory creates powerful practice" (Overview section), we describe SCT's main propositions and demonstrate their value for intercultural communication conflict trainees.

The Importance of Speech Codes

The importance of speech codes is evident in the first proposition of the theory: "wherever there is a distinctive culture, there is to be found a distinctive speech code" (Philipsen et al. 2005:58). Philipsen et al. explain that people across speech communities codify their lives in meaningful ways for them, and that such codifications contain specific "symbols, meanings, premises, and rules about communicative conduct… that are distinctive" (p. 58). Thus, the study of the cultural foundations of intercultural communication conflict is the study of the codes used to communicate and to interpret others' communication.

In an ethnography of organizational communication in a university setting, Baxter (1993) identified two coexisting and competing codes of communication with their respective cultural meanings between

members of the faculty and members of the administration who joined an institutional task force. Faculty members, grounded in a code of “collegiality,” valued “talking things through” as the appropriate form of communication because it showed “trust and respect for the capacity of the individual to bring good sense and honesty to bear in resolving problems as they occurred” (p. 317). Members of the administration, drawing from a code of “professional management,” valued “putting things in writing” as the appropriate means of communication because “written codification of records, policies, and procedures provided maximum protection for the rights of people” (p. 318). Faculty and administration in Baxter’s study experienced intercultural communication conflict, not because they belonged two different national or ethnic groups—as a matter of fact they were all U.S. Americans— but because they each shared distinctive speech codes.

Baxter's (1993) study also illustrates the fourth proposition in SCT: “The significance of speaking is contingent upon the speech codes used by interlocutors to constitute the meanings of communicative acts” (Philipsen et al. 2005:62). Therefore, what people mean when they communicate and how they interpret others’ communicative behaviors depends on the codes they use. When members of the faculty used face-to-face communication to discuss an issue, they socially constructed their interlocutors, and themselves, as trustworthy. But, members of the administration interpreted the face-to-face medium as a potential source of bias because the written medium, for them, guarantees consistency of responses, and protects interlocutors from personal bias in their responses. However, members of the faculty argued that the written medium was used because of a "fundamental mistrust of the individual" (Baxter 1993:317). In sum, how faculty and staff interpreted each other’s communicative behaviors through their respective speech codes is what triggered intercultural communication conflict within the institutional task force.

The Performative Nature of Speech Codes

According to Dahl (2014), culture is not something that we have, but something that we do. In this sense, speech codes are performative resources that allow social actors to enact culture. In the third proposition of the theory, Philipsen et al. (2005) state speech codes are “more than communicative conduct narrowly conceived; they also implicate meanings about human nature (psychology), social relations (sociology), and strategic communicative conduct (rhetoric)” (p. 61). Hence, communication constructs what it means to be a person, what it means to relate to others, and provides effective and efficient rhetorical means to enact such personhood and sociality (Philipsen 1992). As Baxter (1993) explained in her study of speech codes among members of the faculty and the administration in a task force, "talking and writing are not merely neutral technologies of information transmission and exchange but powerful symbolic forces that articulate broader themes including models of personhood and sociality” (p. 325). On the one hand, members of the faculty believed that the best way to reaffirm the uniqueness and integrity of the individual is face-to-face talk. And, on the other hand, members of the administration argued that persons are constituted through their roles and positions in the institution, and accordingly putting things in writing is the best means of communication to enact such identity.

Furthermore, Baxter (1993) identified two distinct models of social relations that were implicated respectively in each group's speech codes. As part of the speech code of “collegiality,” “talking things through” encourages situations “in which people can act like friends and settle any differences over lunch” (p. 320). The cultural premise implied in this speech code is that social relationships "should be based on personalized interaction between unique selves” (p. 320). As part of a speech code of “professional management,” “putting things in writing,” by contrast, stands for “a model of sociality in which persons of unequal power maintain social distance from one another” (p. 320). The cultural premise implied here is that "social relations should be based on impersonal interaction between occupants of organizational positions” (p. 320). In sum, as Baxter’s study demonstrates, the two codes of communication described are not mere media to exchange information, but when they are used, they construct notions of personhood and social relationships for their users.

