Cultural Fluency as a Guide to Effective Intercultural Communication:

The Case of Japan and the U.S.:

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Abstract

Intercultural communication serves a vital role in that it can forestall miscommunication and misunderstanding. Because of increased intercultural contact and interdependence, people in the world are forced to "rethink" intercultural communication in order to acquire effective intercultural communication competence. The present paper provides a critical discussion of the conceptualization of intercultural communication and the commonly acknowledged challenge of intercultural communication. With a focus on Japan and the U.S. (since both countries have remarkably different forms of communication in terms of nonverbal communication particularly), the paper defines culture and explores the following: (1) origin of intercultural communication research; (2) cultural fluency and willingness to communicate; and (3) words versus *haragei* (a Japanese concept), touching upon intercultural (business) communication.

Keywords: intercultural communication, cultural fluency, cultural communication, Japanese forms of communication, nonverbal communication

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Introduction

"Intercultural" communication and "international" communication are separate areas of research; in brief, intercultural communication researchers focus on the individual as the unit of analysis, whereas international communication researchers work at the macro level using units of analysis such as nations, world systems, and groups (Gudykunst and Mody 2002). Intercultural business communication is a relatively young field of study compared with intercultural communication or business communication (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2003). An often neglected dimension of business is human interaction (Brislin 1994), and thus, intercultural business communication has grown into a complex disciplinary endeavor: "Of themselves, the fundamental constructs of culture and communication involve an array of well-established and highly developed fields of enquiry, with their distinctive and sometimes overlapping approaches, theories, and methodologies" (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2003, p. 3).

Intercultural communication serves a vital role in that it can forestall miscommunication and misunderstanding. Because of increased intercultural contact and interdependence, people in the world are forced to "rethink" intercultural communication in order to acquire effective intercultural communication competence which, as Arasaratnam (2005) states, is becoming more relevant in the increasingly multicultural communities that people live in today. Although intercultural communication is *not* new, what is new *is* the systematic study of exactly what happens when cross-culture contacts and interactions take place—that is, when a message *producer* and a message *receiver* are from different cultures (Gao 2006). One major area of intercultural communication research is cross-cultural communication, and most current cross-cultural communication research tends to be comparative (e.g., comparing speech convergence in initial interactions in Japan and the U.S.) (Gudykunst and Mody 2002).

The present paper, therefore, provides a critical discussion of the conceptualization of intercultural communication and the commonly acknowledged challenge of intercultural communication. With a focus on Japan and the U.S. (since both countries have remarkably *different* forms of communication and are two remarkably *different* cultures when it comes to nonverbal communication), the author defines culture

and then explores the following: (1) origin of intercultural communication research; (2) cultural fluency and willingness to communicate; and (3) words versus *haragei* (a Japanese concept) in intercultural (business) communication.

What is a Culture?

The intersection of psychology with sociology, anthropology, and organizational studies, as noted by Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2003), is fertile ground for a critical appraisal of the overarching construct of *culture*; for instance, a survey of recent literature in these disciplines indicates that the debate is still continuing as to whether culture is a mental construct, a social dimension, or a shared, patterned behavior. Although the term "culture" has been defined in a variety of ways, culture is characterized as a "system of *beliefs*, *values*, and *assumptions* about life that guides *behavior* and is shared by a group of people; and these are transmitted from generation to generation, rarely with explicit instructions" (Peace Corps 2002, p. 14).

Cultural dimensions

Cultures tend to vary along a number of dimensions. The following are among those in which different views and behaviors can lead to misunderstanding and tension (Ziegahn 2001):

