

DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v12i1.3221

Citation: Abasenga, A. (2022). The Aspects that Affect Verbal Communication in Intercultural Communication. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 12(1), 14-25. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v12i1.3221>

The Aspects that Affect Verbal Communication in Intercultural Communications

Albert Abasenga¹

Abstract

Globally, people passed and raised in different environments, cultural backgrounds, situations, and circumstances. These several backgrounds can affect their communications in one way to another when they are transmitting, addressing, sending, sharing and receiving different perspectives, thoughts, guidance, advice or opinions from others. For that, the present study aims of discussing the aspects of verbal communication that facilitate and impede intercultural communication between human beings. The aspects that the study is discussing are related to speaking skills and writing skills including voice, the diction of words, and phraseology. This article uses critical analysis and fact data from both society and the written documents of scholars, for giving and addressing clear outcomes. The study advises that people should be aware of their counterparts' cultural backgrounds in order to facilitate their communications effectively. It also advises the communicators to make some research about the culture of their counterparts, and train themselves about other's languages and their usage.

Keywords: Communication, Language, Verbal Communication, Intercultural Communication.

¹ Assistant Lecturer of Languages and Communications, University of Kigali, Rwanda School of Education. Orcid: 0009000901480580 E-mail: aabasengac@gmail.com

1. Introduction

This write-up has the aim of discussing the aspects of verbal communication in Intercultural Communications. It discusses the aspects which can facilitate and those which can impede verbal communication in Intercultural Communications. It starts with the definitions of keywords, then the aspects which can facilitate and end with those aspects which can impede verbal communication in Intercultural Communications.

2. History and meaning of Key terms

This section is discussing the etymology and definitions of keywords in the study. The keywords that are discussed here are Intercultural communication, Communication, Language and Verbal communication.

2.1. Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication as a human activity is ancient. For the proper name of the field "Intercultural Communication" credit is often given to American anthropologist Edward T. Hall, who used it for the first time in his book "The Silent Language" in 1959. The book is sometimes called "the field's founding document" (Hart, 1998).

Intercultural communication as a term is often used to refer to the wide range of communication issues that inevitably arise within an organization composed of individuals from a variety of religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. It is the sending and receiving of messages across languages and cultures. It is also a negotiated understanding of meaning in human experiences across social systems and societies (Michigan ELT, 2009). When people are communicating with other cultures, they mean not only those who speak a language that is different from theirs or who live in a different country or region; they also mean those who live in the same city or region but who do not share the same social groups, Michigan ELT added.

Intercultural communication is more complicated in nature because people tend to interpret messages they are receiving based on past experiences and the cultural backgrounds that were passed down to them in their own home cultures. In intercultural communication, people have to understand the encoding and decoding of verbal and nonverbal cues specific to a particular culture. People are usually not aware of the many ways that culture can influence the way we listen to, speak to, and understand other human beings.

Auwalu (2015) adds that when two or more people with different cultural backgrounds interact and communicate with each other or one another, intercultural communication is said to have taken place. It helps the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds, where different cultural backgrounds

include both national cultural differences and differences which are connected with participation in the different activities that exist within a national unit (Jens Allwood, 1985).

2.2. Communication

Communication is the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium. The successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings (Oxford English, 2021). Giffin & Patten (1976) also state that communication is the process of creating meaning as well as ascribing it. It is the exchange of ideas and interaction among group members human beings can communicate with each other.

Through communication, people are able to exchange knowledge, beliefs, opinions, wishes, threats, commands, thanks, promises, declarations, and feelings. They need language as the basic level of communication between one human being and another. Language helps people to pass on their ideas, feelings, knowledge and requests. Awoniyi (1982) affirms that without communication there would be chaos. He adds that human existence and civilization as we know it today would disappear without communication. He further claims that there are at least five important elements of the communicative process. Those elements are sender (encoder), message, medium of transmission, medium of receipt, and receiver (decoder).

Fatimayin (2018), adds that People communicate to satisfy the needs for belonging, to be heard and to be appreciated. He continues that they communicate to keep in touch with and connect with others such as friends, family, colleagues and business partners. In short, people communicate to socialize. The human being is a social animal living which is able to socialize because of its ability to communicate. In addition, people communicate in order to get things done or make their intentions and feelings known. Above all, people communicate with specific purposes in mind.

Fatimayin argues that there are four basic purposes of communication. Almost all of these purposes are better served through verbal communication than other options like email or print messages. it can be used to convey information. This can be done verbally or through text-based media to pass information such as the time of meeting or policy statements from an organisation's administration to its employees.

