

Intercultural Communication and Intercultural Scholarship

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The goals of intercultural communication research include research, publication, and instruction. Four of the fundamental areas within the field of intercultural study are the language(s) used in the intercultural situation, the culture of the communicants, the communicative elements that accompany oral language and are also potential problem points in intercultural communication, and the development of scholarly organizations which encourage scholars from many backgrounds to share research and begin cooperative research projects. These four areas have been chosen because they are among the areas in which Nobuyuki Honna has made significant contributions.

Language and Language Varieties in Intercultural Communication Study

The most fundamental element in intercultural communication is the language system chosen as the medium of communication. In some cases one communicator shares the other communicator's native language and they can use the shared language. In other cases the shared language is not the native language of either. In statistical terms that shared language tends to be English. There are hundreds of millions of native English speakers and even more hundreds of millions of nonnative speakers of English. Thus, English has become a fundamental element in the overall field of intercultural communication.

Of the many topics that are included in the study of the language of intercultural communication, one of the more difficult topics concerns the sociolinguistic stereotype that sometimes is attached to a variety of English, be it an ethnic, regional, or social variety within English speaking countries or a non-native English from a nation that uses English as a second or third language. Sociolinguistic work since the 1960's demonstrated that people unconsciously tend to rank a language or a variety of a language as more prestigious or less prestigious.

British (meaning here the "BBC" variety of English) or French-influenced English tended to be evaluated among the most prestigious varieties. Some other national Englishes were evaluated at the bottom end of the scale. But here it must be clarified that the research under discussion was often done with people who for the most part had no or very little experience with the language varieties being evaluated. In other words, the people in the audience, so to speak, were not familiar with or experienced in the language varieties across the world. When the same types of evaluations were sought after intercultural communication training sessions, the negative evaluations tended to disappear or to be greatly muted.

The intercultural training sessions just mentioned have been attended by a small fraction of the people involved in intercultural communication. Many if not most people gain their information about intercultural communication from experience, pamphlets, magazines, and books. These sources may be helpful but they need supplementation from elsewhere. Well-done articles and books on the topic are helpful in the positive sense by introducing the reader to the other culture and its speakers and in the negative sense by helping to remove negative stereotypes and other impediments to productive intercultural communication. While most

easily available books on the topic are written for tourists and are available widely, the books and articles and pamphlets that are based on deeper research into national Englishes are not all widely available or—in the case of some languages—not even written yet.

Asian Englishes

A great deal of research on some of these national Englishes has been available for a few years. In particular the study in the field of Asian Englishes has been greatly enhanced by a journal that was established by Nobuyuki Honna in 1998, who acts as Chief Editor. Together with editors Yuko Takeshita, Eugene Kohmoto, and Tina Tajima, they produce two issues per year of “Asian Englishes: An International Journal of the Sociolinguistics of English in Asia/Pacific.” The journal is handled by ALC Press in Tokyo, Japan. Among the ten highlighted themes of the journal are: (a) the varieties of English in Asia [both linguistic and communicative approaches]; (b) theories and methods of promoting effective teaching of English and testing of English proficiency; (c) English as a language of international and intercultural communication in Asia; and (d) impact of English on other Asian languages. The articles in the journal show an interaction between the sociolinguistic study of languages and the study of intercultural communication.

One sociolinguistic dimension of the sociolinguistic stereotypes discussed above interacts with the teaching of English as a foreign language. In some cultures, the learners seem to feel their variety of English is perhaps not good enough for successful intercultural communication. Honna and Takeshita (1998, p. 117) addressed this problem in the first issue of the journal:

Japan’s Anglophile English teaching program has strongly indoctrinated Japanese teachers and students with the concept of English as an American language. Japanese teachers and students underestimate Japanese English, a product of their strenuous learning efforts, simply because it is different from native speakers’ varieties, most probably from American English.

However, once Japanese teachers and students of English discover what possibilities this international language can give them, they gradually come to understand the concept of English as an international language and develop self-confidence in Japanese English. They also display increasingly positive attitudes toward other non-native varieties of English.

Honna and Takeshita demonstrate both the utility of having trained teachers in intercultural communication and the good results that can flow from such training.

Honna has presented research results in this area in many countries and at many several international conferences. A few of his voluminous publications are included in the References section below.

Impact of English on Asian Languages

“Asian Englishes” has published articles on the impact of English on various languages of Asia. The impact of English on Japanese has been documented in dictionary form by a series of loanword dictionaries since 1965. Some are listed in the References section.