- *Individualism* (values the self-reliance, equality, and autonomy of the individual) versus *collectivism* (values group effort and harmony)
- *Mono-chronic time* (is tangible and can be saved, wasted, and run out) versus *poly-chronic time* (stresses involvement of completion of transactions rather than preset schedules)
- *Egalitarianism* (believing in fairness and equal opportunities for everyone) versus *hierarchy* (may be valued in more collectivist cultures as a means of acknowledging innate differences and inequalities and of facilitating communication through the recognition of social levels)
- *Action* (e.g., U.S. culture tends to value action, efficiency, getting to "the bottom line") versus *being orientation* (may be more important to people coming from a more holistic cultural orientation than the perception of precipitously moving to action steps)
- *Change* (has become the mantra of dominant U.S. society) versus *tradition* (values the lessons of history view the past as an important guide to the present and the future)
- *Communication styles* (depending on cultural variables such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, and race, individuals may have a reference for both sending and receiving messages in styles)
- *Power imbalances* (i.e., cultures are stratified by inequities in terms of access to political and economical power). (pp. 2-3)

Cultural psychology and its focus on historically situated and interactionally based relationships between individuals provide rich sources of data which benefit both inter- and intra research and, perhaps, a more accessible discipline for business interculturalists is that of linguistic anthropology, most especially in its approach to language *is* culture (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2003): "There is much that linguists and communication scholars can contribute to an understanding of the processes generating and reconstructing the luminal zone of the intercultural community…we now need to extend that analysis further using the tools afforded by multi-disciplinarity" (p. 10). The inseparability of *language* and *culture* using the term "languaculture" and that languaculture awareness is extremely important but extremely difficult to achieve in situations of intercultural context (Roberts 1998): "…one of the most remarkable trends in current thinking about language and culture is a broad consensus on the constructed nature of social reality… the recent literature within cultural studies and anthropology critiques the earlier abstract, homogeneous notion of *culture*" (pp. 109-110).

Culture is (1) an important idea as it deals with the way people live and approach problem solving in a social and organizational context, (2) the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another, and (3) the result of a complex interaction of values, attitudes, and behaviors of the members of a group; "values" influence attitudes, "attitudes" affect behaviors, and "behaviors" in turn have an impact on "cultures"—thus forming a reinforcing or self adjusting, circular phenomenon (Soutar, Grainger, and Hedges 1999) (see Figure 1).
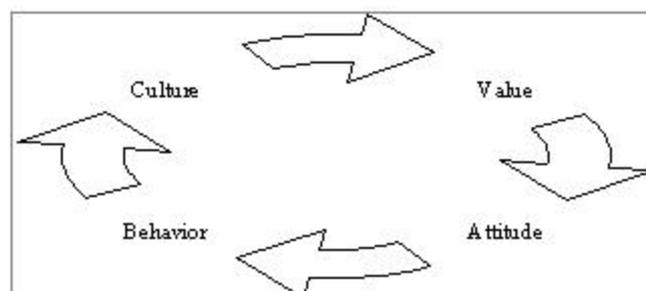
Figure 1. Circular phenomenon of culture based on the theory by Soutar et al. (1999)

In the same way, LeBaron (2003) argues that cross-cultural communication is demonstrated by examples of *values*, *attitudes*, and *behaviors* involving four variables as described below:

1. *Time and space*: Time is one of the most central differences that separate cultures and cultural ways of doing things. *Robert's Rules of Order* (rules for meetings), observed in many Western meetings, enforce a mono-chronic idea of time. In the East, time feels like it has unlimited continuity, an unraveling rather than a strict boundary.
2. *Fate and personal responsibility*: This refers to the degree to which people feel themselves the masters of their lives, versus the degree to which people see themselves as subject to things outside their control.
3. *Face and face-saving*: In the broader definition, face includes ideas of status, power, courtesy, insider and outsider relations, humor, and respect. In many cultures, maintaining face is of great importance, though ideas of how to do this vary.
4. *Nonverbal communication*: Research has shown that the emotions of anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise are expressed in similar ways by people around the world. (pp. 2-3)

As people's familiarities with the above four different starting points increase, they are cultivating *cultural fluency*—cultural fluency is awareness of the ways cultures operate in communication and conflict, and the ability to respond effectively to these differences.

