Implications of Universal and Parochial Behavior for Intercultural Communication

James Leigh, PhD FRGS

Asst Professor, Campus Coordinator Languages

Intercollege, Nicosia, Cyprus

leigh@intercol.edu

Abstract

Human behavior is striking for it is the same and yet different. Many common behaviors are displayed by humans around the world whatever their race or ethnic heritage. And yet there are also unique parochial behaviors among various peoples. That is behaviors that are bound to a particular culture or ethnic group in their locale or milieu. Of course the interaction of different cultures may lead to common cultural phenomena and behaviour across various human groups – hence for example, TV, blue jeans and *hello* are just about ubiquitous.

Human behavior is largely rooted in one or both of the following:

- Biological heritage

- Cultural heritage

Universal behavior, that is shared by humans around the world therefore, is based in human biological inheritance passed on through the generations of all mankind. Alternatively, behavior that is different among the various groups of mankind, is developed in our learned behavior from our social and physical surroundings.

It should be no surprise therefore, to see that the interaction of diverse parochial behaviors across cultural borders often lead to unintended misunderstanding – even conflict. This misunderstanding may appear as the received meaning of the various exotic behaviors' messages are found offensive, even if they were not meant to be so.

In this paper, first of all human behavior that is universal will be looked at. Then a *comparative-culture* view of learned parochial behavior will be taken of various unique and culturally bound behaviors. However, the overall thrust of the paper is practical. From the insights gained of human behavior, some empathy-based practical communication techniques for effective intercultural communication are listed. With their application, intercultural offence may be minimised, and co-operation and understanding maximised.

keywords: universal behaviour, parochial behaviours, bio-cultural functionalism, intercultural offense, empathy-based communication techniques.

INTRODUCTION

Critical observers often have negative reactions to human differences when they see parochial physical characteristics or behaviors of different peoples. Parochial difference is only a manifestation of adaptation, by a specific group of people, to their unique physical or social environment. However, these observers' negative reactions are fuelled when they see that individuals outside their native surroundings may suffer pragmatic disadvantage by not being able to thrive in an exotic environment. These critics assume this is evidence for the inherent inferiority of exotic peoples and their behavior. With such

prejudice, it is impossible to form empathetic intercultural relations, and therefore, effective communication does not take place (Leigh, 1999).

A more realistic understanding of intercultural human behavior is founded on the notion of cultural difference and not cultural deficit. Based on this more accommodating idea, practical principles and techniques, built on empathy for effective communication across cultures, are listed in the culminating thrust of the paper.

BEHAVIOR AT UNIVERSAL AND PAROCHIAL LEVELS

First-time travelers may be surprised to see much that is common across different human groups. On the external culturally resourced level we see, to name a few, toothpaste, TV, mobile phones and consumer brand names like Coca-Cola, Ford and Toyota, all of which are ubiquitous. Obviously cultural interaction has led to the presence of these common phenomena among human groups. However, various spontaneous behaviors, stemming from inherited behavioral tendencies in humans, are also universal. Such behaviors would include, for example, smiling when happy, seeking intimacy or body contact to express love or affection, and an increase in the level of fleeting eye contact when sincerity and openness is absent. A specific culture may reduce or enhance these behaviors, but as these actions are rooted in the nature of humans, they are more or less present in all humans.

Darwin argues for the biological roots of universal behavior. His work on facial and body gestures led him to conclude that both humans and animals have innate orientations for much of their behavior. For example:

> *In almost all animals* [and man] *… terror causes the body to tremble. The skin becomes pale, sweating* [occurs], *… the hair bristles, …* [urine and faeces] *are involuntarily voided, … .the breathing is hurried,* [and] *the heart beats quickly, wildly and violently* (Darwin, 1965, pp. 30,77).

Chomsky (1969; 1976; 2000) supports the concept of universal human behavior. He suggests that every language is infinite in the potential number of utterances which can be made by the never-ending structural possibilities of phrases stemming from the vast scope and content of each language (1976, pp. 46-51; and Shanks, 1993, p. 26). Those of his school of thought argue for a generic grammar, and claim that this is present in all languages, and stems from inherent trends or predispositions in the human mind. That is, even though the *surface structure* (or apparent structure) of different languages may seem very different, the *deep structure* of meaning is the same across all languages. This universal deep structure, according to Chomsky, depicts the universal pre-programmed (from within our biological heritage) language orientation and ability in all humans.

