

An Analysis of Cross-cultural Practices of Communicative Functions

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The two most recent national curricula (the 6th and 7th) adopted functional syllabus as compared with the previous national curricula which were mostly grammatically-based ones. As forms have variants from the prototype, communicative functions also bear different perceptive practices among individuals and even more among different cultures. In a functional syllabus, learning English means that learners are able to use functional expressions in English speaking situations where certain functional expressions should be used, and also learners do not use functional expressions where communicative situations do not fit. This study was conducted to investigate cross-culturally different practices of communicative functions. The survey of 105 native speakers of English participating in English Program in Korea (EPIK) and 120 Korean speakers was conducted to check whether or not respondents hire communicative functions for described situations. The respondents were polled in the summer of 2004 when the EPIK session was open at Korea National University of Education. As a result of the study, a significant range of perceptual differences were found between English native speakers and Korean native speakers as to whether a certain situation calls for a practice of communicative function or not. The survey findings should form the basis of a review on raising awareness of language learners for the functional differences of the same expressions for different cultures.

I. INTRODUCTION

The connection between language and culture is inseparable as the connection between language and users. There is no such a thing as human nature independent of culture: studying a foreign language in a sense is trying to figure out the nature of another people (McDevitt, 2004). Language users use a language in a certain cultural context that imposes conditions to apply certain communicative functions. It follows that the imposing conditions would differ from one culture to another culture.

The concept 'function' has been introduced partially in a few textbooks in the 5th national curriculum. More recently functional syllabus has been adopted as a main structure of textbooks published for the two most recent national curricula (the 6th and 7th). This means that Korean learners of English are learning functional expressions and able to practice the functions where the situations call for their use. However, what would happen to the learners where their perception and English native speakers' perception to utter functional expressions are different in certain situations?

This paper is to investigate if there are perceptual differences among different cultures as to whether a certain communicative function should be used or not in a given situation. Since the concept 'function' was introduced in the recent national English curricula, there's a strong tendency that situations for communicative functions are taken for granted, are fixed and static in the textbook and activities in English classrooms. This paper objects to this product-oriented approach of situation-function relationships in communicative language learning. Instead it argues for the dynamic process and fluidity of communicative situations for communicative functions by demonstrating the perceptual differences of the same situations in using communicative functions across peoples from different cultures. The paper will show the survey results of communicative situations and functions for a group of native speakers of English and a group of Korean to make these points clear. In doing so, the paper opts to emphasize the necessity of situational learning as well as communicative functions as a part of dynamic cultural learning process, and this dynamic process will have to be a part of curriculum for not only cultural learning but also functional learning of language use.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Culture plays an important role in intercultural communication because culture underlies how people learn to communicate. Samovar and Porter (1994) pointed out this rather eloquently by saying "Communicative behavior is governed by rules, principles or regulations that govern conduct and procedure. Communication rules act as a system of expected behavior patterns that organize interaction between individuals. Communication rules are both culturally and contextually bound" (p. 23). Of course, this does not imply in any way that culture A is superior to culture B because it shows certain communicative behavior in a given situation where the other culture does not. Simply, culture A is different from culture B in a given cultural behavior pattern.

However, this difference may provide a basis for communication breakdown and misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication because a certain communicative behavior is not expected or expected in some cultures. In America, the compliment is often

used to maintain social harmony and to sustain social interaction (Celce-Murcia, 1991). In contrast with American culture, in Korea, the compliment to the speaker is restrained since it might appear to be a sort of flattery when spoken in the face of the speaker. Also, self-appraisal is considered to violate a cultural virtue of being humble and modest for the Koreans. Also, for the Koreans to respond to a compliment as Americans do would be considered arrogant as noted in Yang (1987, p. 26).

These differences can further be found in such communicative functions as expressing gratitude, opening/closing conversations, making soft criticisms or making requests (Billmyer, 1990; Brown & Levinson, 1978; Wolfson, 1983). Hall (1976) mentioned that the Korean, Japanese, and Chinese cultures are classified as high-context cultures, while German, Swiss, Scandinavian, and North American cultures are defined as low-context cultures. In high-context cultures, most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the people who are a part of the interaction. Very little information is actually coded in the verbal message. In low-context cultures, most of the information are contained in the verbal message and very little is embedded in the context or within the participants.