Stumbling blocks in cross-cultural communication

Regarding the researchers/interviewers in intercultural context, Shah (2004) identifies the following six stumbling blocks in cross-cultural communications and understanding:

1. *Assumption of similarities*: This might temporarily ease the discomfort of 'walking on thin ice,' but it can be seriously misleading, with implications for data interpretation and the research itself (Holstein and Gubrium as cited in Shah 2004).
2. *Language differences*: Communication competence studies insist that knowing the language is *not* enough unless and until it is supported by cultural knowledge.
3. *Nonverbal misinterpretations*: Nonverbal messages and signals are located within cultures and patterns of behavior and, therefore, cannot be learned through mere language acquisition (e.g., a nodding implies 'Yes' in many cultures but means 'No' in parts of Greece).
4. *Preconceptions and stereotypes*: Intercultural communication takes place in the backdrop of preconceptions and stereotypes deriving from initial contacts with other cultures.
5. *Tendency to evaluate*: Evaluations are made in comparison with the known value systems and patterns of behavior, derived from one's own cultural background.
6. *High anxiety*: In intercultural interaction, the participants might experience both stress and anxiety at the prospect of dealing with the "unknown."

Culturally unique concepts

Communication is a process involving multiple messages sent via multiple signal systems; and culture has a "pervasive influence on the encoding of both *verbal* and *nonverbal* signals and on the decoding of those signals. Because of this influence, misunderstanding and conflict is inevitable in intercultural communication" (Matsmoto, Leroux, and Yoo 2005, p. 28):

> *Cultural groups are often characterized by distinct languages, and subcultures often have dialects within a language. Each is a unique symbol system that denotes what a culture deems important in its world. That words exist in some languages and not others reflects the fact that different cultures symbolize their worlds differently…. The German word "schadenfreude" and the Japanese word "amae," [which do not have counterparts in English, provide examples].* (p. 15)

Asian constructs—such as *amae* (a Japanese concept that describes dependence upon another's benevolence) and *woori* (an inclusive group in Korea)—reflect the relational nature of human existence; that is, a relational analysis requires consideration of how relationships are culturally defined before attempting to interpret the behavior of individuals, and it entails making explicit the normative expectations and behavioral rules implicit in social relations (Miyahara n.d.): "The strategic units of analysis are not the individual or the situation alone but person-in-relations (focusing on a person in different relational contexts) and person-in-relations (focusing on persons interacting within a relational context)" (p. 11).

Origin of Intercultural Communication Research

The term "intercultural communication" was first used in Edward T. Hall's (1959) book, *The Silent Language*, and Hall has been acknowledged to be the founder of the field of intercultural communication (Note that *The Silent Language* was translated into Japanese in 1966 by Masao Kunihiro, et al. as *Chinmoku No Kotoba*) (Rogers, Hart, and Miike 2002). The original paradigm for intercultural communication took form in conceptualizations by Hall and associates at the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. Department of State during the 1951-1955 period; Hall's early life experiences as he grew up in the culturally diverse state of New Mexico, and commanded an African American regiment in World War II expressed a high degree of cultural fluency, and were significant influences (Rogers et al. 2002): "Hall's graduate training in anthropology at Columbia University and his work as an applied anthropologist in the Foreign Service Institute brought him in contact with scholars who influenced his conceptualization of intercultural communication" (p. 5). Table 1 traces the history of intercultural communication research.

Table 1. Major events in the development of the field of intercultural communication

Date	Events
1950-1955	Development of the original paradigm of intercultural communication by Edward T. Hall and others at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington D.C.
1955	First publication on intercultural communication by Hall ("The Anthropology of Manners" in *Scientific American*)
1959	Publication of *The Silent Language* in English (a Japanese edition appeared in 1966 as *Chinmoku No Kubota*)
Late 1960s	Development of the first intercultural courses at universities (e.g., University of Pittsburgh); and publication of Alfred Smith's (1966) *Communication and Culture*.
1970	International Communication Association established a Division of Intercultural Communication
1972	First publication of an edited book on *Intercultural Communication* by Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter.
1973	*Intercultural Communication* by L.S. Harms at the University of Hawaii is published (the first textbook on intercultural communication)
1974	First publication of *International and Intercultural Communication Annuals*; The Society of Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR) is found
1975	*An Introduction to Intercultural Communication* by John C. Condon and Fatih Youssef is published (the second textbook in intercultural communication); the Speech Communication Association established a Division of Intercultural Communication

1977	*International Journal of Intercultural Relations* begins publication
1983-present	Theory development in intercultural communication is emphasized (e.g., three International and Intercultural Communication Annual volumes on intercultural communication theory are published)
1998	Founding of the International Academy of Intercultural Relations

Adapted from Hart (1966) and Hall papers, special collection, University of Arizona Library, cited in Rogers et al. (2002, p. 14).