For example, the following two sentences in English and Greek respectively, appear very different because of the dissimilar alphabet and syntax (Greek words are shown without accents):

- *The book is mine.*

- *Einai diko mou to biblio.*
  (Is / mine / the book.)

However, even though the syntax is reversed in the Greek, the semantics is virtually identical to the English expression. So superficially the sentences may seem very different, but the meaning is the same for both of them – hence universal deep structure.

While there may be much that is the same across all languages, obviously the same surface structure is not universal across every language. Many colloquial expressions are unique to a particular language. I have been *on the receiving end* of these comments at different times:

- **Hang in there.** (An Americanism meaning, *Keep trying and don't give up.)*

- **Belt up!** *(*An Anglicanism meaning, *Shut up!)*

- ○ ***Piddling around.*** (Another Americanism, which is quite rude for the British, meaning, *Not doing anything much.)*

- ○ ***She'll be right mate.*** (An Australianism meaning, *Everything will be OK.)*

- ○ ***Bob's your uncle.*** (An Anglicanism meaning, *arriving, succeeding or accomplishing.)*

As these expressions are from different cultures bordering the Atlantic it is not possible to be sure of the meaning unless one is conversant with the expressions of that culture. Therefore, it is necessary to relate human behavior to the context of its source to gain a complete understanding of actions and comments.

Berry and Bernstein relate human behavior to the physical and social environment respectively. Berry (1966; 1967; 1971; 1976; 1992) applies the biological concept of *differentiation* to the study of human behavior through his theory of *ecological functionalism*. He argues that humans specialize (and so become differentiated) to adapt to their particular physical and social environment, to survive and thrive. Differentiation, in its general sense, influences the type of specialization required of human physiology, anatomy, genes, psychology, and culture. Therefore, human activities lead to different kinds of differentiation, in various societies in their peculiar physical and social settings.

Berry's orientation has been described as follows:

> *The child rearing practices, socialization procedures, and cultural institutions that affect cognitive realization and competencies also affect the mode and context of the expression of those competencies. Values, motives, and attitudes activate and shape the development and expression of psychomotor and cognitive competence. These social factors are themselves cultural adaptations to the ecological pressures upon a society. Putting it quite simply: People express competence when it makes adaptive sense to do so* (Nurcombe, de Lacey, and Walker, p. 217, 1999; see also Berry and Dasen, 1973).

Berry's field research supports the idea that there may be great differences between the way a society, and its people, view the world and expresses this view, as opposed to the way another society does these. For example, if we take the Temne and Eskimo (Berry, 1966; 1971), we find the following language differences:

- ○ An exact equivalent in the other language does not exist.

- ○ A similar expression in the other language does not exist.

Indeed to translate from one language to another while maintaining precisely the original meaning is probably never possible. To cite two simple words in Greek (shown without accents):

- ○ *Kafeneio* (coffee shop)

- ○ *Cwrio* (village)

The English equivalent words are only the best possible approximates, as coffee shops (Kontos, 1991, footnote 18) and villages in England are nothing like they are in Greece or Cyprus. A coffee shop in England is a place to buy coffee beans or ground coffee as the ingredients to take home and make the coffee. However, in Greece or Cyprus, the coffee shop is like a rudimentary café-club where mainly men meet to drink coffee, play games and discuss politics and social maters.

When a culture does not have the item within its environment from another culture, we cannot expect a word to express the meaning of that item, and it may be difficult, even with a phrase, to exactly construct the meaning of such exotic items. Thus semantic overlap from one culture to another is never complete. No matter how hard we try translate with full meaning it is probably never possible.

Berry suggests that these Temne and Eskimo language differences, which are related to the perception and intellectual skills of the people in these two societies, are associated with different child-rearing

practices, which are in turn a result of the type of subsistence patterns in each society, as determined, at least in part, by the physical environment.

Bernstein (1960; 1961a; 1961b; 1967; 2000) has taken the *linguistic relativity hypothesis* and investigated the contention that language codifies the way one views the world and therefore directs one's behavior. He was strongly influenced by Sapir (1949; 1976) and Whorf (1956), previous proponents of linguistic relativity.

Bernstein's study of social class in Britain indicates that the English language styles, which he called *codes*, of the social classes, are different. He argues that this difference indicates the codes are a manifestation of specific views of life and perceptions of reality resulting from the diverse life styles of the social classes. Thus the *restricted code* of the lower classes, and the *elaborated code* of the higher classes, were in essence like different languages, even though on the surface they were apparently forms of the English language.