Finally, speech codes suggest the normative communicative means to enact appropriate notions of self and social relations. Zaidman (2001), in an intercultural study of conflict between Israelis and Indians in business communication, identified the communicative resources that Indians use in English. Indians operate under a code of “humility, respect, and politeness” (p. 429) toward others that is enacted

communicatively via a comprehensive system of honorifics, long and indirect sentences with complicated structures, and terms of respect. In stark contrast, Israelis, grounded in the code of *dugri*, use direct and straightforward talk that aims to enable a sense of community. These codes provide social actors with the communicative resources to appropriately and effectively perform particular sense of self and social relationships.

The Location of Speech Codes in Talk

Philipsen (2003) argues that communication is heuristic in the sense that it indexes the very means and meanings of communication used to communicate appropriately, or in terms of proposition five of SCT: "the terms, rules, and premises of a speech code are inextricably woven into speaking itself" (Philipsen et al. 2005:62). Since the components of a speech code are woven into communication itself, it follows that they can be directly or indirectly identified in social actors' utterances. Hence, the location of speech codes in talk is necessary for TRs to have access to the cultural foundations of intercultural communication conflict.

Philipsen (1992) identifies three discursive sites where one can notice the components of a speech code: "patterns in speaking," "the use of metacommunicative vocabularies in culturally distinctive forms," and "the rhetorical invocation of metacommunicative vocabularies" (pp. 131-133). We look at each of these in turn.

In his study, Zaidman (2001) showed how Indian managers described some Israeli *patterns of speaking*: "Israelis are tough in negotiation. They are not flexible… They are impatient. They are blunt and to the point. They are straight and non-diplomatic" (pp. 427-428). This description illustrates, the tone or manner of Israelis' ways of speaking in negotiations as is perceived by an Indian manager. A certain tone used in a certain speech event in repeated communicative situations is a communicative pattern that an observer can notice.

Nishiyama's (2013) investigation illustrates how some Japanese people *use* in conversation *the metacommunicative term* "nemawashi" as part of the decision making process in Japanese organizations. "Nemawashi" entails "holding many face-to-face, informal, behind-the-scenes discussions about a proposal among all the people who would be involved in implementing any decision to be made later" (p. 334). The purpose of having "nemawashi," according to Nishiyama, is to test the waters informally and behind closed doors before an official meeting, to see if a proposal is likable or not, without exposing group members to potential face loss during the official meeting. "Nemawashi" then functions to preserve group harmony.

The following problematic situation illustrates how "nemawashi" is *rhetorically invoked* in conversation, as opposed to *used*, to evaluate communicative conduct: Imagine two Japanese workers in the Toyota Tsutsumi plant in the Aichi Prefecture[1] speaking about the new American employee who made a decision and only consulted with one other coworker: "What is this new guy doing? He has not done *nemawashi* correctly. He should have consulted with all of us." The Japanese workers invoke the metacommunicative term "nemawashi" to appraise someone's communicative conduct that violates a communication norm and to point out the appropriate communicative course of action. Metacommunication usually surfaces in conversation when norms and expectations have been violated (Philipsen et al. 2005). Since intercultural communication conflict entails the violation of cultural norms and expectations, metacommunication is a useful tool to identify and understand cultural norms in conflict. Nonetheless, Philipsen (1997) states that these three metacommunicative tools are not exhaustive and other discursive sites where speech codes can be traced may be identified by other researchers and TRs.

The Influential Nature of Speech Codes

An important feature of a speech code is its discursive force (Philipsen 1997). In the sixth proposition of the SCT he argues that "the artful use of a shared speech code is a sufficient condition for predicting,

explaining, and controlling the form of discourse about the intelligibility, prudence, and morality of communication conduct" (Philipsen et al. 2005:63). The discursive force refers to the potential power that speech codes have to alter, predict, and explain others' communicative conduct. Because speech codes are shared, "deeply felt, commonly intelligible, and widely accessible" (Carbaugh 1988:38), they become metacommunicative resources that social actors invoke in conversation, as warrants to attempt to alter communicative behaviors that violate what the code ascertains as intelligible, prudent, and moral communication. In the same way, codes can be used to predict what would constitute appropriate communicative conduct, and also, to explain the meaning of others' communicative practices. However, Philipsen (1997) explains that speech codes are not infallible persuasive, predictive, and explicative resources inasmuch as social actors "do not behave as cultural automatons" (p. 147). Since a speech code does not determine our communicative behavior, but guides it, at any point, we may choose not to follow the code for pragmatic reasons.

