

文化の間にあるコミュニケーションの方法

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Ways of Communication between Cultures

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Abstract

This paper¹ defines culture in the situational meaning of communication collectives. I will begin with the definition and a short overview on basic communication theory, and then proceed to discuss two models of inter-cultural communication and the function of a translator. Communication involves the passing of messages passed from one communicator to another. The focus of this paper, then, is first on the process of passing a message and followed by the spreading of messages in a culture collective. By understanding and optimizing the process, inter-cultural and trans-cultural communication can be given a concept for this needed competence.

¹ This paper is based on the recent research for my PhD thesis “Communication networks of Japanese tea masters of the Kan’ei Culture” at the University of Cologne and a seminar on Intercultural Communication at the University of Freiburg.

The world is increasingly inter-connected, improving our chances in both physical and/or virtual reality to meet someone who is from a place we have never been to or even heard of. In a situation like this, one can be overwhelmed by a sense helplessness: what should one do, how should one behave when meeting a foreigner who speaks a totally different language? We need someone who speaks both languages - a translator, to act as a communicator.

In a globalized society translators are more important than ever. In addition to translating the language content, it is also pertinent to include cultural information. The question then, is how a cultural translator has to function and how his competence can be generated. To arrive at a solution, it becomes apparent that an adequate definition of culture and communication has to be presented, before the process of communication between cultures can be understood.

Therefore, this article will shortly introduce the recent cultural studies discussion, before giving an overview of communication. The main focus will be on different inter- and trans-cultural concepts and the “translator” showing communication models between cultures.

An attempt to define “culture”

The recent discussion on culture studies has shown that one single definition of culture is not possible. Every individual is influenced by their surrounding culture. Regardless of whether we are aware of this influence, the fact remains that our surrounding culture is an influence that we cannot escape from. Culture is a factor that differentiates people. As such,

some researchers are of the opinion that culture does not exist.² Baecker postulates that culture is just the difference between me and the other, though the nature of this difference can not be named. The term 'culture' occurs the moment a person discovers others who are different from them. Simply put, it is the contact with the other that forces us to think of the factors that affects us, that is, our own culture.

The term 'culture' was coined in Ancient Europe. It was first used to refer to the refinement of the habits and customs through education, religion, arts and science. In this sense it is synonymous with civilization. From the 18th century, 'culture' is used in contrast with nature – the 'human culture' consists of things such as tools, buildings, clothes and also language and sciences or organization structures. Towards the end of the 18th and the beginning of 19th century, 'culture' evolved to mean a certain mass of people, united territorially in ethnicity, ideology and language. It is also used alongside the term 'nation'.

With the onset of the twenty-first century, it is no longer valid to use 'culture' alongside 'nation'. Departing from the trend to associate individuals with one culture, one nation, there is an ideological shift towards a "culture community" without territorial borders. Working on the premise that an individual is never member of only one culture community, current studies on culture purports the idea that rather, individuals are influenced by many other factors, thus giving rise to many different 'cultures'. For example, factors such as religious, society and legislation may affect an individual. These factors can also be termed as 'religious culture', 'social culture' and 'legal culture'. Differences in any one of these cultures make one individual different from another, yet an awareness of such

² Baecker, Dirk: "Wozu Kultur?". (Why Culture?). Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2003.

cultures provides certain protocols that will allow the individuals to display a universally accepted and proper behaviour pattern.

From the above, 'culture' is then no longer a stagnant construct but situational-based. We are not encased in a black container, but rather, are living in fluid water, moving and changing through the influence of other cultures. It is essential for each culture to manufacture a kind of connective structure which possesses both a social and a temporal dimension. This forms the depth structure of the culture, interconnecting its members to a society, which is carried by certain symbols. As mentioned above, culture communities are changing through time. Therefore the past plays an important role. The history of symbols is the memory of the culture creating its identity and the difference to other cultures. Cultures without common characteristics in the present could have been connected in the past and thus constitutes a shared memory. People then, could feel certain ties by using symbols with shared knowledge and/or memories. This can be seen in the example of religions. Although worshippers of each religion reside in different parts of the world, yet Christians, Buddhist or Moslems all over the world can communicate through similar behaviour patterns inside their religious culture community.