Hall's books (*The Silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimension*, and *Beyond Culture*) are among the most cited books in intercultural communication on the basis of the Social Science Citation Index from 1972 to 1998 (Hart as cited in Rogers et al. 2002) and he was also considered the most influential figure in the field of intercultural communication by respondents in a survey of U.S. members of the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (Harman and Briggs as cited in Rogers et al. 2002). *The Silent Language* was written for the general public but had a profound influence on academic scholars: "Over the past four decades, the field of intercultural communication has grown mainly within university departments of communication ….Throughout the growth of intercultural communication study, Hall's work has remained influential" (Rogers et al. 2002, p. 15). *The Silent Language* placed a heavy emphasis on "nonverbal" communication, and an important appeal of the book to its readers was its illumination of previously hidden dimensions of human communication, particularly *proxemics* (how space affect communication) and *chronemics* (how time affects communication). Elements of Hall's paradigm include the following (Rogers et al. 2002): (1) it was focused on intercultural communication, rather than on macro-level mono-cultural study; (2) nonverbal communication defined (by Hall) as communication did not involve the exchange of words; (3) the emphasis, especially in nonverbal communication, was on the out-of-awareness level of information-exchange; and (4) the approach to intercultural communication accepted cultural differences was nonjudgmental, reflecting a perspective from anthropological research and training. Hall's paradigm was a strong intellectual influence on conceptualizations of the Japanese ways of *nonverbal* communication, shaping the field of intercultural communication in Japan. However, only recently have researchers studying intercultural communication devoted systematic attention to the influence of cultural fluency: an influence expressed in Hall's career.

Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication is hugely important in any interaction with others because people tend to look for nonverbal cues when verbal messages are unclear or ambiguous (especially when *different* languages are being used) (LeBaron 2003): "Since nonverbal behavior arises from our cultural common sense (our ideas about what is appropriate, normal, and effective as communication in relationships), we use different systems of understanding gestures, posture, silence, emotional expression, touch, physical appearance, and other nonverbal cues" (p. 4).

Low-context cultures (the U.S., Canada, and northern European countries) tend to give less emphasis to nonverbal communication, whereas in high-context settings such as Japan (and most Asian counties) or Colombia, understanding the nonverbal components of communication is relatively more important to receiving the intended meaning of the communication as a whole (LeBaron 2003). Hall originally identified the concepts of high-context and low-context in the 1960s to categorize differences in communication styles; the concepts were stated in *Beyond Culture* (published in 1976 by Anchor Press) as follows (WIN Advisory Group n.d.): "*High-context transactions feature pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Low-context transactions are the reverse*" (¶ 3). When the culture context is high general communication does not require a lot of background information to pass from one person to the other as a lot is already known, but when the culture context is low general communication requires a lot of background information.

In a study by Gudykunst et al. (1996), it was hypothesized that cultural individualism-collectivism, self construals, and values would have separate effects on individuals' use of low- and high-context communication styles. As predicted, the results of their study suggest that independent self construals and individualistic values mediate the influence of cultural individualism-collectivism on the use of low-context communication, and interdependent self construals and collectivistic values mediate the influence of cultural individualism-collectivism on the use of high-context communication. Their findings further

suggest that individual level factors (i.e., self construals and values) are better predictors of low- and high-context communication styles across cultures than cultural individualism-collectivism.