The value of this proposition for a conflict situation is that TRs may explain and understand where each party in conflict is coming from; they may tentatively hypothesize about appropriate potential communicative behaviors; and they may try to realign both their and others' communicative behaviors that violate code norms and expectations.

Speech Codes Theory as a Training Tool

Speech Codes Theory can be used as a training tool to get at the cultural foundations of intercultural communication conflict by following the six-step iterative training cycle that we propose here. Spradley (1980) states that "culture, the knowledge that people have learned as members of a group, cannot be observed directly" (p. 10). Instead, we make inferences about culture, based on evidence gathered from two types of human activities: What people do (cultural behaviors that include communication) and what people know (cultural knowledge) (Spradley 1980). The six-stage training cycle proposed here allows TRs to infer cultural norms and premises from these types of human activities. This cycle mirrors what ethnographers of communication do in the field: (1) *observe* a problematic situation arising during intercultural communication; (2) *describe* it; (3) *notice* patterns of communication in the situation; (4) *analyze* these patterns, and *formulate* questions to learn about cultural norms and premises pertaining to these patterns; (5) *inquire* about the problematic situation using the previously formulated questions; and (6) *reflect* on the compiled data and *articulate* emic cultural norms for communicative behavior with their respective cultural premises.

In what follows, we elaborate on these six stages and we use the introductory vignette as an exemplar of some Spanish ways of expressing gratitude in tension with U.S. American ones.

Observation

The fundamental goal of observing is to direct our attention to a particular problematic intercultural communicative situation and its interactional context. Spradley (1980) suggests a funnel-approach with three sequential observation techniques: (1) descriptive, (2) focused, and (3) selective. First, the TR starts with descriptive observations to obtain a broad overview of the conflict situation. One way to obtain a broad view is to use Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING framework. The TR would pay specific attention to the (S)etting, (P)participants, (A)ct sequence, or the communication event, and the (I)instrumentalities or the verbal, nonverbal, or mediated media of communication. In the expressing gratitude vignette, the (S) includes the bar where the squabble about paying the bill, or (A)ct sequence, took place. The (P)articipants are Rafa and James, who are close friends and workmates.

Second, the TR continues with focused observations to notice the problematic situation, or (A)ct sequence, between the two participants. Finally, the TR engages in selective observation and directs attention to specific details such as the (K)ey or tone of the problematic situation and the (I)instrumentality, or the nonverbal reaction in James' face when hearing Rafa say "no seas idiota."

(Thick) Description

At this stage, the TR describes the observations of the problematic situation in great detail on paper or electronically for subsequent analysis. Descriptions should mirror the observing stage and vary in terms of breadth and depth. They should be "detailed, context-sensitive, and locally informed" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 1995:10) or in Geertz's (1973) terms, "thick descriptions." The goal of "thick description" is "to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' [communicative] acts, the 'said' of social discourse…" (p. 27). For instance, a thick description of Rafa's utterance "no seas idiota" as it happened in its context will help the TR distinguish the utterance function as a tacit acceptance of gratitude and not as an insult.

Noticing

Based on prior observations and the constructed descriptions, the TR looks for "patterns of communication," "uses of metacommunicative vocabularies," and "rhetorical invocations of metacommunicative vocabularies (Philipsen et al. 2005:131-133), because they are the direct evidence from which cultural norms for communicative conduct and the respective cultural premises can be inferred. Cultural norms are "abstract patterns for acting appropriately, templates for communication, that function to instruct and evaluate social conduct" (Carbaugh 1990:142). Fitch (2003) defines cultural premises as "assumptions about people, actions, institutions, [social relationships,] and so on and so forth that constitute the symbolic resources of a culture. Premises are the common sense of what is possible and impossible, desirable and undesirable in the interpersonal world" (p. 112), and as such they act as warrants for appropriate communicative conduct.