2.3. Language

Language is the main mean of human communication. Without language, it is not easy for people to communicate. Alshami (2019) mentions that language is a means of conveying people's thoughts, ideas, feelings, and emotions to other people. Hall (1959) adds that it is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually

used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols. It is also the system of human communication which consists of the structured arrangement of sounds into larger units.

Language is used for almost several purposes, including writing letters, or notes, gossiping with our friends, making speeches and talking to ourselves.

Mwakapina (2021) continues that one of the distinguishing features of humans and other creatures is the ability to use language to think and talk or communicate. Language is a very important aspect or characteristic of human beings. In most cases, a lot of human activities are done through language. He adds that language dominates many activities/aspects of human beings. For that, it is a key factor that makes human beings different from other creatures. It is a gift endowed to human beings only. Through language, human beings can communicate or transfer thoughts, ideas, and knowledge from one person to the other.

The ability to use language distinguishes humans from other animals and all non-human species because none of them is known to have a system of communication with a complexity that in any way is comparable to language. For them, they communicate with non-linguistic means resembling our smiling, laughing, yelling, clenching of fists, and raising of eyebrows while human beings use all of them.

2.4. Verbal communication

The term verbal communication comes from the Latin word “verbum” (Verbal) and the word communication comes from the Latin word “communicare” (to share). So, it follows from this that verbal communication means sharing things by means of words. What is shared here can vary: it might be information, feelings, thoughts, support and memories.

It is also defined as communication that helps human being to express their views, information, and ideas in the form of sound and words. The spoken part usually involves face-to-face communication. Examples of verbal communication include communication through radio, television, or mobile phones.

Szkola (2021) mentions that verbal communication always needs a common code which is a language to be effective, including the series of words and grammar rules. Two or more persons can quickly communicate if they are aware of their languages. It might be difficult for people to communicate without a common code. Sage Edge adds that for effective communication, there must be a common language, which everyone can understand. It also encompasses good relations at the workspace and home.

Verbal communication involves using speech to exchange information with others. A person usually communicates verbally in face-to-face conversations. Meetings, interviews, conferences, speeches, and phone calls are other forms of verbal communication. In business,

you communicate verbally to exchange ideas, understand diverse points of view, and solve problems (Cengage, 2009).

3. Aspects of Verbal Communications

The aspects of verbal communication like voice, diction, phraseology, etc are the ones which can facilitate verbal communication in intercultural communication on one side and/or impede it on the other hand.

3.1. voice

It is the first aspect of verbal communication that facilitates Intercultural Communication. It is the sound or sounds produced through the mouth by a person speaking or singing (Oxford dictionary). It is a powerful tool in communication. When people describe vocal work, consider elements such as tone, pitch, pace, pause, volume and intonation.

Voice tone is how the character of your business comes through in your words, both written and spoken. It is not about what you say, but rather the way you say it, and the impression it makes on everyone in your audience who reads or hears you. (The Acrolinx Team, 2015).

When anybody uses and pronounces well the words, it helps the understanding between the people who are discussing. This good pronunciation facilitates verbal communication between people of different cultural backgrounds.

For example; the stress on English words helps the communicators to know the meaning of the words. The word “**record**”, and its pronunciation can give two different meanings, for it is better to master how it is pronounced. Record /’rekɔ:d/ this means a success which is better than others, but /re’kɔ:d/ means to take information and keep it.

In French, the accent is clear for both written and spoken forms. The good use of accents helps the people who are communicating to understand one another. The words ending with “é” is pronounced /e/ but the ones which end with “e” is muted /ə/. The word “**marché**”: /marʃe/, which means market and “**marche**”: /marʃ/ means neighbouring region. The way the speaker pronounces these two words helps the listener to understand them very well, its meaning and communication go fluently.

On the contrary, when pronunciation goes wrong, the tone impedes verbal communication in intercultural communication. At that time, the communicators can not understand the message from one person to another. In that case, the conflict is raised between the people who are discussing.

For example; in English, there are British, American and Australian English. All of them have their own pronunciation. If a person does not know one of those pronunciations while it is the

one the speaker is using, it causes barriers in their communication. The word **salt** pronounces /sɔ:lt/ in British pronunciation and /salt/ in American pronunciation. In this example, when a person speaks in an American way while the listener does not understand this pronunciation, the tone of that pronunciation impedes the verbal communication between people who are communicating.