The number of English language loanwords regularly used in Japanese has been estimated at well over 40,000. Honna (1995) notes that some 11% of the words uttered by an average Japanese per day are from English. This impact of English on Japanese has occurred even though some Japanese scholars over the past 50 years or so have had a negative reaction to the borrowing of English words. However, this rather rapid borrowing of English is not surprising since English language study has been a part of the upper grades educational program for almost 50 years and has fairly recently been extended down into elementary schools. Most Japanese have studied English for several years. Honna (1995) has discussed this situation in Maher & Yashiro (1995).

The influx of loanwords into any language often leads to the borrowing language using the new vocabulary in a variety of ways. The speakers may apply the borrowed words to new meanings or change their meaning to fit the new culture. They may expand or narrow their meaning. In a later stage of borrowing, after the words have spread to the vocabulary of most speakers, the new words are commonly used in newspapers, books, businesses, government documents and so on. All of these processes have been well studied for many languages. However, the last few stages of the importation of a sizeable vocabulary from another language have not been so well studied. In particular the use of foreign vocabulary in “word play” has needed more attention. Honna has been a leader in this area since the early 1980’s.

The use of English words or a combination of English and Japanese words in “word play” as used for example in magazine and TV advertisements would not have been understood by the Japanese reader many decades ago. In general, only when the advertisers can be sure that most viewers or readers can understand their message will they use such eye-catching and interesting devices. One such example occurred a few years ago when signs were put up in places where silence was appreciated. The signs consisted of two elements, the first of which was the written character for “beautiful,” which is pronounced like English “be.” The second element was “sairento,” the Japanese pronunciation for English “silent.” The combination is especially interesting because the English pronunciation results in the direct command “Be silent.” The Japanese interpretation results in a meaning such as “Silence is beautiful,” a much less harsh sign. Another such use of the combination is in the name of a business of a few years ago. The pronunciation of the name sounds like the English “You and I.” The first word was written with the character for “friend” and is pronounced “yuu.” The second word was written with the ampersand “&.” The third word was written with the character for “love/like” and is pronounced “ai.” Thus the combination meant “you and I, friends who like each other,” which is a good name that suggests a warm friendly atmosphere inside. In the References section there are several publications in which Honna and others have provided hundreds of examples that show how far the “word play” stage of language borrowing has advanced.

The Study of Culture

A student who begins study of another culture and its language needs to have available good textbooks on the language and good sources on the culture. When culture is the topic, it is convenient to view the culture in terms of Popular or Daily culture, Classic culture, and the basic Values of the culture.

Textbooks and other sources such as the Internet can help the student with the Popular culture in terms of types of food eaten, holidays, educational organization, major cities, major types of transportation and so on. Good videos are available for most of the major cultures of the world.

Classic culture includes the culture's major philosophers, authors, composers, architects, government leaders as well as the major works of those famous people. Famous buildings and natural wonders and places where important events have occurred also fall into this category. Information about these people and places and things is widely available in books and on the internet for most cultures.

The third category, the underlying values of a culture, is harder to analyze and present in terms understandable to the student. The general values of a culture can be seen as a hierarchy of behavioral norms (what is expected by others), attitudes (e.g. the traditional attitudes toward society and one's place in it), values (considerations of good/evil, moral/immoral, ethical/unethical, and so on), and the most basic belief system of a culture. The last component is almost always based on the religion or religions that have been practiced by the members of the culture over the centuries.

One reason that this third category is harder to analyze is that none of the components are on prominent display. The student can see the different foods that are eaten by a culture and can see the great architectural monuments produced by the culture, but the student cannot directly see the fundamental values which energize the behavior of members of the other culture. For example, the role of family in a culture is hard to see because everyone in the world has a mother and father and other relatives. It is not easy to see that some cultures are patriarchal in structure and others are matriarchal. These underlying cultural values need to be learned by study of the best sources on the topics. From books for tourists and books by people who report their own experiences, the student may learn quite a bit. Unfortunately, there are too many sources that are not particularly reliable on these deeper cultural topics. One of the more recent sources that all too often has misleading explanations is the popular internet site called Wikipedia. Fortunately, more and more competent studies and books are appearing that explain the deeper values of a culture and how they impact the behavior of the members of the culture. Two such books are discussed below.