> *The restricted code is characterized by rigid use of syntax … The sentences in this form tend to be short, grammatically simple, stressing the active voice, with limited and repetitive use of conjunctions, little use of subordinate clauses, limited use of adjectives, and infrequent use of impersonal pronouns as subjects of conditional clauses. Restricted-code users have difficulty in sustaining a formal subject through speech sequence, characteristically confuse reason and conclusion, and rely on idiomatic colloquial stereotypes in a predictable way …* [The restricted code] *becomes predominant in an environment in which … spoken language is not perceived as a major vehicle for conveying inner states. The restricted code symbolizes the normative aspects of the group and reinforces the existing pattern of social relationships. It deals with direct, immediate, unspecifically descriptive aspects of the environment. It supports a particular kind of authority in which social power is quickly revealed, in a setting which stresses group solidarity and loyalty….* [Alternatively] *the elaborated code has a much less predictable grammar and phraseology. Precise and accurate syntax is employed. Logical modifications and stress are mediated through a grammatically complex sentence construction, for example by the use of a range of conjunctions and subordinate clauses. Prepositions are frequently used, to indicate logical relationships as well as temporal and spatial contiguity. The first personal pronoun is frequently used. There is a wide range of adjectives and verbs. Individual qualifications are mediated through structure of internal relationships within and between sentences. It is a language form which develops the possibilities inherent in a complex conceptual hierarchy for the organization of experience, stressing universal rather than context-dependent meanings. The restricted code stresses group solidarity, consensus, and the authority structure in that group. The elaborated code stresses individuality and individual responsibility* (Nurcombe, de Lacey, and Walker, 1999, pp. 59-60).

Obviously Bernstein's ideas are directly relevant and transferable into intercultural research to investigate the idea that language, which is a function of the social environment, determines one's view of the world.

However, there have been dissenting voices in criticism of Bernstein's idea of the superiority of some languages or codes over other languages or codes. These dissenting voices, including Labov, argue against the claim that some languages are deficient in various aspects of communicative effectiveness.

For example, Labov (1970a; 1970b), Baratz (1969) and Stewart (1964) assert that the language-deficiency idea is mistaken. They argue, that Black English is a fully developed language and the difficulties of black children (in Anglo Saxon society in the USA) arise only because they are not proficient in Standard English, which is the dominant medium in which they must function during formal situations.

Labov (1970b) has argued against the language-deficiency interpretation, of Bereiter and Engelmann (1966), by pointing out that Non-Standard English operates by grammar rules that are just a complex as Standard English, and that this fact is not recognized by Bereiter and Engelmann. He asserts therefore that the logic of the deep structures of Non-Standard English is equivalent to Standard English.

On the other hand de Lacey (1991) has made the following comment:

> *If there were any lingering doubt about the relative efficiency (in terms of precise, unambiguous and speedy communication) of Standard English, by comparison with Non-Standard forms, it was likely dispelled by a thorough series of experiments carried out by Kirk and Hunt of the University of Illinois.*

The work of Kirk and Hunt (1975, 1980), in the USA at Illinois, has shown that Standard English was consistently more precise and efficient in many descriptive tasks over Black Vernacular English (BVE) (Nurcombe, de Lacey and Walker, p. 237, 1999). That is not to say that Standard English is better in communicating everything than BVE, but it is certainly better communicating some things than BVE. Of course the opposite would hold true too, that is, that BVE would be more efficient in communicating some things than Standard English, all depending on who is speaking to whom, when and where. The following example illustrates this quite well:

> *A white teacher told of his experience with some Negro boys in southern USA. I asked some boys the colour of the sky. No one could tell me. Then the father of one of them came in, and I told him of the boys' ignorance. I repeated my question without any success. He then grinned and asked his son, "Tom, how sky stan?" To which Tom immediately replied, "Blue."* (Allen, Ware and Garrison, 1867, p. xxvii).