These differences in culture will cause language learners to get confused when they cross the high/low context and use certain functions in awkward situations where native speakers from target culture don't normally use. People involved in language teaching have begun to understand the intertwined relation between culture and language (Pulverness, 2003). It has been emphasized that without the study of culture, teaching a foreign language is inaccurate and incomplete. For foreign language learners, language study seems senseless if they know nothing about the people who speak the target language or the country in which the target language is spoken. Acquiring a new language means a lot more than the manipulation of functional expressions. The need for cultural learning in foreign language education arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of their target culture, seem to encounter significant hardships in communicating what they intend to say to speakers of their target language.

III. METHOD

10 communicative functions are extracted from the national curriculum, and situations are constructed as survey questions to ask whether or not the subject uses a designated communicative function in a given situation. 105 native speakers of English and 120 native speakers of Korean responded to the survey. Native speakers of English are participants of EPIK, native speakers of English who were being taught on the Korean educational system a week and who were supposed not only to teach English to Korean students but to assist

Korean English teachers in teaching English. Korean participants are from different groups of students, teachers and company employees. Out of 225 questionnaires distributed, total of 201 responses, 93 native speakers of English and 108 native speakers of Korean, are collected and used for statistical analysis.

93 native speakers of English are from five different countries where English is their native language: 55 Americans, 19 Canadians, 6 Australians, 8 New Zealanders and 5 British. Ethnic makeup of the native speakers of English is 41 Korean, 40 Anglo-Saxon, 9 other European, one other Asian and 2 others. For the range of subjects' ages, there're two subjects under the age of twenty, 43 in their twenties, 29 in their thirties, 11 in their forties and 8 in their fifties. For gender, the subjects are composed of 51 females and 41 males (one undeclared).

Ethnically Korean descendants may cause interference in statistics due to the influence from Korean culture. However, the comparison of situational practices of communicative functions between Korean descendants and Anglo-Saxon descendants show no statistically significant differences. No significant differences were found in comparison of situational practices of communicative functions among different nationalities of English native speakers. Thus, in this paper, the ethnicity and countries of native English speakers will not be dealt with as independent variables.

108 Korean participants were from different parts of Korea: 45 from Seoul, 40 from Gyeonggi, 13 from Daejeon and Chungcheong area, 6 from Busan and Gyeongsang area, 4 from Gwangju and Jeolla area. They consist of 40 college students, 38 teachers and 30 company employees. According to the range of subjects' ages, there're 4 subjects under the age of twenty, 76 in their twenties, 23 in their thirties and 5 in their forties. For gender, the subjects are composed of 85 females and 23 males.

Communicative functions on the survey questions include greeting, introducing, thanking, congratulating, promising, inviting, apologizing, explaining, asking for advice, giving a warning, asking someone to say again, and checking someone's understanding. The selection of functions is based on the list of communicative functions in the national curriculum. The situational questions that subjects might or might not use a given communicative function are constructed in three way distinctions to be made by the respondents: I'll use the communicative function in a given situation (yes), I won't use the function in the situation (no), and I'm not sure whether or not to use the function (don't know). The survey results are analyzed using SPSS version 12 for chi-square to find out the statistical significance of different groups in their perceptual differences as to whether or not respondents use communicative functions with reference to given situations.

IV. RESULT

The chi-square test results show that there exist many situations where native speakers of English tend to practice certain communicative functions while Koreans do not, and vice versa. The cross-cultural differences are shown along for each situation with reference to practice of communicative functions.

TABLE 1
Greeting

N=201			
	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	0	100	71.145***
Situation 2	49.4	50.6	9.854*
Situation 3	35.0	65.0	48.217***

*:p < .05, ***: p < .001

When strangers meet on a street, native speakers of English greet each other almost without exception while Koreans do not greet on streets between strangers. When a person greets someone, Koreans are more likely to greet him/her back only when (s)he remembers the person while native speakers tend to greet him/her back regardless of whether or not (s)he remembers the person who greets him/her. In a school setting, native speakers of English tend to greet to an appearingly teacher significantly more than Koreans would in the same situation. This is somewhat contrary to our intuition since Korean culture is a high-context culture; most of the information is in the physical context as a part of the interaction. On the other hand, English speaking culture is a low-context culture, so very little is embedded in the context or within the participants. This distinction implies that Koreans are more likely to greet someone than the people from English-speaking countries in greeting situation 3, but the result is opposite. With respect to the function of greeting someone, the results illustrate that the relationship between familiarity and greetings is stronger than that between social courtesy and greetings for Koreans while people from English speaking countries show the other tendency where the relationship between social courtesy and greetings are more closely bound together.