Culture Dictionaries

After looking over the materials available to Japanese for learning how to explain their culture to non-Japanese English speakers, Nobuyuki Honna began a bi-cultural project to demonstrate to Japanese how they could explain their culture in terms that non-Japanese would understand. In such a project, a scholar from the other culture is crucial so that the explanation is clear and concise and readily understandable in English. Honna's project produced two bilingual explanatory dictionaries (Honna & Hoffer, 1986; Honna & Hoffer,

1989) of about 400 total entries that covered popular/daily culture, classic culture, and the deeper values of the culture. The Japanese reader could read about a topic in Japanese and then look across the page to see how best to present the ideas to an English speaker. For a simple example of an explanation in the best terms for an American learning about Japan, the use of “feet,” “yards,” and “miles” are better than “meters” and “kilometers.” In terms of area of a room, the use of square yards is better than the number of tatami mats in the room. The idea here is that the American might be able to re-calculate kilometers into miles or tatami mats into square yards, but by the time the calculation was finished the conversation would have moved several sentences and thus the communication skewed.

The relatively short explanation of about one-half page for each topic gave enough room for explaining the most important points. That short length for each topic is also the reason the books are more like dictionaries than encyclopedias. A student of Japan and Japanese can go to the more voluminous explanations that are available if the student decides to learn more about the topic. The slightly longer space for each topic also allowed for a more in-depth explanation. One good example is the word “on.” In a Japanese-English dictionary, the word is defined as “kindness,” “favor,” “grace,” “(an) obligation,” and further as “a debt of gratitude” (Sanseido, 1959). In Honna & Hoffer (1986), the explanation of “on” begins with the phrase “moral indebtedness.” In other words, “on” is more powerful than suggested by the synonyms given in the dictionary. An “on” is a type of moral debt that cannot be repaid. Your parents gave you life and there is no way to repay them in kind but you can do your best by giving them respect and loyalty. The dictionary entry for “on” points out that

On takes several forms of service for its repayment. The *samurai* warrior fulfilled his obligations to his lord in battle, risking his life if necessary. Sons and daughters exercise acts of *koo* (filial piety) and take care of their aging parents. ...Japanese society is still governed by the concept of *on*, and human relations are bound by a complicated network of mutual responsibilities and obligations. (Honna & Hoffer, 1986, p. 214)

Each Japanese term in an entry, such as *samurai* and *koo* above, are also entries in the dictionaries.

An important part of the conclusion to this section is that scholars from both cultures were involved in the research and production of the explanations. It has been a working principle for Nobuyuki Honna for these past few decades that intercultural study should include scholars from both (or all) cultures involved in the study. The teamwork involved helps to insure that the best possible explanations are given in the best way for the reader who is interested in the topic. There is implicit in this approach the suggestion that all intercultural communication research would profit from the bi- or multi-cultural approach.

Communicative Competence in Intercultural Nonverbal Communication

Language classes of a few decades ago often used textbooks and other materials that did not include much information about nonverbal communication in the target culture. If they did include such information, the information was usually about the target culture’s nonverbal communication patterns with each other. While that is a necessary part of the overall study of

the communicative competence of native speakers, the student that plans to interact within that culture might better study the nonverbal communication patterns expected of non-members of the culture. For a simple example, there are groups in the USA that slap each other on the back or punch each other on the arm while talking. A person from another culture who engages in such behavior before becoming considered a member of such a group might antagonize the group. Textbooks and training sessions might be based on good studies of the behavior of different types of people from outside a culture and on good studies of what is expected of those different types of people.

The best material for the student would include the appropriate behavior together with a careful analysis of nonverbal behaviors that would have a negative effect in the target culture. In general terms, the nonverbal features of a culture are available in books, pamphlets, videos, CDs, and on the internet. There is much less material available on the expected nonverbal behavior of an outsider who enters the target culture.

Facial Expressions

Of the many components of nonverbal communication only two will be mentioned here: facial expressions and emblems. For decades the problems of recognizing basic facial expressions in a target culture have been studied (e.g. Ekman, 1982; Leathers, 1978). Since the speaker's face is easily observable in the intercultural communication situation, "reading" the speaker's facial expression would seem to be easy. However, some facial expressions have a very low percentage of accurate interpretations across cultures. In one experiment, a picture of a conversation between a Japanese diplomat and an American diplomat was shown to a group of Americans and a group of Japanese. Each group was to indicate individually on paper what their "reading" of the two facial expressions indicated. Without exception the Japanese group saw only an everyday conversation; without exception the American group saw the American diplomat as very upset with or even angry at the Japanese diplomat. Such misreadings—or as in this case a **non**-reading—are all too common in intercultural situations. Some training in reading the target culture's facial expressions might help avoid such difficulties.