It does seem that some languages have obvious strengths and are adept in various aspects of communication. For example, Eskimos have a language that apparently is more effective in spatial terms as compared to the Temne. To see whether the Temne and the Eskimo have a system of geometrical-spatial terms which is consistent with the demands of their environment, Berry (1966) made an analysis of the terms in use in both languages. One hundred terms from English were selected for the possible translation into Temne and Eskimo. For example, the following terms are some of those which were included: square, triangle, rectangle, circle, oval, corner, surface, symmetrical, parallel, horizontal, vertical, position, orientation, and opposite. The following illustration shows a summary of the terms by the class and the language:

SUMMARY OF TERMS BY CLASS AND LANGUAGE			
Class	**Language**		**d E/T**
	Eskimo	**Temne**	
Temne or Eskimo word is a true equivalent of the English word.	57	33	+24
Temne or Eskimo phrase is a true equivalent of the English word.	10	6	+4
Temne or Eskimo word or phrase is derived from an English word.	0	7	-7
No way to express English word in Temne or Eskimo. or Distinction is not made between the word and one in the previous three classes.	33	54	-21

It can be seen that the Temne find it necessary to utilize approximately one third as many geometrical-spatial differentiations in their language as compared to English people. The Eskimo however, differentiate more than half of the geometrical-spatial English concepts in their own language. These observations however, it must be noted, relate to word equivalents in each language.

May be more important is the fact that the Eskimo make, at least linguistically, 28 more distinctions of the type used in the study without borrowing from the English language. The seven Temne borrowings from English may indicate that the Temne are beginning to need these concepts possibly as their culture changes as a result of intercultural contact.

The absence of Eskimo borrowings from English may indicate that the Eskimo find their own system satisfactory. From a less ethnocentric view, it may be suggested that the Eskimo possess an intricate system of language which aids the spatial interpretation of objects and their relationships locationally.

The language and behavior of different peoples illustrate just how they are adapted to their physical environment. For example, Eskimos must hunt and navigate in rather featureless barren landscapes of arid snowlands. So these people are well equipped with specially developed language, behavior and ability to cope and thrive. They have good perceptual abilities for appreciating differences in fine detail, and thus perform well on tests using patterns and sketches. Conversely, the Temne people of Africa live in environments that are visually rich and varying. Rarely do they have to travel far from their farms, and thus are not adept in noticing minor differences in the detail of patterns or pictures (de Lacey, 1974, pp. 64,68,90; Leigh, 1991, pp. 7,8).

Desmond Morris' eclectic and comprehensive work attempts to combine both the various biological and cultural influences on humans into an integrated view to explain human behavior (Morris, 1967; 1969; 1971; 1988). Morris shows that human behavior is rooted in both biologically inherited or determined behavior, and culture or learned behavior. He suggests that an integration of these two behavioral roots culminates in an explanation for much human behavior. He believes that by observing the behavior of others, and understanding their cultural context, we can better communicate and relate to them.

A synthesis of the ideas of Chomsky, Berry, Bernstein and Morris, includes the idea that humans establish behavior through their universal biology and physiology, and their parochial culture, in interaction with the particular physical environment. This adaptive process facilitates the possibility for individuals to meet their needs, survive, and belong to wherever and with whomever they find themselves. Indeed we can say that through culture, one communicates with other people.

Effective communication requires that human symbolic interaction conveys common meaning from one person to another. In effective communication, the behavior, of the participants (as expressed through their symbolic interaction) should convey the same meaning to each other. Without this common understanding, misunderstanding is bound to appear.

Each culture is internalized by its members to be their belief and behavior (Leigh, 2000). The author of this paper has called this synthesis, *bio-cultural functionalism*. That is, each of us specializes (and so becomes differentiated) in order to function through our biology and culture within our physical settings.

It is the parochial diverse behaviors of humans, different from culture to culture, that often retards intercultural understanding, and is a cause of misunderstanding. The following example highlights how easy offence can occur in intercultural communication:

> *Often ill will among nations is exacerbated if not caused by differences in ways of showing intentions. An Egyptian living in the United States was surprised and hurt to learn that his American roommate considered Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to be "rude and arrogant." The American was responding to Sadat's comment, in answer to an American journalist's question: "Invited or not invited, I will come" to discuss the peace negotiations with President Carter. The Egyptian immediately recognized his president's statement as an English translation of a standard … expression that Egyptians commonly use to show the very best intentions to settle a misunderstanding and restore harmonious relations* (Tannen, 1987, p. 192).

