Communication Strategies

Inter-cultural communication

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Outline

1. The concept of ‘communicative competence’ (Margie Berns)
2. Clyne’s study on inter-cultural communication
3. Grice’s maxims revisited
4. A linguistics of inter-cultural communication?
5. Questions
The concept of ‘communicative competence’

- huge variety of Englishes and diverse settings of the learning and the use of English
- settings are shaped by local cultural and social values
  → appropriateness
The concept of ‘communicative competence’

• Firth (1930):
  – “a piece of speech, a normal complete act of speech, is a pattern of group behaviour in which two or more persons participate by means of common verbalizations of the common situational context, and of the experiential context of the participants.”

→ theoretical orientation to describe individual communicative competence in non-native settings (context – situation)
The concept of ‘communicative competence’

1. Hymes:
   • knowledge of sociolinguistic rules
   • knowledge of grammar rules (Chomsky)

→ competence and performance cannot be separated

→ performance is also influenced by cultural and social context

→ social life shapes communicative competence (gender, family, community, religion)
The concept of ‘communicative competence’

2. Halliday:

• social context and options it presents: “doing things with language”

• using language to perform communicative functions

• options = meaning potential

→ influenced by the social context
The concept of ‘communicative competence’

• Language based on relationships:
  – form + function
  – culture + language
  – society + norms of use
Communicative Competence and the World Englishes Paradigm

• emergence of multiple norms for English use
• axioms of communicative competence
  – acceptability
  – appropriateness
  – intelligibility
  \(\rightarrow\) cannot be used without the context of situation
Communicative Competence and the World Englishes Paradigm

- shared socio-cultural norms as prerequisite to successful communication

“I see you’ve put on weight”  
(African English greeting)  
vs.  
“You’re looking well”  
(American English greeting)

→ linguistic or cultural problem?
Communicative Competence and the World Englishes Paradigm

“Communicative competence becomes a cornerstone in the theoretical foundation of the new paradigm that is now known as world Englishes.”

→ know what, when, where and how something can be said
How can we achieve that?
Clyne’s study on inter-cultural communication

- interdisciplinary study
- impact of cultural values on discourse
- role of verbal communication patterns in successful and unsuccessful communication
- framework for a linguistics of inter-cultural communication
Clyne’s study on inter-cultural communication

- recordings of spontaneous communication in the Australian workplace
- people of differing backgrounds, notably European and Asian, who use English as a lingua franca
  - Melbourne: more than 100 languages spoken there
  - wide cultural diversity, (e.g. Croats, Sinhalese and Vietnamese, Maltese, Polish and Chinese people co-settled and worked together)
  - unlikely to share communication patterns (like Germans and Turkish people → history of interaction)
Clyne’s study on inter-cultural communication

- pragmatics and a discourse perspective
- extend the theoretical model
- issues raised are not only interesting for linguists but also to those involved in education, business, and industry
- use of English and inter-cultural communication between non-native speakers is greatly increasing
Definition: Culture

• “whole way of life of a distinct people [...] its total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behavior, social habits” (Williams 1980)

• “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.” (Hofstede)

• “In its most general significance, a text is a sociological encounter through which the meanings that constitute the social system are exchanged.” (Halliday)

→ there is hidden meaning underlying discourse structures
Approaches to inter-cultural communication

• Contrastive Approach
  – native discourse across cultures

• Interlanguage Approach (NL – IL – TL)
  – discourse of non-native speakers in a second language

• Interactive Inter-cultural Approach
  – discourse of people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a lingua franca or in one of the interlocutors' languages
Data

• communication in work situations
• Australia, English as an official language
• speakers: people who migrated to Australia as adults, their L1 not being English
  – “New English” from Asia or the Pacific
• audio-tapes of spontaneous communication
• video- and audio-tapes of formal meetings
Data

• interaction between dyads and larger groups
  – wide diversity
  – possibility to isolate cultural differences from other differences (gender, class/status)
• different companies in different industries
  → industry and situation specific phenomena
• facilitate description of
  – successful and unsuccessful inter-cultural communication
  – inter-cultural factors in the negotiation of meaning and the resolution of inter-cultural communication breakdown
Cultural values systems – sociocultural interactional parameters as an explanation of communication patterns

• work-related values (Hofstede) → four dimensions:
  – Power Distance Index (PDI)
    • high PDI: acceptance of inequality, underdog is to blame
    • low PDI: supporting equal rights and interdependence, 'system' is to blame
  – Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)
    • high level of UAI: anxiety and job stress, fear of failure, low risk-taking, dependence on authorities
    • low level of UAI: low anxiety level, more acceptance of dissent (Widerspruch), few rules
Cultural values systems – sociocultural interactional parameters as an explanation of communication patterns