TABLE 2
Introducing Someone to Someone Else

N=201			
	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	49.5	50.5	5.158
Situation 2	52.6	47.4	5.544
Situation 3	56.8	43.2	2.855

In case of introducing someone to someone else, the common perceptions that Koreans tend to be more reserved in introducing a girl/boy friend to other friends seems not to stand any longer. Koreans are more forwarding in introducing someone to someone else than English native speakers, except the situation when a teacher introduces a girl/boy friend to his/her students. Despite these statistical differences, the results were not statistically significant to make any general conclusion between two groups with reference to introduction.

TABLE 3
Expressing Someone's Gratitude

	N=201		
	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	62.6	37.4	9.245*
Situation 2	60.7	39.3	24.627***
Situation 3	59.1	40.9	16.993**

*: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$, ***: $p < .001$

When students are given a good grade that they think they deserve, Koreans express gratitude more likely than native speakers of English in the same situation. When people get off in a crowded public transportation, Koreans have a propensity to thank someone who steps aside from his/her way more than native speakers of English. Most of Koreans have a general tendency to express their gratitude to the person who wasn't invited but just crashed to his/her birthday party bringing a gift more than native speakers of English. This illustrates that the daily life in English speaking countries is based on appointment or contract more than that in Korea. The results show that Korean has a wider scope of situations where they express their gratitude than English native speakers have.

TABLE 4
Congratulating

	N=201		
	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	54.7	45.3	2.682
Situation 2	41.2	58.8	7.411
Situation 3	62.3	37.7	21.051***

***: $p < .001$

Though it's not statistically significant, Koreans tend to express the function of 'congratulating someone' in a family matter even if the situation is rather unusual while English native speakers are less willing to do in the same situation, though it's not statistically significant. English native speakers are more likely to express the function of

'congratulating someone' on his/her birthday than Koreans. Native speakers of English, on the other hand, are apt to pretend not to know the principal's birthday and want to escape from an awkward situation as compared with Koreans. People in English speaking countries seem to be more concerned with remembering someone's special day and giving him/her a gift on the day while Koreans think it is appropriate just to acknowledge the special day casually and verbally.

TABLE 5
Promising

N=201			
	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	35.8	64.2	14.330**
Situation 2	53.2	46.8	4.518
Situation 3	41.7	58.3	15.269**

** : p < .01

Both Koreans and native speakers of English make empty promises to avoid confrontational situations. However, native speakers of English are more likely to make empty promises to ease the uncomfortable situations than Koreans to a statistically significant degree. Korean speakers are more outgoing in facing issues that sometimes make situations uncomfortable than English native speakers except the case where Koreans made an error in remembering an important date. In situation 2, both groups are willingly to break the previous engagement to celebrate the important date, though Koreans show stronger tendency.

TABLE 6
Inviting

N=201			
	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	38.9	61.1	5.778**
Situation 2	36.8	63.2	19.637***
Situation 3	46.0	54.0	13.859**

** : p < .01, *** : p < .001

Koreans will not be likely to invite ex-wife/husband to their wedding compared to English native speakers. Despite the fact that the divorce rate is running high, and second or third marriages become common, Koreans still feel uncomfortable in inviting ex-wife/husband to their new family events. It's often the case where ex-wife/husband relationship gets degraded into something less than friends in Korea. Koreans also want to interact with their girl/boy friends only among themselves and are hesitant to invite them to

their family gathering in contrast with native speakers of English. People from English speaking countries are expectedly more open than in Korea about spending time with their boy/girl friends in their family gathering.

People in general have a tendency not to show their private life in public regardless of the differences in their native cultures. However, within the general tendency, people from English speaking countries are more likely to reveal their family conditions regardless of how poor the conditions might be, while Koreans tend to keep it in private.

TABLE 7
Apologizing

	N=201		
	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	55.1	44.9	5.955**
Situation 2	54.2	45.8	3.820*
Situation 3	59.5	40.5	7.047**
Situation 4	49.3	50.7	9.594*

*: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$

Contrary to the common belief that English native speakers are more polite in apologizing for little things they cannot help, the results show that Koreans are statistically more inclined to apologize for not being able to be with his/her wife/husband for dinner together. They are also more likely to apologize both for not being helpful to their boss and for not being able to accept one's favor. However, in stepping on unidentifiable passenger's tow in a crowded subway, native speakers of English tend more likely to apologize to him/her than Koreans. These results are in the same vein which Koreans are less likely to use language to express communicative functions to strangers than to familiar ones.