To illustrate intercultural conflict let us take the following example of how a tragic event occurred, as a result of a visiting priest's not being able to accept, what for him, was alien and immoral Eskimo hospitality:

> *"Maybe our visitor wants some of our best loving hospitality with you Asiak, so make yourself beautiful and ravishing," Ernenek said to his wife. With a silly, half suppressed little laugh, Asiak let her hair down, rolled up her sleeves and dunked her arms into the urine tub, passing her fingers through her hair till it was smooth and shiny. She combed her hair with a fish spine while using the tub contents as a mirror. She scooped up a handful of fat and rubbed it on her face and sat down beside the priest who had watched her with astonishment. He backed up with fright and horror, and she moved intimately closer, offering a grin, herself and a blush. In total bewilderment the priest tried to flee, only to be seized by insulted Ernenek, who was mortified and burst into tears. "You son of a toothless walrus and father of a hairless polar bear," Ernenek cried; "Who do you think you are to insult me like this? I will teach you a lesson." With that he picked him up and threw him against the ice wall of the igloo. The priest was never again going to insult anyone. His head made a thud on the wall. He was dead* (adapted from Ruesch, 1950).

A UNIVERSAL AND CULTURAL-COMPARATIVE VIEW

The efficacy of the eclectic integrated view of bio-cultural functionalism (that human behavior is rooted in our biology, and cultural and physical environment) may not be complete. How do we explain mental telepathy, revelation, inspiration, premonition, parapsychological phenomena, selfless heroism and brutish sadism? Also the rise of individuals from unremarkable backgrounds, to accomplish incredibly influential deeds, noted as benchmarks in history, cries out for explanation. Take for example, Mahatma Ghandi, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Albert Einstein, Patriarch Abraham, Mother Teresa and Jesus Christ – they were all of humble background, and yet they rose to positions of great influence upon humanity for better or worse. Time and chance, or individual differences, seem inadequate to explain remarkable human examples in history. There are influences on humans, and abilities and proclivities within individuals that we need to understand (Nash, 2000). However, these factors are not within the gamut of this paper, even though they may be of prime importance.

However, by combining the views of Chomsky, Berry, Bernstein and Morris, we have apparently obtained a wholistic view of human behavior and its biological and cultural roots.

Let us now look at some typical examples of universal behavior, and then some examples of parochial behavior for graphic illustration (Thomas and Deutsch, 1973, p. 15; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1971; 1979, pp. 297-314; Ekman, 1982, pp. 147-152; Ekman, Friesen and Ellsworth, 1972).

The following examples of body language are probably universal:

- Smiling when happy or greeting another.

- Raising eyebrows or hand waving when greeting another.

- Laughing when amused.

- Partially hiding the face or blushing when coy or embarrassed.

- Startling as a reaction to shock.

- Baring our teeth when enraged.

- Crying when sad or in pain.

- Frowning when discomforted or concerned.

- Whimpering under sustained and intense suffering.

- Adopting the fetal position when under massive threat, dejected or cold, or other hopeless situation.

- Making barriers with legs or arms in front of our bodies (e.g., by crossing them) to keep another at bay.

- Body shrug to express, *I don't know*.

- Slumping when dejected or tired.

- Standing straight when alert or confident.

- Open hand and arm gestures when sincere.

- Fleeting eye contact when deceit or covering up is present.

- More sustained eye contact when goodwill, honesty and sincerity are present.

- Hand activity around the face, head and neck when stressed or deceitful.

However, we must take caution and be tentative in interpreting body language and allow for the influence of individual and cultural differences. For instance, a foreign male should not expect sustained eye contact with a Sri Lankan woman because of her shyness in such company. So it is important to get a whole picture from a person's complete body language cluster, which is best understood with a view to the person's individual and cultural background.

There are other universal characteristics shared by languages around the world (Fromkin and Rodman, 1981, pp. 330,331; Nurcombe, 1976, p. 217; Nurcombe, de Lacey, and Walker, 1999; Greenberg, 1963). Some of these universals:

- Wherever we find humans we find language.

- Each language is adapted to serve each one of us well in our surroundings.

- Each language is potentially infinite in the number of sentences that can be produced.

- A language mirrors its physical and social surroundings and so changes as the surroundings change.

- Every normal child is able to learn any language irrespective of whatever language he is born into.

- Language is a product of one's anatomy, psychology and, social and physical environment.

- Language is a function of its historical heritage.

- Similar vocal pitches indicate positive or negative moods in many languages.

- Each language refines and indicates different ways to understand and collate the surroundings.

- Language is a survival tool that facilitates our adjustment to our surroundings.

- All languages:

    - Are largely arbitrarily symbolic.

    - Have vowels and consonants.

    - Can form sentences, including commands and questions.

