



The Expressional Function of Communication Models in the Process of Learning a Foreign Language and Learning Experiences with the Culture of the Foreign Language

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Abstract

In our contribution, we ruminate on innovations in the process of learning a foreign language through an expressive function in the communication scheme of students learning a foreign language based on their learning experiences with the specifics of a foreign language culture. For the survey, we choose a request formulating because the request has a specific structure that is given by culture. We examine this phenomenon in the presence of social distance and power- power distance index (PDI). Within the request model, we focus on expressive factors such as compliments, intensifiers, minimizer, preparatory formula, supportive reasons, politeness markers, disarmament, consultative mechanisms, promises and a combination of previous factors. We arose from De Mooij's theory of communication styles in terms of the structure of the utterance, Hofstede's theory of cultural dimension and Díaz-Pérez's theory of expression factors of a request. The aim of the paper is to explore communication models of expressive factors of foreign language students based on the power distance index (PDI). We are interested in what communication models are created by Slovak students of the English language (the influence of English and Slovak culture), given the communication style of low- and high-context communication. We simulate social situations with (PDI+) and without (PDI-) a presence of social power and distance. The research was carried out at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra and 226 students took part. It comes out that communication models of expression factors are closely related to the PDI index.

Keywords: *Communication model, expressive factors, low- and high-context communication, power distance index*

1. Introduction

Language information and communication models are processed in various ways depending on a variety of factors, which concreate choices of linguistic and paralinguistic means of communication as well as strategies of politeness depending on the individuals and their cultural backgrounds. The communication style of an individual depends on his/her experiential complexity, mental programming, social environment sources, related to life experience [11]. Individuals learning a foreign language usually acquire communication styles of the related foreign culture. Foreign sources suggest implementing foreign language cultural elements, value orientation, or behavioural schemes into the communication styles of those learning a foreign language. Although Slovak culture based on the use of the particular communication style is classified as a predominantly high-context culture and the UK culture as a low-context culture, we observed the influence of Anglophonic culture on the Slovak students during the research investigation. Since the modelling of expressive factors classifies low- or high- context communication, the emphasis of the research study was put on their investigation. In fact, it was useful for language behaviour statistical analysis to learn about the index of individual countries. The main theories discussed in the study were the theory of interpersonal communication styles by [8], and the theory of communication styles related to speech acts structuring [2, 3], Hofstede's theory [1], and theory of Grice [6]. The main emphasis of the contemporary research laid on the issues of trans-cultural communication through the media and cultural proximity [18], language modelling through information technologies [23], and cultural dependency [2, 3, 5, 7]. Contextually, dependent variables, distance and power determining regulations and process of communication in a wider context of each culture, were taken into consideration in the current study. As [11] claimed communication style is always determined by the power distance index of the related culture. The objective of the research study was to examine the production of communication models in the category of expressive factors depending on the PDI- influence.

2. The expressional function of communication models in the process of learning a foreign language

In individuals' performance in a foreign language (perception and production), an individual does not only process the foreign language structure but also recognizes the language culture, creates a relation to language and culture, considers the causes and functions of cultural and individual speech patterns in the foreign language. [2] claims that the basic dimension of culture-influenced communication is the culture-driven communication model, which is governed by interpersonal communication styles. Communication style is understood to be a stable way of communicating an individual with his/her social environment, certain communication habits, but also his/her relationship to the objectives, contents and forms of communication [2, 3, 10, 11, 12]. The communication model described how the individuals' communication patterns were processed in their cognitive structures, how they communicated or used individual's communication formulas, word strings, etc. in their communication models [24].

In the foreign language acquisition, the individual gets familiarized with the target language and its culture, and gradually becomes cognitively anchored in the target language and its culture, i.e. cognitive processing of culture, acceptance of cultural and linguistic artefacts specific to the target language. According to [25], it is a process of transition from one culture into another. Individuals start to think in the target language. By cognitive processing, a variety of further cognitive processes may appear, such as a cultural conflict, a cultural shock, cultural and intercultural understanding [16, 24]. Important aspects of a foreign language acquisition include mainly the awareness of different cultural patterns, including the cultural background of the mother tongue and the awareness of the communication style of the given culture, whether it is a low-context or a high-context culture.

According to [9], low-context cultures express themselves precisely, directly, openly, and sufficiently, explicitly, while high-context cultures are more redundant, indirect, more diplomatic, such text is ambiguous and therefore requires a higher context. The natural dependency results in both different view of social status (verbal personal style is common in individualistic cultures, the needs of individuals over groups are emphasized, e.g. only English-speaking cultures capitalize first-person singular pronoun) and also in the extent of representation of the context in communication (it depends not only on the culture individualism but also on the extent of uncertainty avoidance, showing the need for clarity of communication). Collectivist cultures prefer indirect communication with more metaphors, but the metaphor of one culture may not be well interpreted by other cultures. Therefore, it is relevant to the recent study. Anglophone cultures reach the highest values of the culture individualism index, compared to Slovakia with a relatively low value of culture individualism index (collectivist culture).