In the U.S., for instance, people have gotten so used to conflicting messages (verbal vs. nonverbal communication) that the importance of the nonverbal message has been greatly diminished over the years ("Project Planning" n.d.):

> *Speaking is in most cases valued higher than silence because silence makes us feel as if we are not communicating very well with other partner. There is a saying in Japanese: "Talking is silver, but silence is gold." This refers to the fact that by speaking, you often make matters worse. This has not kept the Western cultures from attributing a bad "vibe" to silence in a room. Overall, not enough attention is paid to the nonverbal message in the American culture. One of the factors responsible for this could be the fact that Americans generally overuse facial expressions and gestures, thus diminishing their importance. (p. 14)*

Japanese/U.S. intercultural communication scholars began studying Japanese/U.S. communication behavior in the 1970s; Japan and U.S. are the two largest economic powers in the world and a high volume of trade and personnel interchange occurs between these two countries; today there are more studies of communication between Japanese and U.S. nationals than of intercultural communication between any two other countries (Rogers et al. 2002):

> *While courses in intercultural communication are taught throughout the world today, usually in university departments of communication, in Japan these courses are also offered in university departments of English and school of business. One reason for the growing popularity of intercultural communication, and for the location of some courses in business schools, is that this field is perceived in Japan as a particularly useful skill for use in international business. (p. 16)*

The U.S. and Japan are two vastly different cultures in almost every respect of life and the cultural differences in communication can make international business between the two countries very difficult; perhaps, the biggest nonverbal difference between Japan and the U.S. is kinesics (such as gestures, body movements, and posture) (Hoyt n.d): (1) when the U.S. business men meet it is customary to shake hands, whereas bowing is customary in Japan; and (2) establishing eye contact during conversation shows interest, honesty and sincerity in the U.S., but in Japan the opposite is true and eye contact shows that you are being suggestive, insistent to be equal or belligerent. Moreover, in Japan, constant eye contact with a superior is considered rude because it may be seen as defiance or a challenge ("Project Planning" n.d.).

Cultural Fluency and Willingness to Communicate

Intracultural communication refers to communication between interactants sharing the *same* cultural background. However, in intercultural communication, interactants come from *different* cultures; during intracultural communication, interactants implicitly share the same ground rule of communication and interaction, but in intercultural communication this is oftentimes not the case (Matsumoto et al. 2005). At the most fundamental level, each individual's interpretation of the world is different, but according to the groups to which people belong (national, regional, local, and professional) they share some interpretations with others (CILT 2005). Culture is a system of beliefs and values shared by a particular group of people, and thus, skills described below, which constitute cultural fluency, are essential to become successful global players:

- *tolerance of ambiguity* (the ability to accept lack of clarity and to be able to deal with ambiguous situations constructively)
- *behavior flexibility* (the ability to adapt own behavior to different requirements/situations)
- *knowledge discovery* (the ability to acquire new knowledge in real-time communication)
- *communicative awareness* (the ability to use communicative conventions of people from other cultural backgrounds and to modify own forms of expression correspondingly)
- *respect for otherness* (curiosity and openness, as well as a readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about own cultures)
- *empathy* (the ability to understand intuitively what other people think and how they feel in given situations)

As an example, the quality of teachers' daily social and intellectual interactions is influenced by effective communications and interpersonal skills. When considering the relationships between Japanese and non-Japanese teachers who work together, the quality of their relationships may need to be assessed in terms of their willingness to communicate (WTC) with persons from different cultures, and the ability to do so while respecting cultural differences (Walker 2005).

Walker's study on cultural fluency and WTC has found that teachers of the study sample

understand that intercultural communication requires effective interpersonal skills, and that they believe that good English language skills give them the confidence to communicate in English—a 'global' language. People in the European Union are now required to study two foreign languages, so many Europeans will be trilingual in 10 years, but Japan is still working on becoming bilingual (Sato and Obi n.d.). Generally speaking, most U.S. people are monolingual and language proficiency is a prerequisite for really understanding the important cues of intercultural communication. Therefore, it is viewed that most U.S. people do not have that proficiency that is required by the rest of the world.