The interconnection of the culture members is created through communication. The communication occurs because it is based on a culture in common. The question then is which comes first? Do we communicate through a culture in common, or do we have a culture in common because we communicate?

Culture through Communication – Communication through culture

Perhaps this question does not have a correct answer as like the question of whether the egg or the hen exists first. However, in this case,

communication is a human need and culture was created after the existence of communication communities.

For the purpose of discussion in this paper, communication is defined as a social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meaning in their environment. In the classical communication model in the smallest unit is the act of communication or the Communication Cycle (as seen below).

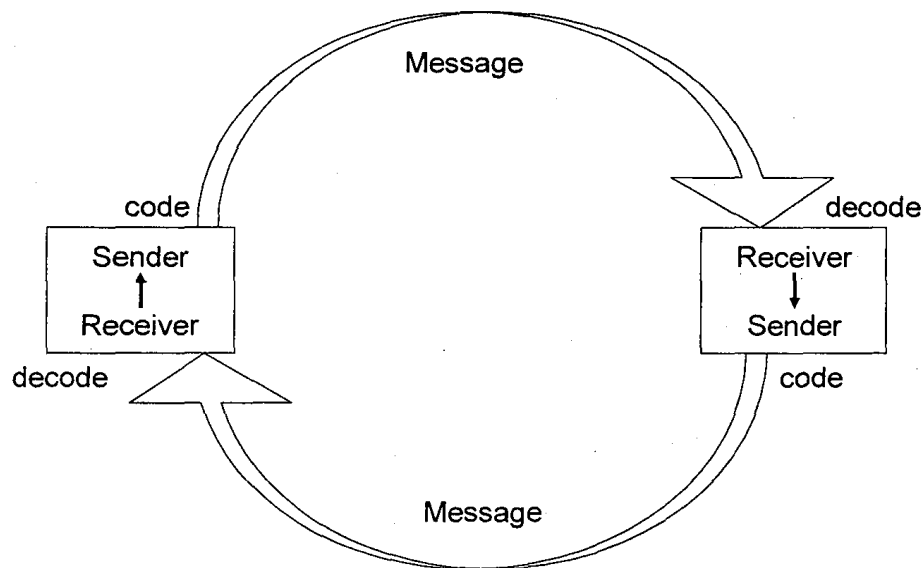


Figure 1: Communication Cycle

Communication is the relationship or the process between at least two communicators – a sender and a receiver, with two communicative acts. On the one hand, there is the message of the sender, while on the other hand, the reception of that message by the receiver. It is subsumed, that sender and receiver have similar symbols and signs at their disposal, so they are able to code or decode the message. This is what we call language. Sender and receiver must have a channel for their communication. Without this, the message of the sender would not be listened to by the addressed receiver.

If all these premises are fulfilled and also work vice versa, we can speak of a “communication cycle”. In the event that one of the above mentioned elements of the cycle is interrupted, this will truncate the communication.

Communication is a matter of understanding. Understanding between people is established when both sender and receiver, speak in the same language using a code in common. A code is created in many ways. First, both sides have to negotiate the code by finding out about their customs, traditions and institutions in order to establish a common factor. After this first step, both sides can define a code, on which they base their communication. This base is what we might call culture.

Individuals are connected via communication channels to a community. Therefore, culture can be defined as a community of individuals sharing the same code and channels for communication. However, not everybody who communicates is a collective with the same traditions and the same language. For example, when I sell my books through an internet auction, I and the buyer do not build automatically a community. It would be more accurate to say that the buyer and I are integrated in the community of the internet users. This is because the buyer might be Asian and I am European, and although we are members of the same internet culture, at the same time, we are also members of different cultures. This shows that an individual is not only member of one community respectively one culture. We all are members of many cultures.

Cultural Communication transfer

There are moments when communication is interrupted or does not even happen. Cultural conflicts occur when no language and no cultural past are in common and no communication code can be found. In the words of Shannon and Weaver, who developed the prototypical example of a

transmissive model of communication, a noise source occurs.³ One reason for this breakdown in communication is that the receiver can not decode the message. The interpretation of the message does not work because of missing appropriate code and translation tools. Another reason, the channel of communication is disturbed by the outside. In any case, the cycle is interrupted (figure 2).