In French also, the bad usage of accent can cause misunderstanding between communicators. When a speaker or writer uses an accent in a bad place, it causes confusion to the listener who is not coming from the same culture as the speaker. The word “**pêcheur**” means fisher and “**pécheur**” which means sinner. The misuse of the accent on these two words gives another meaning.

Pronunciation can cause conflict in verbal communication in intercultural communication, at the time different words from different languages are pronounced the same but they have different meanings. Take examples of the words “qui” from French and “key” from English. These words have the same pronunciation but different meanings. The French man can use French words the English speaker hears others. In the African language, the Kinyarwanda word “u-mulima” and the Kiswahili one “mulima” are pronounced the same. The meanings of these words are totally different. The Kinyarwanda one means farm while the Kiswahili one means mountain. The speaking of these words can impede verbal communication between people of different cultural backgrounds.

Pace is referred to the speed at which someone speaks (bbc.co.uk). This speed can be fast, medium or slow. When it is at a medium level, it facilitates verbal communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. When the speed of one language is at the same level as another language’s speed, it facilitates communicators from different cultures.

When the speed of one speaker is very fast or too slow, it impedes verbal communication in intercultural communication. The listener cannot understand well the words pronounced by the speaker very fast. When it is too slow the listener becomes bored on the speech, s/he can sleep while the speaker is addressing his/her message.

Volume is the loudness of the speaker. Lumen explains it as the psychological characteristic of physical strength (amplitude). It is also perceived as an auditory sensation by the listener which can be ordered on a scale from quiet to loud. Loudness is then a subjective measure of the listener, which is often confused with objective measures of sound strength such as sound pressure level (in decibels), sound intensity, or sound power.

The sound volume of speaker facilitates the people from different cultures in their communication. When you are talking with people from East Africa Countries (Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania,..) you should put your voice down. The people from this region, do not like high voices. They accept middle and low voices as disciplinary voices. They like to listen to this voice very well.

The volume of sound impedes verbal communication when it is on a high level or low level. At that time, the message is not easy to be delivered from sender to receivers.

For example, in Rwanda and Burundi culture, when a child talked with elder people loudly is beaten because it is considered as the child does not have respect. The people from here in Cameroon, when they are discussing they use a high volume. This means that their discussion with the people from East Africa can be a problem because the Eastern people speak slowly with a low voice. Their discussion cannot be delivered well as it is.

Pitch is the auditory attribute of sound ordered on a scale from low to high (Larkin, 2006). People can think about the notes on a musical score with the pitch getting higher as you move up the scale. Pitch is closely related to the frequency of sound waves; it is almost entirely determined by how quickly the sound wave is making the air vibrate and has almost nothing to do with the intensity, or amplitude, of the wave, which relates to loudness. That is, “high” pitch means very rapid oscillation, and “low” pitch corresponds to slower oscillation.

The pitch facilitates verbal communication in one way or another in the intercultural communication of people. When a person (especially the ladies) is very angry s/he uses a high pitch, everyone around knows what it means. When s/he wants to tell another a secret s/he uses a low pitch (whispering), and the middle pitch is considered as calmness.

The pitch impedes verbal communication in intercultural communication because it is not considered the same in all cultures. The way one culture can interpret the pitch of the voice can differ from the way another interprets it. In some cultures, whispering is taken as a way of spreading rumours, and for that reason, it is not possible for communicating with them by using a low pitch.

Pause can enhance delivery or be filled needlessly and distract the audience. Larkin (2006) mentions that a pause may refer to a rest, hesitation, or temporary stop. It is an interval of silence and may vary in length. The speaker may use pauses to enhance the message delivery or fill the pauses needlessly and distract the audience from the message.

Pause that is used at the right time and right place helps communicators to understand one each other. It facilitates the speaker to connect his/her message well. It helps also the listener to understand the previous message and be prepared for the next content by making a connection with the previous one.

On the other side, pause can cause misunderstanding between communicators from different cultural backgrounds. A speaker can use a pause at the wrong time and the wrong place. The listener can not understand what the speaker wants to say. A lot of pauses in one speech are considered as hesitation. This means that the speaker does not have confidence in what s/he is talking. The listener becomes bored and does not get very well the message from the speaker’s speech.

3.2. Diction

The second aspect which facilitates verbal communication in intercultural communication is diction. According to Hornby (1974) diction is the choice and use of words; style or manner of speaking and writing.