TABLE 8
Requesting

	N=201		
	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	54.1	45.9	10.844
Situation 2	67.9	32.1	8.808

In case of reasonable requests, both Koreans and people from English speaking countries don't have any difficulties to make their requests of what they want to get done. However, within the general tendency Koreans respond more directly in making requests than people from English speaking countries, though the difference does not reach the level of statistical significance. People in general have difficulties in making a public request especially in case of anticipating a blunt answer from the person addressed. Again, within

the general tendency, Koreans are more forwarding in making a request than people from English speaking countries, though the difference is not statistically significant.

TABLE 9
Advising

	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	75.0	25.0	30.295***
Situation 2	63.3	36.7	23.481***

N=201
***: p < .001

Koreans are a lot more likely to advise children that they should not jump around in public places than native speakers of English. This is somewhat contrary to the public perception in that Korean adults do not interfere with other children in child rearing even if they are rowdy in public places. Also, Koreans are more likely to advise his/her friend not to commit social misdemeanors when they do so than native speakers of English.

TABLE 10
Warning

	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	55.4	44.6	3.371**
Situation 2	59.3	40.7	16.559**
Situation 3	64.9	35.1	20.297***

N=201
: p < .01, *: p < .001

Whether they are Koreans or native speakers of English, people have a tendency to avoid warning a stranger. However, within the general tendency, Koreans are significantly more likely to warn people in dangerous and/or illegal situation. Interestingly this applies to stranger situations as well. The result of warning a friend is in accordance with the more likelihood of being forwarding in giving friendly advice when their friends are doing something wrong.

TABLE 11
Asking Someone to Say Something Again

	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	51.3	48.8	7.716
Situation 2	64.7	35.3	8.981*
Situation 3	54.1	45.9	3.770

N=201
*: p < .05

In both cultures asking someone to say something again is more reserved in public

situations and situations involved with a stranger, though Koreans are more likely to exercise the communicative functions of asking someone to say something again than English native speakers. Contrary to the common belief that Korean students shy away from asking questions to professors than English native speakers, native speakers of English are less likely to ask questions while Koreans are more likely to ask the question again for an answer to a statistically significant degree.

TABLE 12
Checking Someone's Understanding

	KNS (n=108)	ENS (n=93)	chi-square
Situation 1	54.9	45.1	5.693
Situation 2	37.6	62.4	24.143***

N=201

***: p < .001

Koreans are more likely to check whether or not their listeners have understood what they say than English native speakers, though the difference is not statistically significant. However, in asking professors to read their assignments more carefully, English native speakers are significantly more assertive than Koreans. This tendency is somewhat different from the survey result that Koreans are more likely to give advice, warn someone, ask questions or make requests in the described situations on the survey than people from English speaking countries.

V. DISCUSSION

Learning a new language is a dynamic process where learners must engage in the communicative situations in meaningful ways rather than getting to know prototypical situations and memorize them with functional expressions. This fluidity of situational elements in communication requires teachers and learners to look at learning a new language as a cultural process of engagement in communicative situations rather than learning communicative situations and functions as static cultural products. This sort of process-oriented approach rather than the product-oriented approach to culture has been argued for in quite a few recent studies (Jourdain, 1998; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). Bacon (1995), for instance, argues that the simplistic approaches to teaching culture such as informing cultural facts or tour-guide details, or so-called objective native culture versus target culture are not as valuable as is often believed. The reasons, he provides, are that facts are unstable, tours are superficial, and a cultural contrast ignores the dynamic social nature of culture. On the other hand, Kramsch (1983) advocates that in order to achieve

cross-cultural communication we have to involve the affective and cognitive processes of the learner in interpreting these facts rather than merely presenting the cultural facts. Another claim for process-oriented approach was also made by Mantle-Bromley (1992) in that the language teacher must understand that just as language learning is a process, so too is culture learning. More recently, Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) cautioned about the danger of viewing culture as a product, not process. Their claim is that the notions of culture as knowledge, culture as skills, or culture as both may lead to notions of culture as static products or forms that may be objectified.

In the same context this study positively illustrated that there are many instances of cultural situations where both Koreans and people from English speaking cultures differ in whether or not to express certain communicative functions. In communicative language teaching it's important to know a list of communicative functions. However, it's more important to understand where these communicative functions are culturally expected for people to use or not to use. This paper has shown the perceptual differences between two cultures for a list of communicative functions in the national curriculum. Thus, it emphasizes the fact that culture is a pattern of dynamic processes of people's interaction, and the patterns are different in different cultures. When learners want to get across the language barrier, they must learn how to get across the cultural barrier as well. Also, the survey results call for more careful look at the differences across learners' native and target cultures with reference to the use of communicative functions and their expressions. Hopefully the results find their ways into the teaching of communicative functions and situations in classroom English teaching.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire for Cross-cultural Practices of Communicative Functions

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- (1) Which country are you from?
the UK _____, the US _____, Canada _____,
Australia _____, New Zealand _____ Ireland _____
- (2) Which family background have you grown up?
Anglo-Saxon _____, African _____, Korean _____
Other European _____, Other Asian _____, Pacific Islanders _____ Others _____
- (3) Your age range:
20-30 _____, 31-40 _____, 41-50 _____, 51- _____
- (4) You're female _____, male _____.
- (5) Please write down the name of job you spend most time of your life among jobs including a part-time job.