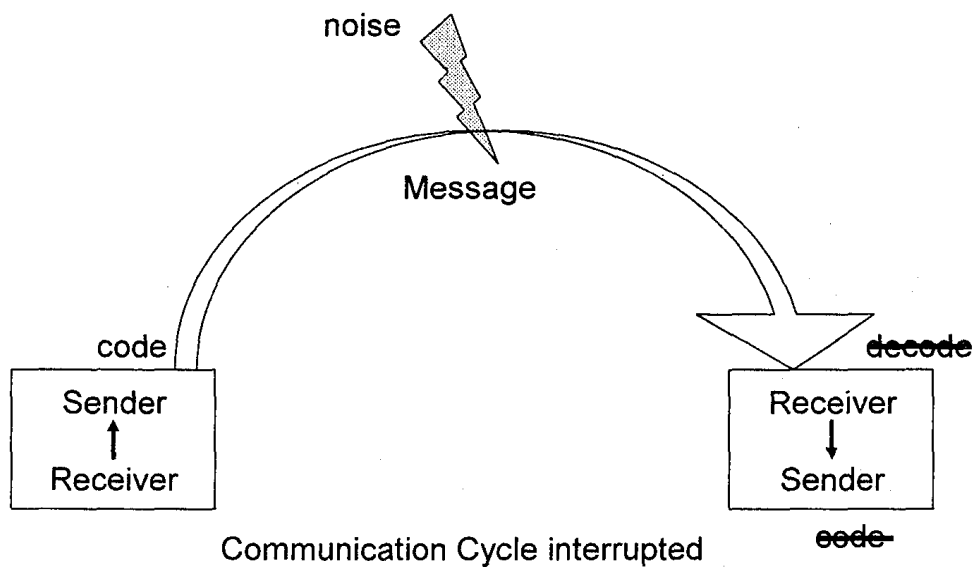
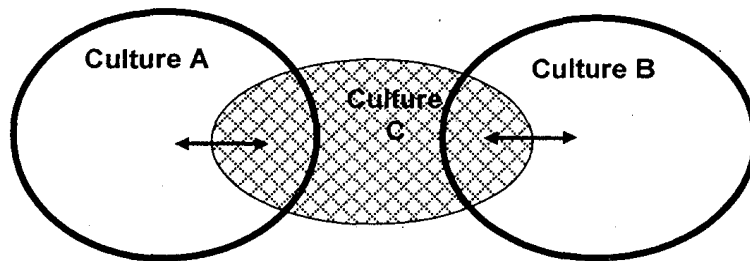


Figure 2: Interrupted Communication Cycle

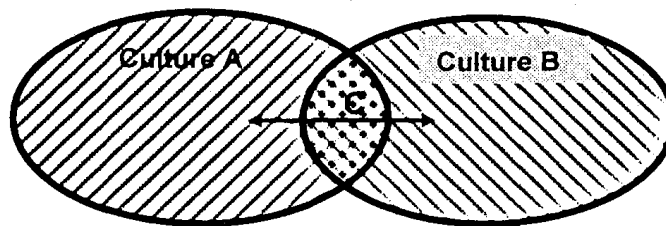
An example of this is when a person would like to sell his books through the internet, but the network connection is disrupted. Thus, the person will not be able to communicate with the buyer and will have to find another way to sell his books. Although there is a temporary interruption in the communication cycle, it is possible to find other ways to remediate. Rather than to focus on the loss of communication, an individual could find other ways and channels to close the cycle.

³ Shannon, Claude E.; Warren Weaver: "A Mathematical Model of Communication". Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1949.

We have defined culture as a collective of individuals sharing the same code and channels for communication. In doing so, there are two possibilities to find communication channels. Model 1 shows two culture collectives A and B. They are connected through a third collective C. Both, A and B are influenced by and influence C. The second Model 2 shows the two cultures overlapping to an area C. They influence each other directly through this intersection.