- **Individualism Index**
  - high II: personal life more important than work
  - low II: work is more important

- **Masculinity Index**
  - high MI: aggressive, competitive behaviour
  - low MI: friendly behaviour, negotiation, compromise
Cultural values systems – sociocultural interactional parameters as an explanation of communication patterns

- English-speaking and Northern European cultures: low PDI and UAI
- German-speaking cultures: low PDI, high UAI
- 'Latin' and Japanese cultures: high PDI, high UAI
- South-east Asians: low PDI, low UAI
Discourse/ cultural parameters

• form vs. content
  – scholarly writing (German vs. English; “easy to follow” as an insult for a German paper)

• verbal vs. literate
  – emphasis on written or spoken discourse in different settings (oral examinations in Dutch, Finish, Czech cultures vs. essays in British or American settings)

• rhythm of discourse
  – turn-taking

• directionality
  – linearity vs. content orientation

• abstractness vs. concreteness
Grice’s maxims revisited

• Maxims of Quantity:
  – Make yourself as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)
  – Do not make your contribution more informative than is required
  – in content-oriented cultures (e.g. Continental Europe and East/South-east Asia), the restriction of information might be unacceptable
Grice’s maxims revisited

• Supermaxim of Quality:
  – Try to make your contribution one that is true
    • little meaning in in South-east Asian Chinese and Vietnamese cultures → principle of harmony, charity or respect 'requires' ambiguity

• Maxims:
  – Do not say what you believe to be false; and
  – Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
    • does not apply to everyday conversation anyway
Grice‘s maxims revisited

• Supermaxim of Manner:
  – Be perspicuous

• Maxims:
  – Avoid obscurity of expression
  – Avoid ambiguity
  – Be brief
  – Be orderly

{ Culturally limiting

• e.g.: Vietnamese 'tolerance for ambiguity'
• brevity is subject to cultural variation (spoken discourse of people from Indian or Sri Lankan background is characterized by repetition, partly in rhetorical patterns)
Grice’s maxims revisited

• **Quantity:**
  – Make your contribution as informative as is required for the purpose of the discourse, within the bounds of the discourse parameters of the given culture
Grice‘s maxims revisited

• Quality:
  – **Supermaxim:** Try to make your contribution one for which you can take responsibility within your own cultural norms
  – **Maxims:**
    • Do not say what you believe to be in opposition to your cultural norms of truth, harmony, charity, and/or respect
    • Do not say that for which you lack evidence (DUBIOUS)
Grice’s maxims revisited

- Manner:
  - Supermaxim: Be perspicuous
  - Maxims:
    - Do not make it any more difficult to understand than may be dictated by questions of face and authority
    - Avoid ambiguity unless it is in the interests of politeness or of maintaining a dignity-driven cultural core value, such as harmony, charity or respect
    - Make your contribution the appropriate length required by the nature and purpose of the exchange and the discourse parameters of your culture
    - Structure your discourse according to the requirements of your culture
Grice‘s maxims revisited

• “adaptable for use within any culture”

• but not suitable for inter-cultural communication

→ Where is the use then?
Grice’s maxims revisited

• “Successful inter-cultural communication is achieved by making the communicative intent very clear and, where possible, being aware of the interlocutor's cultural expectations”
Grice’s maxims revisited

• change the second maxim of Manner:
  – Make clear your communicative intent unless this is against the interests of politeness or of maintaining a dignity-driven cultural core value, such as harmony, charity or respect

• add a 5th maxim of Manner:
  – In your contribution, take into account anything you know or can predict about the interlocutor's communication expectations
A linguistics of inter-cultural communication?

1. A global description of the appropriate discourse-culture(s) according to the parameters mentioned before:
   - Discourse rules, e.g. rules for the organization of written discourse (letters, essays), of meetings, and for business transactions and professional encounters
   - Channel/medium rules → which medium is used in which situation?
   - Linguistic creativity rules → governing the use of riddles, limericks, puns etc.

2. A global description interaction-related aspects of core values of the culture(s), e.g. harmony, charity, tolerance for silence and ambiguity etc. + Hofstede (PDI, UAI, II, MI)

3. An inter-cultural model of turn-taking

4. Inter-cultural tendencies in pragmatic usage and rules for the performance of particular speech acts in a given culture or region
Questions

• Is that possible?
• Implications for the sectors of
  – education ?
  – business ?
  – industry ?
Literature

• Clyne, Michael G. (1994), *Inter-cultural communication at work* Cambridge: CUP.