In the process of experience with the culture of foreign language and culture, social distance and social power (Power Distance Index, PDI) play an essential role. PDI examines the relationship of individual cultures to power and social status, as well as to distance and proximity. It shows how a given culture values, appreciates and assesses the hierarchical relationships and respect for superiors [11]. A high index suggests that social inequality is accepted and there are large social differences in such cultures. The low index suggests that equality and opportunity for each individual is emphasized in these societies.

According to [4], social distance is not a hierarchical type of relationship as opposed to social power. Social distance relates to the image of proximity differing from culture to culture, applied in language, too.

3. Expressive Factors and Foreign Language and Culture

The expressive function of language is one of the essential elements in perception, processing and production of language. Emotions in language production always include form and function. The form focuses on indicators, which can be used to identify our emotions. The functional aspect describes the area in which emotion fulfils a function in human activity in cooperation with perception, memory, or motivation. There are more studies [13 14, 15, 17, 20] pointing out the idea that the relation between subjective experience and objective expression of emotions is not that tight as the theoretical bases have presented in language production.

The purpose of the study is to examine the expressive function in communication style, a choice of expressive factors. Based on [22] and [21] the structure of a request is culturally determined. A request consists of internal and external elements and its central part is its core, a minimal element, which acts and achieves the purpose. The external elements are such parts, which are added to the core of the request and intensify the effect of a request. The focus was put on a group of expressive factors based on Trosborg's typology of request elements (1995) and the elements of politeness by Díaz-Pérez (2003), and adapted them for the purpose of the research study. The external expressive



factors in request modelling used in the study were the following: Politeness factors, Pre-sequences, Post-sequences/supporting details, Mitigating devices, Minimizers, Consultative mechanism, Compliments/sweeteners, elements intensifying the likelihood of a request fulfilment, Intensifiers, Promises, Reciprocity, Combination of previous and Other.

4. Methodology

The research was conducted within the time of three academic years at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra at the Faculty of Arts.

4.1 Participants

The research sample consisted of 63 male and 163 female 21,5 years old university students of the first, second or third year of study. The students majored English as part of a teaching program or translation studies program. They had studied English for 9 years and passed secondary grammar schools examinations from English as a foreign language, tests ISED 3 level B2.

4.2 Procedure

The questionnaire on social situation stimulation was applied to find out the relation of the communication styles to low- and high-context communication in the request modelling in relation to the power distance index. English language students modelled the responses to social situation simulations; they modelled requests in English. The research study was based on the following theories: The Trosborg's typology of requests (1995), the theory of low- and high-context cultures by [8], [2, 3], the theory of power, and distance by [11], the theory of expressive request factors by [4]. The models as adopted for the research study follow:

- Politeness factors (F20): *thank you, please* – immediately before or after the request core.
- Pre-sequences (F21): *Hello Mary, I wasn't at school yesterday, I felt sick so I stayed at home. Can you please lend me ..., Hello, professor XY. I have a request on you. I forgot my phone at home and I need to make an urgent call. Can I use your phone, please?*
- Post-sequences/supporting details (F22): *Could I use your phone? It is very important to me and I have no other phone at hand.*
- Mitigating devices (F23): *Sorry for interrupting, I remembered that ...*
- Minimizers (F24): *I would like to ask you for a small favor...; Could I have it for a minute to copy it? I need it for my work. Only a couple of chapters. I'll return it immediately...*
- Consultative mechanism (F25): *"Do you think I can have a shot of your notes? Please, would you mind if I use your telephone? I have to make a very urgent call..."*
- Compliments/sweeteners, elements intensifying the likelihood of a request fulfilment (F26): *"Could you help me prepare for my essay as I know you are very knowledgeable in the subject."*
- Intensifiers (F27): *"... important... , ... as soon as possible ... , ... quick"*
- Promises, reciprocity (F28): *"Excuse me. Would it be o.k. if I borrowed the book for half an hour to photocopy a couple of chapters? I'll bring it straight back."*
- Combination of previous (F29): *"I feel rude asking you this, but I need to make an urgent phone call. There are no phones nearby. Would you mind if I used your phone?"* (Mitigating devices + Pre-sequences).
- Others (F30)

4.3 Instruments

In order to obtain expected data, the following tools were used: A questionnaire of social situations simulation by [4] to examine the communication style of low and high context communication, or expressive factors request modelling depending on PDI, and estimation scale C-W.