Diction is divided into two types: formal and informal dictions. Formal diction involves choosing descriptive, precise words that are polite and proper. Sentences in formal diction are often longer. Informal diction, on the other hand, often assumes that the audience already knows what you're talking about and generally uses shorter words. Sentences may be incomplete or ignore some finer points of grammar and usage. (Sardi, Atowardoyo, Weda, 2017)

A speaker should choose relative and standard words regarding the context, this helps the listener from different cultural backgrounds to get the full message.

For example; in the sentences like:

1. Good morning. It is a true pleasure to make your acquaintance. How are you feeling today? (**formal diction**)
2. Hey, kid! Nice to meet ya. What's up? (**informal diction**)
3. The man spoke to his father in a low voice so others could not hear. (**formal diction**)
4. That guy told his dad secrets. (**informal diction**)

The first and third sentences are very clear. The communicators can get the message without any difficulty. It means that the diction from there is well chosen.

Informal diction likes to cause problem of verbal communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. Some of the informal diction includes slang, dialect, colloquial,...

For example; in Kiswahili, the Tanzanians' dialect has some words and terms that differ from one to another between Kenyans'. This dialect words of Kiswahili impedes communication of people from different cultural backgrounds. The words like: **fees** (school fees) means "**kalo**" in Kenyan Kiswahili and "**adha**" in Tanzanian Kiswahili. **Electricity** means "**stima**" in Kenyan Kiswahili and "**Umeme**" in Tanzanian Kiswahili. **Wife** means "**bibi**" in Kenyan Kiswahili and "**mke**" in Tanzanian Kiswahili.

Slang also impedes verbal communication in intercultural communication. According to Sardi, Atowardoyo and Weda (2017), Slang is the words that are specific to a period in time or are

considered “trendy” are often present in slang diction. Young characters use slang diction that is specific to their generation, and old generation uses their own slang.

For example: The party is going to **be straight fire!** Means that “the party is going to **be good!**”

I am not fussed means that “I do not bothered/ I do not mind.”

Killing me means that “really hurting.”

3.3. Phraseology

The last elements which facilitates verbal communication in Intercultural communication are phraseology. MarriamWebster defines it as a manner of organizing words and phrases into longer elements (sentence). According to Batubara (2015), it is the branch of linguistics; it refers to the language used by people in communication.

The structure of a sentence from one language can facilitate the listener from another cultural background to understand the message of a sentence. Many languages use the format of Subject+Verb+Object (S+V+O). This means that the communicators understand easily the sentence because it has the same structure as the one which s/he already knows.

For example; in English: He eats the potatoes.

In French: il mange les patates.

The structure form of these two sentences is the same. This helps people of one culture either in English or French to understand a sentence fast from another language (culture) means through its structure.

Contrary, phraseology impedes verbal communication in different ways. Each language has its own way of arranging words in sentences. This arrangement causes conflicts between communicators from different cultures.

For example; in English structure, adjectives always come before nouns but in french, sometimes come after the nouns. I have a white shirt. J’ai une chemise blanche.

In English, the personal pronoun object comes after the verb but in French comes before.

I see you. ---->je te vois

Sentence formation is another part that can impede verbal communication in intercultural communication. In Kinyarwanda, one word stands for a whole sentence but English requires to use more than one word. You will go out. Muzasohoka.

Lastly, in literary works, among these literary works there are poems, drama, plays, ... etc., it is not possible to understand what the sentence mean if you are coming from another culture. These literary works are more figurative than concrete, so they impede verbal communication with persons from different cultures. In addition for that, literary works do not respect the grammar rules of a language.

For example: Professor Nol Alembong (2014:18) in his book “the passing wing”, says:

And it stood valiantly
as if that breath that ordered
things to take their various shapes-
at creation, that is-
went into its moulding alone.

When a person observes the grammatical rules followed in this extract of poem, s/he can say that it is completely false, which means that communicators from a different culture can not understand this poem while the transfer of grammatical rules is a problem for them. Some grammatical rules which are not followed are; to start with a conjunction is not possible in a normal English sentence. In the second stanza, he does not use the auxiliary ‘be’ he decides to use the determinant ‘that’. All these ways of writing literary works impede verbal communication in intercultural communication.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Enabling verbal communication between people from different cultural backgrounds fluently requires everyone to accept the differences and challenges that s/he may experience while s/he is communicating. It is also better to do some research on the culture of others while you are not coming in the same environment. Furthermore, communicators have to train themselves about the first language of their counterparts.

To sum up, the Speaker is the one who is on the top of handling and reducing all forms of barriers that impede verbal communication in intercultural communications. He is also the one who can make easier communication to the listener from another cultural background. However, the listener has to accept cultural differences and challenges.

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