    - Use sound, word meaning and word sequence as a part of standard usage.

    - Use similar parts of speech like noun, verb and adjective.

    - Relate events to time somehow (e.g., past, present or future), and create negatives (e.g., I didn't go.).

- Borrow and lend words.

  - In most languages:

    - The subject goes before the object.

    - Sentences include a subject, a verb, and an object, which may not be in that order.

    - There are opposites like dry/wet, long/short, hot/cold.

In contrast to universal behavior, the following highlights various parochial behaviors, which are learned and culturally bound:

> *Some Catholics still avoid meat on Friday, as an act of contrition, and so often eat fish on this day. Japanese love raw fish. Chinese eat dogs and monkeys. Moslems and Jews do not eat pork. Hindus do not eat beef. French eat frogs, snails, horses and raw meat. Arabs eat camel meat and drink camel milk. Aborigines eat earth grubs. Greeks drink sheep's milk. Some African tribes drink blood. Yanamamo Indians of South America eat fresh uncooked lice and fried insects. Jews fast on Yom Kippur. Arabs fast throughout the month of Ramadan in the daytime. Other peoples, like many Hindus, avoid all meat products for food. Jews and Christians make pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Moslems to Mecca, Hindus to Benares and Buddhists to Tibet. Some Christians specially worship on Saturday but most on Sunday. Jews usually attend the Synagogue on Saturday. Moslems specially worship on Friday and pray five times each day. They may also have four wives but in western culture one would be jailed for this. And so it goes, each culture living according to its understanding of "how it should be done"* (Adapted from Leigh, unpublished manuscript).

The following examples illustrate that parochial language reflects the type of adaptation necessary for survival in the physical and social surroundings of each culture:

  - **Japanese** can speak to another using a selection of many different address forms to indicate explicitly any one of a whole range of relationships - for example, intimate, familiar, neutral, polite, deferential, authoritative. This illustrates the hierarchy and ceremony of interpersonal relationships in the society.

  - **Hunanoo**, a tribe in the Philippines, have an incredible 92 different names for the many varieties of rice in their surroundings (de Lacey, Poole and Twomey, 1979, p. 79). Rice is a staple food for them and obviously very important for their survival. Hunanoo also have: forty different linguistic categories for soil quality and mineral content, distinguish 1500 types of plants and cultivate over 400 of them, and recognize over 450 animal types (Nanda, 1991, p. 161). Obviously these people rely heavily upon their knowledge of agriculture and the environment for their survival.

  - **Arabs** (Bedouins) have many different words for the different types of camels (Palmer 1973 p. 45). Differentiating camels is obviously associated with their survival and surroundings.

  - **The Subanum**, another tribe of the Philippines and a simple agricultural society, have 132 separate words for the diagnosis of disease (Conklin, 1969, pp. 221-233).

  - **The Lapps** have many words associated with their reindeer (Trudgill, 1979, p. 27). Reindeer are important for their survival.

  - **South American Indians** (some tribes) have many words for the myriad species of birds in their environment, but there is no generic word *bird* in their language (de Lacey, Poole and Twomey, 1979, p. 79). Bird-life is a very distinctive part of their environment.

  - **Australian Aborigines** can communicate fluently without words, by using only their myriad gestures as a formal and comprehensive gesture-language (King-Boyes, 1977, p. 39). Ritual

and ceremony are valued highly and are extremely important in these societies. Also Eades (1982) reports that Australian Aborigines never ask the question, *Why?*

- **English** people, when speaking, continually use the words *please* and *thank you* in their conversations, and often avoid direct statements. Thus English language and behaviour tends to be periphrastic to avoid offending or alienating the other person. Also there are few words in English for vegetables which suggest that they were not so much used for food (Fromkin and Rodman, 1981, p. 321).

- **The Hindu language**, Hindi, has separate words for: my sister's husband (*behnoi*), my husband's elder brother (*jait*), my husband's younger brother (*deva*), and my husband's sister's husbands(*nandoya*). Kinship vocabulary is an indication to the nature of the more significant family relations in a culture. The single word *brother-in-law* in English indicates that one behaves similarly towards all the men in those different kinship statuses. The variety of words in Hindi, indicates that each of these categories of people is treated differently (Nanda, 1991, pp. 119,120).

- **Panare** (Latin American Indians in Venezuela) do not have words for the many western Christian words for spiritual concepts. For example, there are no equivalents for guilt, repentance, salvation, sin and punishment. The Panare view of life and the supernatural, is obviously very different to the western Christian view (Lewis, 1990, pp. 182-192).