Although many Japanese people appear to have positive attitudes towards the learning of English, they feel that it is difficult even to acquire effective English communication skills at school. The average score for Japanese who undertake the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is almost the lowest in the world and the conversational skills of Japanese are considered to be poor (Matters et al. 2004). Such difficulties prompted Sakai and D'Angelo (2005) to argue: "Japan needs to develop pride and confidence in its own form of educated English … to play a role on the international stage, and to be able to engage in debates and exchange of ideas on an equal footing with those from all over the world (p. 324).

When people of two different cultures interact, cultural fluency is the appropriate application of respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, the willingness to suspend judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, and sense of humor. WTC is defined in terms of low communication anxiety (also known as communication apprehension—thus a learned condition caused by unfamiliar social situations, cultural dissimilarity, and the use of a second language). This means that for Japanese teachers to enjoy harmonious collegial relationships, they should be confident in their English language competence and make the effort to converse with colleagues in English. Based on eight factors (i.e., English proficiency; cultural differences; topics; interaction partners; feedback; silence; inadequate communication strategies; and pressure from in-group), Chen et al. (1996) examined communication between Japanese and U.S. nationals from the perspective of Japanese participants. Data were collected in interviews with Japanese visiting students to a U.S. southwestern university As a result: (1) English proficiency is *not* often the source of communication problems, but the source of the programs includes pronunciation, listening, speaking speed, limited vocabulary, literal understanding of expression, and variations of English; and (2) communication problems stemming from cultural differences include jokes, ritualistic daily interactions, appropriate interaction for particular occasions, emphasis on talks in social interaction, and difference in nonverbal cues.

From a psychological and linguistic point of view, it is necessary to create modifications in learners' concepts and schemata by a process of further socialization and experiential learning in the foreign language, which itself embodies the foreign culture (Gao 2006):

> *There are two possible approaches: first, the use of learners' first language as the medium of study of a foreign culture, taught according to the principles of appropriate disciplines, although without the intention of introducing the learner to the totality of the culture.… Second, the integration of language and culture learning by using the language a medium for the continuing socialization of students is a process which is not intended to imitate and replicate the socialization of students is a process which is not intended to imitate and replicate the socialization of native-speaker teachers but rather to develop students' cultural competence from its existing stage, by changing it into intercultural competence*. (p. 66)

In Japan, as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology's guidelines for English language teaching within the school curriculum have placed increasing emphasis on "communication," a greater portion of textbooks and classroom activities has focused on face-to-face interaction in hypothetical intercultural contact situations (Yashima 2002). As further noted by Yashima, Macintyre developed a path model (see Figure 2) that postulate that WTC is based on a combination of greater

perceived communicative competence and a lower level of communication anxiety: "Macintyre then applied this model to second language (L2) communication and showed that anxiety about L2 communication and perceived L2 communicative competence consistently predicted WTC in a L2" (p. 55).
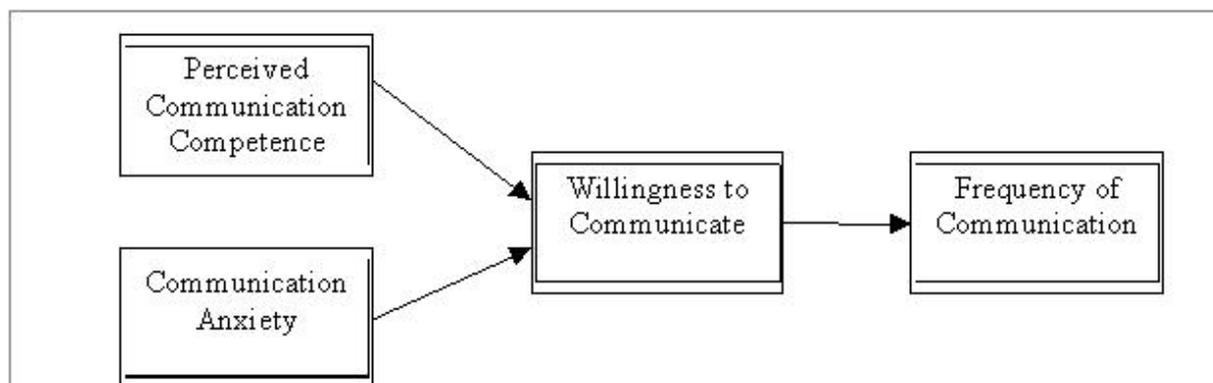