Noticing a pattern of communication entails discovering the recurrence of some components of a speech event. For example, after several observations, a TR could notice that some Spaniards (Participants) in some situations (Setting) acknowledge (or not) interlocutors' expressions of gratitude (Act sequence) indirectly (Key). *Uses* of metacommunicative vocabularies and their *rhetorical invocations* are easier to spot because they emerge in conversation when cultural norms are flouted or violated. For example, imagine James saying to Rafa: "I know you feel uncomfortable with it, but "I'm going to thank you for everything you've helped me with all these years." James *uses* the metacommunicative phrase "I'm going to thank you" in its interactional context to express gratitude to Rafa. A *rhetorical invocation* of a metacommunicative expression is simply the act of *mentioning* or *referring to* communicative conduct. From Rafa's point of view, James' expression of gratitude violated a norm (saying "thank you" among close friends in some situations is not necessary) and such violation prompted the marked response "no seas idiota" that could have been uttered differently: "no seas idiota, *'dar las gracias*,' entre amigos por pagar la cuenta es innecesario" (Don't be stupid, "expressing gratitude" among friends for paying the bill is unnecessary). In this example, Rafa *refers to* or *mentions* the expression "dar las gracias" and explains how it functions among friends. In sum, metacommunicative phrases emerge in conversation when norms of communication are violated or ignored, and sometimes such norms are even verbally articulated (Carbaugh 1990).

Analysis and Formulation of Questions

At this stage, the TR analyzes the patterns of communication and the uses and invocations of metacommunicative vocabularies collected thus far. If a communication norm is not voiced along with a metacommunicative expression, then the TR should pay close attention to how a norm can be inferred from it. The TR should probe these metacommunicative vocabularies and formulate questions about potential norms and cultural premises. Any norms and premises inferable at this stage are potential because they are TR's interpretations. In the next stage, we will elaborate on the process of checking these norms and premises against the members of the speech community's knowledge (Baxter & Babbie 2004).

Next, we present some guiding questions that can help tap into the appropriate knowledge to formulate the norms and their cultural premises for a given communicative situation. TRs can use the following questions to formulate norms: “What communicative conduct is deemed proper here?” (Carbaugh 1990:141), With whom? Why is it appropriate? What communicative conduct is deemed improper here? Why is it improper? What other communicative options did interlocutors have to choose from but chose not to use? The questions to formulate cultural premises are as follows: "What does a listener [or TR] need to know to render this textual segment intelligible? What sociocultural and interpersonal discourses need to be invoked to understand what this textual segment means?" (Baxter 2010:159).

Here are some sample questions to elicit norms about the expression of gratitude: Is Rafa’s “no seas idiota” an appropriate response to James’ “thank you”? Should Rafa have said "de nada" (you're welcome)? Should Rafa have remained silent? Should James have remained silent? Was “thank you” the appropriate expression of gratitude for Rafa? And, also some questions to elicit cultural premises: Why did James say “thank you” to Rafa? What did James assume about himself and about Rafa when he said “thank you”? What did James assume about his relationship with Rafa when he said “thank you” to him? Why did Rafa respond “no seas idiota” to James? What does Rafa assume about himself and about James when saying “no seas idiota”? What does Rafa assume about his relationship with James when saying “no seas idiota?” Was Rafa’s “no seas idiota” an insult?

Inquiry

Lindolf and Taylor (2002) indicate that “interviews are often used to verify, validate, or comment on information obtained from other sources” (p. 175). Therefore, after TRs have formulated enough questions in the previous step about the data collected until this point, they should interview the parties involved in conflict and other members of the same speech community to elicit answers that help construct cultural norms and premises. Ethnographic interviews should resemble friendly and spontaneous conversations (Spradley 1979) in which the TR presents him or herself as lacking knowledge on the subject. The TR should follow unstructured open-ended interview protocols (Spradley 1979) to ensure the native’s point of view. TRs could audiotape the interview, with participants’ permission, and they should take notes during and after the interview.

Reflection and Articulation

This last stage of the cycle requires the TRs to integrate their own observations, descriptions, and interpretations of natives’ communicative behaviors (step 4) with the latter’s perceptions and interpretations elicited through ethnographic interviews (step 5).

The first step is to formally articulate the norms for communicative conduct and the cultural premises that undergird them. Norms can be stated as follows: “in context C, if X one should/not do Y” (Carbaugh 1990:142). Thus, the TR should interrogate the integrated data and ascertain whether an application of Carbaugh’s norm template elicits any emic norms. In relation to our vignette about expressing gratitude, a norm for communication that follows the template is: “[If person A has a close relationship with Person B]$^{\text{Context C}}$ + [and person B voluntarily performs a favor with an average rank of imposition]^{X} + [person A should not express gratitude verbally]^{Y}.