- (6) Please write down single most important reason why you apply for EPIK program.

GREETING

1. Would you greet him/her when you pass by a stranger on a street?
2. Would you greet back to a person who greets you, but you don't have any memory of the person at all?
3. Would you greet to a person who looks like a teacher but you don't know the person at school?

INTRODUCING

1. Would you as a teacher introduce your boyfriend to your student when you run into your student on your date?
2. While walking on the street with your boy/girl friend you run into your colleague and got into a discussion. Would you introduce your boy/girl friend to your colleague?
3. You're a high school student and walking with your friends on the street. You see your father working on a street as a garbage collector. Would you introduce your friends to your father?

GIVING GRATITUDE

1. Would you express gratitude to a teacher who gave you a good grade which you think you deserved?
2. Would you thank a person who steps aside from your way when you get off in a crowded subway?
3. Would you show gratitude to a friend who wasn't invited but just crashed to your birthday party bringing a gift?

CONGRATULATING

1. Would you congratulate if you hear from your father the news that your mother is pregnant when you come back home after your honeymoon?
2. Would you congratulate on a stranger on a street who's holding a birthday balloon?
3. Would you congratulate on your principal's birthday when you don't have a present to give and you have an option to pretend not knowing the birthday.

PROMISING

1. Would you promise to your mom just to make her happy that you'll do your homework before going out to play, but you know that you wouldn't be able to keep the promise?
2. Your father asked you to go fishing together on the weekend once in such a long time and you said "yes." However, in the evening your girl friend reminded you of her birthday this weekend which you completely forgot. Would you promise her that you will spend the weekend with her?
3. Would you as a doctor promise your patient asking desperately not to tell his wife how serious his cancer is?

INVITING

1. Would you invite your ex-husband/wife to your second wedding?
2. Would you invite your boy/girl friend to your family's travel for summer vacation?
3. Would you invite your daughter's friends to your own restaurant for her birthday party? It's a dumpy little place that sells cheap meals.

APOLOGIZING

1. Would you apologize to your wife/husband when you don't keep the promise of taking her/him out for a dinner due to an extended faculty meeting in the school?
2. Would you apologize if your boss asks you to help her personal errands and you cannot help?
3. Would you apologize if you cannot accept someone's favor because the favor can be misunderstood as bribery?
4. Would you apologize to the people in the direction if you step on somebody's shoes in a crowded subway and you don't know whom you stepped on?

REQUESTING

1. You share the dormitory room with your roommate. You are doing homework for a very important presentation. Your roommate is listening to music loudly, so you are interfered with

- your studies. Would you request to stop listening to music loudly?
2. It is a hot summer day. You catch a bad cold. You take an air-conditioned bus to see a doctor. You are freezing to death, so you want to turn the air-conditioning off. Would you say to the driver to turn it off?

ADVICE

1. You're eating dinner in the restaurant with your best friend. Suddenly a boy/girl is jumping and walking around next table. You and your friend can't concentrate on eating. Do you advise his/her parents to cool down the child?
2. You are walking along the street. You saw your friend throw the trash on the street. Would you advise to your friend to pick up the trash?

GIVING A WARNING

1. Would you caution a boy getting too close to tigers in the zoo, but their parents don't seem to care at all?
2. Would you give a warning to a driver who's parking on a handicapped lot illegally?
3. Would you give a caution to your friend if she uses her credit card excessively way over what she earns?

ASKING AGAIN

1. In a big conference, you cannot understand what the chairman said. Would you ask him to say that again?
2. In your class you asked a question to the professor, but he continues his lecture as if he didn't notice. Would you ask the same question again in the middle of the lecture?
3. A stranger appears to say something to you, but you cannot understand. Would you ask the stranger to repeat what she/he said?

CHECKING UNDERSTANDING

1. Would you check the understanding of your students after you explained a topic?
2. Would you ask if your professor look at your assignment more carefully again because the grade you received indicates that he didn't?

Applicable levels: primary, secondary, tertiary education

Key words: cultural learning, communicative functions/situations, survey analysis

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