Figure 2. Portion of Macintyre's WTC model, as cited in Yashima (2002), p. 55

Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) studied the antecedents of WTC in a L2 with Japanese adolescent learners of English and found that the learners' perceived communication competence is most strongly related to WTC: "Those who are internationally oriented seem to be motivated to study the L2. The higher level of motivation links to self-confidence, possibly through learning behavior and its resultant competence" (p. 142). Human communication is such a complex process in which people do influence each other; and intercultural communication is the sharing and construction of meaning through interaction with dissimilar others (Yoshima et al. 2004): "Through learning an L2, we can expand our communicative repertoires and make the construction of shared meaning easier. WTC in an L2 involves readiness to initiate this process that will hopefully lead to mutual understanding and trust" (p. 145).

Words and '*Haragei*' in Intercultural Communication

In the Christian tradition, great importance is attributed to *words*, as Yoshida (2002) maintains, "The basic approach to cognition and communication in that tradition can be see, for example, in the Gospel. According to St. John: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God" (¶ 26). Yoshida further describes as follows:

- In contrast to Westerners who depend on words, Japanese can communicate through simple indications or hints (thus "*haragei*"); words are merely an indication leading to the meaning, and the meaning itself is often buried between the lines without being explicitly expressed in a way that would be immediately understood by Westerners. In Japanese-style communication, what is uttered can be fully understood only by those who have had similar experiences. (¶ 29)
- People in Europe and the U.S. do not fear confrontations or conflicts to the same degree that Japanese do. Japanese usually hesitate to say "No." A blunt "No" is considered rude, almost like a judgment on a person rather than on his ideas, so Japanese often use ambiguous expressions such as "I will think about it," meaning practically "No." (¶ 30)

In Japan and other collective societies, the self exists in relation to others, and thus, it is the relationship, not the individual (Greenholtz 2003): "…one of the elements of popular mythology that in their minds distinguishes the Japanese from non-Japanese is the Japanese' self-reported ability to understand each other without words, *haragei*" (p. 126) as the following story tells:

In any conversation concerning cultural difference or international relations, the phrase "we Japanese" (who think alike and speak with one voice) will be heard repeatedly. I am reminded of a Japanese colleague describing restaurant portions in Canada as being "too large for we Japanese"—not just for him personally, but for the entire Japanese nation. … There is no public-private distinction in Japan, as we understand it in the West, where the private is where an individual can retire to a zone of safety. Within one's own home, there is some refuge from formal social interaction in Japan, the never-ending chess game in which every interaction must be plotted several moves in advance, relative status guarded, words carefully chosen so as not to give

or invite offense, personal desires subordinated to the needs of the in-group at hand and appearances (dress, make-up, and appropriateness to occasion) carefully considered. (p. 127)

Negotiation styles and business communication

As reported in an article, *Project Planning and Expectations Dealing with the Japanese* (n.d.), there are many differences in the styles of negotiation between Japan and the U.S. (see Table 2). Deals are formulated over the phone, in person or just by corresponding with each other in writing in the U.S. (where people like to be very direct their goal in negotiations), whereas negotiations over the phone or by fax *are* unacceptable and have to take place face to face in Japan. Furthermore, great importance is given to the harmony among the team members and therefore decisions are reached by consensus and take a lot of time in Japan.

Table 2. A Comparison of basic concepts of negotiations between Japan and the U.S.