The questionnaire examines the occurrence of individual factors in various social situations of distance D+, proximity D-, with power P+, without power P-. The example most representative situations follow (situations S1, S2, and S3):

S1 (P-, D-): *You did not participate in the last lesson and you are asking your classmate to lend you his/her notes.*

S2 (P+, D-): *You are in the office of one of your professors and you find out you desperately need to make a phone call. You cannot use any other phone than his/hers so you ask your professor to lend you his/her phone in his/her office.*

S3 (P+, D+): *You are preparing for your presentation for one of the most important subjects and you find out there is a new professor at the department who is an expert exactly in the field you are*



studying. You don't know that professor but you decide to see him/her and ask him/her to read the résumé of your presentation and to give you some advice for literature to study.

The respondents were exposed to the scenarios of the situations. They were required to prepare appropriate responses using selected communication means to create requests in the contexts of social power and social distance in their cultural environment (mother tongue and foreign language use). Intercultural differences were also considered in the selected situations.

4.4 Results

We analysed the use of expressive factors (F20- F30) in three different situations: S1 (P-, D-), S2 (P+, D-), and S3 (P+, D+). Based on the results of Chi-square test, the occurrence of expressive factors of request modelling depends on particular situation, i.e. *there is a difference between the occurrences of expressive factors among the examined situations S1, S2, and S3* (Tab. 1).

Table 1: Analysis of Power Distance Index (S1, S2, and S3)

	Chi-square	Df	p
Pearson Chi-square	224.0969	20	0.0000
Contingency coefficient	0.3847		
Cramér's V	0.2947		

The contingency coefficient represents the degree of dependence between the two nominal variables. The value of the coefficient is approximately 0.38 (moderate dependency), where 1 means perfect dependency and 0 means independency (Tab. 1).

PDI is related to communication style in the category of expressive factors in request (Fig. 2).

The graph presents a polygon, the expressive factors of request modelling are displayed on the x-axis and the observed frequency of the occurrence is displayed on the y-axis. If the curves copy each other – they show the same course, the use of expressive factors of the request does not depend on the situation. And vice versa, if there is any defined degree of dependence, the curves would not copy each other – this is what the results of Chi-square test have confirmed. We can observe different course for S1, S2, and S3. As we can see on the graph (Fig. 2), the differences are mainly in factors F20, F21, F22, F23, F24, F25, F26 and F28 in the situations S1, S2, and S3. The factor F27 illustrates differences only in the situation S2 (P+, D-) compared to S1/S3 (between S1 and S3, there is no difference in the use of F27).

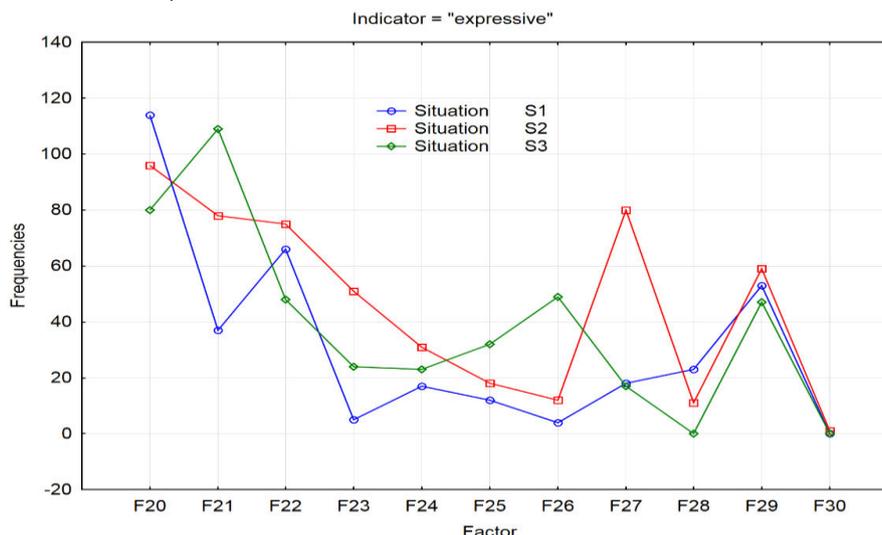


Figure 1: Interaction Plot - Situation x Expressive Factors.

5. Conclusion

Dynamics of communication models of the selected expressive factors and how they were influenced by social power and distance in a pre-dominantly high- or low- contexts cultures, were the main emphasis of the study. It was showed, there is a relation between the expressive factors modelling and simulation of social situations, social proximity without power (S1), social proximity with power (S2) and social distance with power (S3). Furthermore, social power and distance appeared to be the



indicator in the communication process of an individual. An individual follows certain communication frames, communication models in situations of social distance or proximity, and in situations with or without social power. Together with [11], our research study demonstrated a certain level of impact of PDI on communication style.

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