In 1983, Nobuyuki Honna accepted a Japan Foundation grant to travel to Trinity University in Texas to work with two scholars there. They team-taught a course on the subject of nonverbal communication across cultures, using as one set of materials some videotapes of Japanese television shows that Honna had brought with him. In addition to the course, he worked with one of the professors on a teaching aid for learning about American facial expressions. The resulting videotape is entitled "The Development of Facial Awareness" or DOFA for short. On the videotape, a drama instructor at Trinity, Susan Gilliam, demonstrates the ten basic facial expressions for the non-American students to try to identify. After the students finish, there is another section of the tape in which she goes through each facial expression again and identifies each by name. The tape was designed to be use twice or three times during a training series or during a course. The progress of each student could be determined by checking how the student's perceptions improved.

Emblems

The language student should learn the appropriate gestures to use in the target culture and also learn which parts of his own nonverbal system (NVC) might cause trouble in the foreign setting. Since most people use their NVC system automatically, they need to be taught which parts to avoid or change. The simplest example for an English speaker is that of avoiding “yes” as listener responses as the other person speaks since the other person may think that the word means agreement and is then surprised when the English speaker ends the sequence with “no.” A head nod and “uh huh” may also be understood as agreement when they only mean that the English speaker is paying attention. A more powerful example of conflicting NVC is the “thumbs up” emblem, which means “OK” or “good” or so on most of the time it is used, but in Australia and a few other places it is a vulgar sign and should be avoided.

Of the many topics within the study of gestures, the area of nonverbal communication to be discussed here is that of emblems, which are independently meaningful gestures. Other types of gestures accompany language, but emblems can stand alone and convey a meaning. A simple example is the gesture for self, which in the USA is a finger or the palm of the hand on or just in front of the chest while in Japan the gesture is toward the nose. In many cultures the emblem for “come here” has the palm down, forearm extended, and the hand moves down and up. That same emblem is usually misread by an American student as a wave meaning “hello” or “goodbye.”

In person-to-person intercultural communication, gestures may be more frequent than in more formal situations. Thus, the student should be taught a basic set of emblems which might be encountered and which might cause difficulty. Since still pictures of emblems in general are not as helpful as showing the movements involved in an emblem, Honna helped develop a second teaching videotape on “The Development of Gestural Awareness” or DOFA. Susan Gilliam demonstrates fifteen common American emblems that might be misunderstood or might not even be recognized as meaningful emblems at all. As with the DOFA videotape, she follows the demonstration sequence with the correct answers. Each student’s development in perception of the emblems can then be calculated with later showings.

Both the DOFA and DOGA videotapes have been used for training and research purposes in various countries such as Japan, Korea, China, and Australia.

Organizations for Intercultural Communication Studies

Many organizations exist that promote intercultural communication studies and many conferences that are devoted to the subject take place every year. In 1985 a conference titled “International Conference on Cross-Cultural Communication: East and West” was held in Seoul, Korea, under the direction of John H. Koo of the University of Alaska. After the conference John Koo asked Nobuyuki Honna and Bates Hoffer to help him continue such conferences. All three scholars did research in linguistics and sociolinguistics as it applied to learning other languages and cultures. Language, linguistics, and “intercultural sociolinguistics” were, then, the foundation of the conferences. In addition there were three fundamental ideas for the future conferences. First, the conferences were to concentrate on cross-cultural/intercultural communication around the Pacific, with its many languages and cultures. Second, the conferences were to be interdisciplinary, inviting scholars from all

relevant scholarly fields to contribute their research. Third, scholarly research that involved scholars from both or all sides involved in the intercultural communication situation would be recommended and promoted. The twelve conferences that followed the one in Seoul, Korea, have met in the USA, Mexico, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. They have involved scholars from more than two dozen countries and five continents.

In 1991 Koo, Honna, and Hoffer decided to set up an organization to oversee the conferences and to institute a journal. The conferences were re-named “International Conference on Intercultural Communication: East and West.” The new journal was titled “Intercultural Communication Studies.” Koo, Honna, and Hoffer were the organization’s Board of Directors and the editors of the journal.

Conclusion

In his career, Nobuyuki Honna made major contributions in all the areas of intercultural communication discussed above. He has done work on Asian Englishes and their place in International English, has published books that explain Japanese culture in accessible form, has studied the various elements of communicative competence such as nonverbal features of languages, has worked with scholars from many countries and was an original founder of an international organization that encouraged from many backgrounds and cultures to share their research and to work in cooperative research projects with people from other cultures. He has influenced international scholars through his role as a founder of the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies (IAICS), as a member of its Board of Directors, as an editor of the IAICS-sponsored journal “Intercultural Communication Studies,” and as the IAICS President for 2007-2009. His role as President of the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies is a tribute to his many contributions to the field and to his fellow scholars.

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