Basic concepts	The U.S. side	Japanese side
Pre-negotiation	Determine the objectives, opportunities, and problems	Research other company again, again, then again
Entry	A formal sales presentation is made	Get to know people, establish harmony
Establishing relationship with other party	Establish trust and learn needs and objectives of other party	Sales presentation
Reformulate earlier strategies	Try to meet needs of other party	Discuss progress with group and whole company
Bargaining	Make a proposal and accept counter proposal	Make proposal and another proposal, and another proposal
Reaching agreement	Terms agreeable to both parties are reached and finalized	Make sure to keep face

People in the U.S., in general, believe that communication is primarily "verbal" or "written," but "nonverbal" language is as important in Japan (if not more important than written language; and silence is considered a virtue in Japan as well) ("Project Planning" n.d.):

> *A common Japanese proverb would be, "Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know." It is during these periods of silence that the famous belly language (haragei), the sensing of another's thoughts and feelings goes on. …When speaking to one another, the Japanese put more space between themselves than Westerners do, especially in formal situations. By trespassing into this "personal territory," you can make a Japanese feel very uncomfortable. …Speaking in a loud voice is considered rude and threatening.* (p. 15)

Japan is well known as a "collectivist" society where people are extremely sensitive to and concerned about relationships, and a noteworthy Japanese quote, "The nail that sticks out is hammered down," indicates how *individualism* is negatively viewed in Japanese society, whereas U.S. society values "individualism" and "uniqueness"; in other words, Japanese culture discourages individualism, and U.S. culture embraces it (Brightman 2005):

> *Some differences in culture may also be linked to differences in the way the self is construed as well as societal regulations (Fujihara et al. 1999). …Asian cultures, such as Japan, have an interdependent construal of the self; are socially oriented; and are concerned with fitting in, belonging, promoting other's goals, and being indirect. On the contrary, Americans typically have an independent view of the self and seek independence from others.* (p. 186).

The globalization of business and industry enormously enhanced entry by U.S. and European companies into the Japanese market. The number of foreign operating units in Japan increased from 1,500 to 3, 400

companies over the past decade (Yoshida 2002):

> *…while the Japanese need to adjust to and adapt to a more direct style of communication to help bridge the gap, non-Japanese should receive training in the Japanese style of communication so as to minimize misunderstanding and conflict...on a national policy level, it is of essential importance to mobilize budgetary resources toward developing the negotiation and communication skills needed to communicate effectively with the respect of the world. This is a new challenge in the era of globalization. In the process of pursing such policy of objectives, I think that the following teaching of Confucius should be kept in mind: He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger.* (¶ 41- 44)

Yoshida (2002) also describes challenges that international business managers have to deal with in order to carry out their work in Asia including Japan successfully (¶ 39): (1) international business managers in the head office must communicate clearly their corporate visions and concrete policies (otherwise, they reduce opportunities for them to learn the differences in strategic thoughts through active intellectual interactions with local nationals); (2) they must guild sufficient linguistic competence in English to provide effective directions for overseas branches for efficient operations; (3) they should learn local values and cultural backgrounds so that they know how to behave themselves in intercultural settings; (3) they should recognize local needs and adjust the modus operandi accordingly (it may be useful for the head office to have a qualified staff member who can play the role of "go-between" for the head office vis-a-vis the branch office or subsidiary to fill the communication gap).

Conclusion

Cultural communication research tends to focus on understanding communication within *one* culture from the insiders' points of view (Gudykunst and Mody 2002). Understanding cross-cultural communication should be a prerequisite to understanding intercultural communication because cross-cultural communication looks at how people from differing cultural backgrounds endeavor to communicate, and thus, the core of cross-cultural communication is to establish and understand how people from different cultures communicate with each other. A new challenge for cultural fluency as a guide to effective intercultural communication is to generate approaches of investigation on how people from different cultures and speaking different languages actually influence each other in specific intercultural contexts.

Critics argue that the dominance of English influences the Japanese language and Japanese people's views of language, culture, and identity, which are affected by the world view of native English speakers (Kubota 1998). Both critical *consciousness* and practical *skills* in English are necessary for Japanese people to appreciate English for social transformation.

Finally, including nonverbal communication in Japanese communication behavior, "a holistic analysis of Japanese interpersonal communication is necessary…social, political, and economic surrounds of the Japanese society that influence people's perceptions of norms, rules, and competence must be taken into account for a more meaningful and useful approach to theorizing interpersonal communication competence for Japanese" (Miyahara n.d., p. 11).

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