Model 1



Model 2

Figure 3: Communication Models

Using the same example of selling books on the internet, an individual without an internet access could ask a friend who is well versed in computers for help. This friend could put the books for sale on a website. Another person could hear that it is fast and cheap to buy books on the

internet and may want to do so. He may ask a friend to look where to buy books. In the end, he finds the website with the books and buys them for his friend. Though neither I nor the buyer knows anything about the communication channel internet we communicated through it with the helps of our friends. These friends are members of the internet community (culture C) and also members of our respective communities (A and B). Assuming that both the buyer and seller do not know how to use the internet, though they do not belong to the same community, they can communicate mediate (Model 2).

Taking a closer look on model 1 (figure 4), there are two individuals (node 1 and node 2) who are members of two communities. Node 1 is member of Culture A and Culture C, whereas node 2 is member of Culture B and also Culture C. They have Culture C in common and can communicate through C. I would like to call C a transfer culture. Node 1 and 2 transfer messages out of their own cultures through C, where they share a code in common.

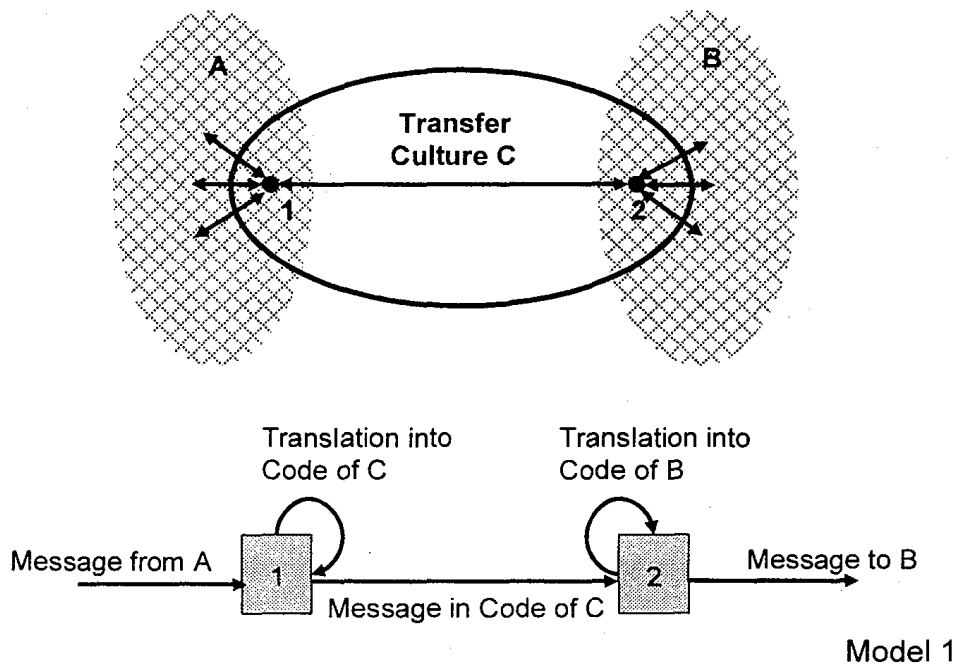
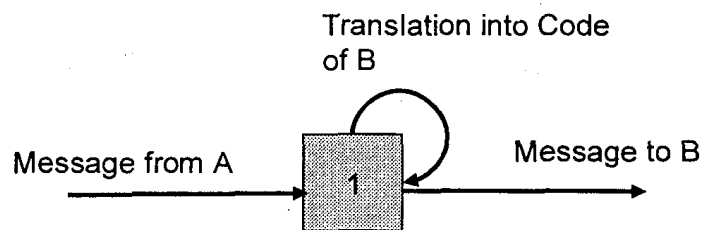
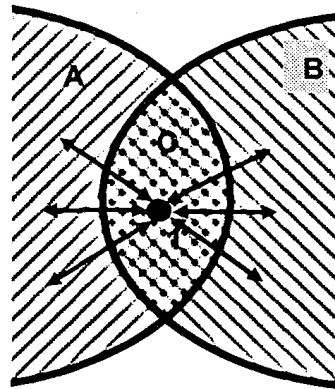


Figure 4: Outer Translation

In terms of communication theory, node 1 has to translate a message coming out of culture A into the code of culture C. Then the message is transferred through the communication channel C. Node 2 decodes the message and translates it into codes of culture B, before giving the message to B.