The second step is to identify cultural premises, and since premises are the rationale for cultural norms, TRs need to ask “why” the norms exists. Hence, the premise that warrants the expressing gratitude norm is: “Close friends usually do things for each other without expecting anything in return.” This cultural premise is what renders Rafa’s “no seas idiota,” not as an insult, but simultaneously as an acceptance of James’s unnecessary expression of gratitude and as a verbal nudge of disapproval. Rafa disapproves of James’ behavior because saying “thank you” violates the cultural premise aforementioned and thus undermines their relationship as close friends, and specially, it threatens Rafa’s identity as a good friend who would not expect anything in return.

TRs will notice that once they articulate several cultural norms and premises, these will cluster around certain themes or topics. A cluster of communication norms and premises is what delineates the contours of a speech code. For example, a "speech code of gratitude" entails a variety of norms and premises pertaining to how to express gratitude in certain contexts and among certain individuals.

Finally, since cultural norms are shared and guide communicative conduct, and cultural premises justify such norms, both norms and premises can be used to exert a degree of social influence. For example, should James confront Rafa about him saying "no seas idiota," Rafa could invoke the cultural premise articulated previously and counter: "You don't need to say 'thank you,' it makes this situation feel as if it were a business transaction, and we're friends! I know you'd do it for me too." And, despite James not sharing this premise, learning about it and hearing it in conversation might, at least, clarify Rafa's way of accepting gratitude, and it may convince him that not saying "thank you" in some situations among close friends is acceptable and even desired.

Speech Codes as Intercultural Communication Sensitivity and Competence

We argue that understanding and mastery of speech codes results in intercultural communication competence and sensitivity. Our claim that communication competence is a corollary of speech code mastery is consistent with Wilson and Sabee's (2003) argument that communication competence should be investigated as a theoretical term contextualized within a specific theoretical framework.

The implementation of the first four stages of the cycle, (1) Observation, (2) thick description, (3) noticing, and (4) analysis and formulation are the foundations to develop intercultural communication sensitivity. We conceptualize sensitivity as a particular susceptibility and responsiveness to the cultural components of communicative conduct in its context. Chen (2014) describes such sensitivity as an ability "to read 'communication cue' and understand 'communication code' regulated by the culture of interactants" (p. 25).

The remaining two stages, (5) inquiry, and (6) reflection and articulation will teach TRs to construct the norms for competent communicative conduct and infer the cultural premises that undergird them. Accordingly, these two stages constitute the basis to develop and perform "emic" (inter)cultural communication competence (Witteborn 2003). Our approach to competence, situated within SCT, unlike prescriptive models of competence that rely on "purely cognitive and affective constructs and imply that competence lies within the individual" (Witteborn 2003:191), refers to contextually effective and appropriate communication practice (Hymes 1974) deeply ensconced in the "interactional lives" of the members of a speech community (Carbaugh & Lie 2014:75). As such, competence is contingent on concrete social settings, their participants and their means of communication, their norms for usage of such means, and their social meanings (Hymes 1974; Philipsen 1992; Witteborn 2003). In other words, intercultural communication competence is tantamount to satisfactory—to the members of a speech community—performance of a speech code (Philipsen 1992).

The fundamental attributes of emic intercultural communication competence are its situatedness and malleability. The competent performance of cultural communication entails not only an alignment with cultural norms for communication, but it is a "process of enactment, a playing out and affirming of cultural forms, and of the creation, adaptation, and transformation of those forms to meet the contingencies of daily life" (Philipsen 1987:249). Therefore, communication competence is open to change and negotiation to satisfy the ever-changing nature of speech communities. Communication competence is partly knowledge of a speech code and partly performance, and also ad hoc negotiation of such code in specific speech events by those who partake in it (Witteborn 2003). An ethnography of communication about the use of *tú* and *usted* (second person singular and plural pronouns) in Spain illustrates ad hoc negotiation of norms of address in context. The analyses revealed that in some situations, addressing an older person respectfully as *usted* (the formal second person pronoun) was followed by an appeal to use *tú* (the informal second person pronoun) on the grounds that *usted* made the interlocutor feel old. In other words, despite the sociocultural norm to use *usted* to address older people

respectfully, interactants sometimes negotiated what the appropriate (or competent) term of address was supposed to be in each situation (Chornet & Muñoz 2012).