- **Greeks** have many different words for various family relationships and relatives that are very important in their large and extended families. Many of these words cannot be directly translated into English, as there is no exact word equivalent or in some cases there is not even an approximate word equivalent.

- **Alaskan Athabaskan Indians** rarely ask questions. For these people, questions are regarded as too powerful to use, because they demand a response. (Scollon, 1982).

In each of the above cases citing various groups, we can understand much about the particular groups from the way their language has developed and is used now. For instance, Greeks have large families and the family is a very important part of the culture. Hence this is reflected in the language.

EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The most important attitudinal factor for all effective communication – empathy – cannot be over-emphasized. Empathy is the projection of your psychology into someone else's psychology to understand that person better: it is putting yourself in the other person's position; putting that person's shoes on; attempting to see and understand the world as he or she understands it. Through empathy we anticipate that person's understanding of a message and what the reaction might be and so we can plan and tune communication with that person more effectively.

Carl Rogers (1942; 1947, pp. 358-368; 1983, pp. 125,126) has said that he has found enormous value in the experience of allowing himself to understand the other person. He says that for too many of us our first reaction to most statements is an immediate judgment or evaluation rather than an understanding of it. We do this because we fear change. We are secure and comfortable in the way we are and avoid personal exposure that might thrust upon us the need for change.

However, by practicing empathy a whole new world of shared understanding and learning unfolds before us. It is like traveling; we can learn so many things visiting exotic places and peoples, that otherwise we would not have been able to. So when practicing empathy, we vicariously experience the whole world through the minds and backgrounds of others.

I have often been asked for steps to practice empathy. The following four-step approach is for applying conscious empathetic behavior:

> 1. Understand the message and the sender (from his or her view and background) within the context.

2. Evaluate the message. Ask yourself is it descriptive, logical, factual, proven or historical.

3. Do you agree with or like the message? Why or why not?

4. How does the message and your reaction to it, affect your surroundings and your future behavior – both your thoughts and actions?

The following guidelines promote success in intercultural communication:

- Above all else be sincere, and empathetic.

- Avoid blaming others, as communication is a joint team activity.

- Encourage and praise, be patient and don't shout.

- Plan carefully, not too much information, but carefully selected. Keep it short.

- Use simple sentences (short and simple structure) and words.

- Use plenty of pauses and repeat if necessary.

- Show and tell – models, illustrations, videos, demos, pictures, diagrams, slides, cartoons etc.

- Reinforce or repeat key points.

- Check the listener's understanding – get good feedback. Use *WH* words (how, why, where, who, which, when) e.g. How will you do it? or What do you understand? not *Do you understand?*

- Master the interpretation of other's universal and parochial body language clusters.

- Develop a good style of communication by utilizing appropriate body language yourself.

- Don't use long strings of adjectives one after the other: e.g. The modern, powerful, compact, efficient autostart, environmentally friendly, engineer-designed, high quality and reliable machine by NUMACH Ltd is far superior to all other machines. *Phew!*

- Don't use idioms, similes, metaphors, slang and jargon unless necessary and they will be understood.

- Don't change sentences half way to clarify the meaning.

- Avoid simplifying by using pidgin or broken language. Say: *Do you want to work tomorrow?* not *You - work - tomorrow*?/! (The broken phrase is unclear – a question or command? Also it may not encourage learning.)

Use the *S.O.S.* of communication with an international accent (e.g. Mid-Atlantic accent):

- Speak **S-**lowly, with pauses.

- Speak **O-**penly, with a wider open mouth and clear enunciation.

- Speak by saying each word **S-**eparately.

  - THISISNOTTHEWAYTOSPEAKANDBEUNDERSTOOD

  - TO - SPEAK - AND - BE - UNDERSTOOD - CLEARLY - ENUNCIATE - EACH - WORD - SEPARATELY

A CONCLUDING OVERVIEW

We have seen that humans display universal behaviors whatever their race or cultural heritage. Also we have focused on parochial behaviors bound to particular cultures. Human behavior therefore is the result of inherited pre-programmed behavior, and learned behavior from our social and physical environments. It should be no surprise that the interaction of diverse parochial behaviors may lead to misunderstanding or even conflict. From the insights gained in this view of universal and parochial behavior, some practical communication techniques, that enhance and create effective intercultural communication, were listed.

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