The friend (node 1) who takes the message of selling books (message from A), translates it into the code of the internet, e.g. an html-website and puts it on the internet (culture C). Here the friend of the buyer (node 2) reads the website, prints it out (translation into code of B) and gives it to the buyer. The translation happens without the communicators, the buyer and seller knowing anything, because it is outside their community. As the message has to be transferred twice to different codes, the possibility of mistakes and changes in the message is high. It depends on the knowledge of two nodes about two cultures. There is the high possibility that the books may not be sold after all.

The second model of culture communication has higher chances of success. The two cultures A and B are overlapping in the area C. Individuals in this area know both, the codes of A and of B. It is not impossible, that these individuals create a code of their own. This would bring us again to model 1. In the event that they do not, we have good chances that the message from A comes almost true to B. The translation of the message is carried out in only one step. Node 1 has the function of a translator and communicator.



Model 2

Figure 5: Inner Translation

For example, if the seller knows how to use the internet he can then sell his books directly. If he comes to know that the buyer from culture B does not know how to use the internet, the seller would send him a printed version of his offer. In this way the transaction is swiftly and carefully carried out without having to bother the friends.

Message from the outside

A translator between two cultures always puts new information in one culture. What happens with the information? Considering that culture collectives are networks, which consists of individuals as nodes and of communication channels as edges, the new information is passed from node

to node through the channels. A social network has only a few important nodes with many edges coming in and out and a lot of nodes with small number of in and out coming edges. This structure is called scale free or Small World. We live in a Small World where everybody is connected to everybody through communication channels. Inside this small world are groups or sub networks which share strong communication channels based on a shared code: the culture collectives.

There are important cultural nodes, from which the information is spread widely at once. If the new information is given to the important node, it would spread very fast throughout the collective (1). If the information is given to a node without many contacts, the information would be given to one or two nodes before coming to an important node (2).