In sum, as TRs become fluent in SCT and learn to read "communication cues" and their connection with a "cultural code" through our six-step iterative training cycle, they will realize that cultural communication competence is a heightened sensitivity to noticing, understanding, interpreting, and appropriately performing emic ways of speaking and their social meanings.

Conclusion and Further Directions

In today's global world, the potential for individuals to experience different speech codes to their own is a reality. The purpose of our article is to propose a six-step iterative training cycle grounded in SCT, as a framework to teach TRs to understand and master the distinct cultural codes of intercultural communication conflict situations. SCT and the six-step iterative training cycle equip TRs with the theoretical and practical tools necessary to identify the cultural foundations of communication conflict situations. This training cycle relies on a more focused understanding of culture that zeroes in on specific local patterns of communication and their social meanings as they are enacted in their discursive context. Our proposal of SCT as a training tool offers solutions to two weaknesses of current research: first, its conception of general cultural values that do not capture finer shades of meaning in communication interactions and, second, its reliance on survey methodology (Zaidman 2001). One strength of SCT is its application to naturally-occurring communication situations. As a result, our training cycle can foster behavioral skill development through "experiential learning by doing" in its natural context (Ward et al. 2005:261). For this reason, our training cycle can also be a useful alternative to some intercultural conflict training activities such as "the critical incident technique" and "cultural assimilators" (Ward et al 2005:257-258) since empirical tests of the latter do not show evidence of behavioral skill development (Ward et al. 2005).

As a corollary of speech codes mastery, we argued that TRs will develop intercultural communication competence (Carbaugh & Lie 2014; Philipsen 1992; Witteborn 2003) and sensitivity. However, unlike prescriptive models that home in on competence as a cognitive or communicative skill that can be taught separately from its context, we argue that the type of intercultural competence developed through the six-step iterative training cycle is endemic to the communicative life of the target speech community and accordingly cannot be generalizable to a national culture. However, combining a culture-as-shared values approach with our training cycle can be useful to explain how general shared values manifest themselves in specific communicative practices, and how local cultural premises can be correlated with more general cultural values.

Every theoretical approach is subject to criticism and SCT is no exception. The major criticisms that SCT has received, and our training cycle by association, pertain to SCT's neglect of power relations and its overly deterministic understanding of prediction and control in proposition six (Philipsen et al. 2005). Fiske (1991) claims that power relations are present in every interaction and as such, this premise should be applied a priori to any cultural analysis. However, Philipsen et al. (2005) explain that SCT follows the paradigmatic assumptions of the ethnography of communication and consequently, any analyses performed through the lens of SCT are indeed open "to the possibility that any dimension of social life, including power, be observed as manifested in discourse" (p. 64). But, SCT will analyze power relations only if it manifests itself in members of a speech community's voices. Philipsen et al (2005) explain the second criticism by indicating that speech codes do not have predictive power in the social scientific sense. Instead, if a code is shared and valued by its users, the code has a discursive force that may potentially change users' behaviors that misalign from the code. There is in fact "a wide array of empirical data [] that shows that culture does play an important role in shaping communicative conduct" and that such role " is not simplistically deterministic" (p. 66). In other words, there is no guarantee that culture will always influence communicative conduct, but it is undeniable that culture has the potential to do so.

Although our training cycle has not been applied in a specific training situation, there is a plethora of empirical evidence in other contexts that attest to the effectiveness of SCT as a theoretical lens to capture

competent communicative practices within a speech community (see Philipsen et al. 2005 and Philipsen 2003 for examples). One direction for practice is the actual trial of our six-step iterative training cycle to test its functionality. The trial of our training cycle would require the design of an assessment tool to measure if it fosters intercultural communication competence and sensitivity, and to what extent.

Endnotes

[1] Toyota advertises the practice of Nemawashi as their Production System Guide in their blog. http://blog.toyota.co.uk/nemawashi-toyota-production-system.

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