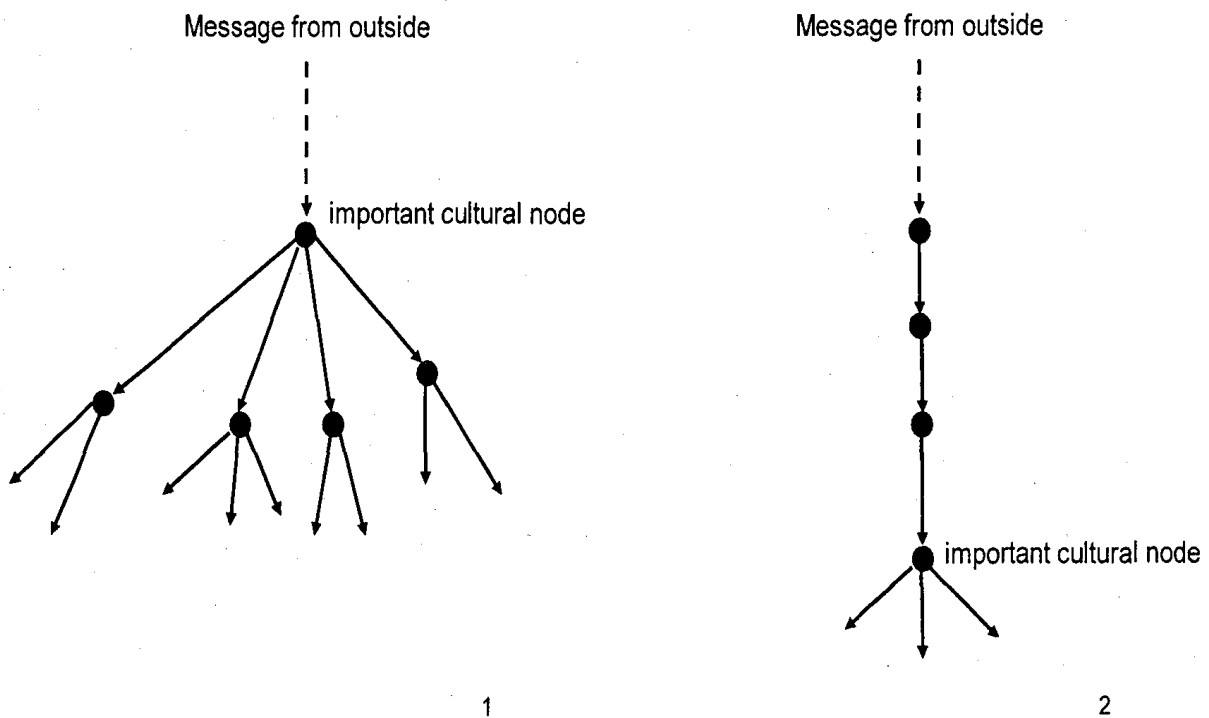


Figure 6: Message from outside

Every transfer has the risk of falsifying the message. In the second case it is not sure whether the original message is spread all over the network.

For example, the Japanese language changed over the centuries much more than German language. Languages are living and spoken cultural codes. The German culture network contained many sub networks as "Germany" as a nation does not exist alone, since German is also spoken in other countries. Words for new developments were spread slowly over the network giving space for own words in the sub networks. Communication was possible but difficult. Different in Japan; words were spread over the network by important nodes. The network could change as a whole much faster, whereas in the German one the sub networks changed before the whole network proceeded to change. In our days of course, new words are spread fast through media as languages used on the TV or internet are changing even faster. As such, some Japanese may even require a dictionary to help them understand the foreign words written in Katakana.

The translator

In terms of communication theory, the influence of culture C has a bigger effect if the translator is an important node in culture A or B. The spreading in the culture community would be faster and without risk of falsification. An important node can be defined as a person having many communication partners, the neighbouring nodes. This could be an author, who writes and publishes a lot and therefore can communicate his message to a lot of people. However, he also needs the right channel to spread his message.

As shown above, the translator needs knowledge about more than one culture community. As previously mentioned, everybody is member of more than one community. The difficulty is how aware one is about this. The

intercultural competence is the degree of the experienced difference. A translator is cognizant of the differences, integrates them into his everyday life and can mediate them. He does not simply estimate.

For generating this competence, one has to gain the awareness of seeing differences. However, for a successful communication, a partner with a comparable competence is needed. Otherwise a noise in the communication cycle could interrupt it. It is not the function of a translator to become totally part of another culture, which is not his own. It is mostly sufficient that he knows the rules and the code. In reality, it can be difficult to assimilate to another culture, because we do not fulfil the expectations of what people expect. For example, Germans shake hands as a sign of greeting, while Japanese bow to say hello. In Japan then, a German would feel obligated to follow the customary greeting and bow like the Japanese. But the Japanese might be disappointed by this, since they have learnt that Germans always shake hands and was expecting the German to do so. This gives rise to the next question, which is, how far should one assimilate to preserve his cultural identity?

A translator would be aware of these difficulties and not disappoint his communication partner, though it is advisable that both sides know about the severity of unfulfilled expectation and compromise. The function of a translator then, is to find the symbols in common and create a code both sides can identify with. The translator is the mediator or the negotiator between cultures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both models of communication have respective advantages and disadvantages. For example, Model 1 is more time consuming and requires more resources. There is also a risk that the

message maybe adulterated in the process of transmission. However, there is a fairly high chance that we can easily find someone, i.e. a translator, who is able to mediate via a transfer of a third language. On the other hand, model 2 requires not just a translator, but a person who possesses knowledge of both languages that he/she is mediating. While it may be difficult to find such a person, his/ her presence warrants a higher chance of the accuracy of the communication and thus minimizing the risk of adulterating the message in the process of mediation. Whether it is Model 1 or 2, in both cases, it is pertinent to find a person who possesses more than one cultural code. Communication between cultures goes through the mediator. This showed that a massive amount of pre-conditioned knowledge is essential for effective communication.

While the world is increasingly inter-connected and individuals are increasingly becoming members of many different cultures, cultural differences remains inevitable as we can not be members of all cultures. Falling back on the examples of world wars in this century, one cannot help but feel that perhaps, a "Clash of Civilisation" has come true. However, it would be grossly simple to just attribute all conflicts to the culture differences. Unfortunately, culture has always been manipulated for political propaganda. It will take concerted effort and time to find commonalities to create a common language. Instead of merely relying on translators to mediate to facilitate communication, it is perhaps time we considered learning from each other and accepting our differences.

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