Cross-Cultural Website Analysis as a method for teaching intercultural competence in the University English Program

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Abstract

PROBLEM STATEMENT: European universities are challenged to effectively teach English and assist students in developing the intercultural skills necessary for the multicultural environment. The publication “First European Survey on Language Competences” (2012) clearly states that the English language is a basic skill and tool for employment and professional development (2012). Bertelsmann Stiftung (2006) stated that intercultural competence is the ‘key competence’ of the 21st century. Based on these facts, the following method is proposed for teaching English and intercultural competence within the same course.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: The method is based on cross-cultural communication research and intercultural competence skill development (Bennett, 1998).

METHODS: Two Italian universities were used for the pilot program. Pre-course, mid-course and final evaluations were conducted for diagnosis of intercultural competence level and oral English language ECFR level. Assessment tools based on ECFR evaluation methods and an instrument based on the DMIS by Milton Bennett were used (2003). The course activities were based on multimodal analysis (Baldry, Thibault, 2006) and cross-cultural website analysis (Toffle, 2012).

FINDINGS AND RESULTS: Final results showed an improvement ranging from (.5) to one complete ECFR level in 40 hours. The intercultural competence level was initially found to be in the area of ethnocentrism but ended in the area of ethno-relativism, mostly in the ‘acceptance’ zone. (Bennett 2003).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: More research and development of assessment is recommended but the preliminary results were positive.

Keywords: intercultural competence, cross-cultural communication, English language proficiency, multimodal analysis, cross-cultural website analysis, CLIL.

1. Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in the English language is currently viewed as a requirement for getting a job or pursuing a higher university degree. The English language has become the global ‘lingua franca’. The significance of this phenomenon is being studied in various areas, including an ongoing study (VOICE 2013) which has identified and developed an entire corpus of English as an international language (lingua franca). International English now has a new name: ELF “English as a Lingua Franca” (Vienna 2012). English has frequently been referred to as ‘English as a Link Language”, starting in the 1960’s in India (Kumaramangalam, 1968), where it was defined as a linguistic instrument to unite the diverse cultural-linguistic areas of India. As David Graddol (2006)
points out, English as a Lingua Franca is replacing English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language. The Economist (August 7, 2004) so eloquently stated: “In central Europe, as in much of the world, knowledge of English has become a basic skill of modern life comparable with the ability to drive a car or use a personal computer.” According to Joshua Fishman (2001) 1.6 billion people use English in some form, and it is the language of a significant number of publications, research, music, and pop culture. (One can imagine that the numbers have grown significantly since 2001!) The New York Times (2007) drove the point home when it said English “is the common language in almost every endeavor, from science to air traffic control to the global jihad, where it is apparently the means of communication between speakers of Arabic and other languages.” English has consolidated its dominance as the language of the Internet, where 80 percent of the world's electronically stored information is in English (Graddol, 2006). There is no question that for now and well into the future, the English language dominates and must be considered an important subject in any university degree program in Europe. Beyond the obvious reasons of being able to find a job, the students have a right to education and at this point in time, education includes the development of English communication competence. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and Education states that all students have the right to education (2007). Just as technology use is creating two camps in the developed and developing world, (the non-connected and the connected), so knowledge of the English language is fast becoming the key to information, learning, employment and business, all on a global scale. Important issues such as social cohesion and social coherence are inseparably connected to the type of education that students receive, as David Putnam wrote, “Human and social capital are clearly related, for education has a very powerful effect on trust and associational membership, as well as many other forms of social and political participation.” (Putnam, 1995). According to Coffield (2000), the European Community directives of promoting lifelong learning were (are) based on the development of social cohesion with the goal of economic competitiveness. And economic competitiveness depends on communication, specifically, communication in English.

1.1 The Necessity for English Language Competence in the Global Market

What is the point of this discussion about social cohesion, social inclusion, and social coherence in the introduction of an English language teaching technique? The answer is quite simple: students who are not able to communicate adequately in English (and do not have basic intercultural skills) are destined to be left out of the future global job market. Many would say that English has already become a requirement and that those who are not able to communicate in English are quickly becoming marginalized. Another issue is at stake besides the obvious reasons that English communication skills are important for a future job: the English language is fast becoming the primary vehicle containing current and developing knowledge. Students who are unable to understand and function in the English language are setting themselves up for being left out in the future should they pursue an academic career or any type of higher professional position such as medicine, engineering, teaching, information technology, etc. (Graddol 2000). Graddol also observed that “English is closely associated with the leading edge of global scientific, technological, economic and cultural developments” (Graddol, 2000). Based on this analysis, the present author doubts that the would-be future professional can even make it into a profession without some English language competence.

1.2 The Necessity for Intercultural Competence in the Global Market

Bhawuk and Brislin stated that “interculturally competent leaders are needed not only in virtual global teams but also in the multicultural context of regional teams and organizations (Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992). The university students of today will be the global leaders of tomorrow; it is up to the university to prepare them to face ‘the phenomenon of globalization’. (Eoyung, 2005, Roberts, 2007). The term ‘globalization’ is a way of expressing the ever-growing presence of globalization on the local scene. Students must be prepared to function effectively.

1.2.1 Definition of Intercultural Competence
What is intercultural competence? There are many definitions. According to Dr. Alvino Fantini, it is a difficult concept to define. He says it is “the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and create appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini, 2003). Deardoff (2006) defines it as “the development of knowledge and skill through experience and training that results in a complex schema of cultural differences, perspective-taking skills, and interpersonal skills, all of which an individual can flexibly (or adaptively) apply through the willingness to engage in new environments even in the face of considerable ambiguity, through self-monitoring and through self-regulation”. It has also been defined as the ability to step beyond one’s own culture and function with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds” (Castle, Snicrope, Norris, Watanabe, 2007). Finally it can be defined as “the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman, 2003). They identified the stages of intercultural competence and developed the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993/ Hammer et. al. 2003) which is a model that identifies the stages of progression from ethnocentrism to ethnocentrism.

1.2.2 Justification for Intercultural Competence Training

The UN Statement on Human Rights and Education states that “…the curriculum must enable each child (student) to acquire the core academic curriculum and basic cognitive skills, together with essential life skills that equip children (students) to face life challenges, make well-balanced decisions and develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships, critical thinking and the capacity for nonviolent conflict resolution. It must develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and promote respect for different cultures and values (UN 2006). Intercultural competency is directly related to this requirement-respect for different cultures and values are well-developed qualities in an interculturally competent individual. The UNICEF Publication “A Human Rights Based Approach to Education 2007” states that “education policies have to contribute to the development of understanding, solidarity, and tolerance among individuals and among ethnic, social cultural and religious groups and sovereign nations…convinced that education should promote knowledge, values, attitudes and skills conducive to respect for human rights and to an active commitment to the defence of such rights and the building of a culture of peace and democracy…(p 67)…(it is necessary to) help teachers to link the education process more closely to real social life and transform it into the practice of tolerance and solidarity respect for human rights, democracy and peace…” (UNICEF 2007).

Education must support the development intercultural skills in individuals. As the UNICEF Publication (A Human Rights Based Approach to Education, 2007) states, “Education must develop the ability to recognize and accept the values which exist in the diversity of individuals, genders, peoples and culture and develop the ability to communicate, share and cooperate with others…. citizens of a pluralist society and multicultural world should be able to accept that their interpretation of situations and problems is rooted in their personal lives, in the history of their society and in their cultural traditions: that, consequently, no individual or group holds the only answer to problems: and that for each problem there may be more than one solution. Therefore, people should understand and respect each other and negotiate on an equal footing, with a view to seeking common ground “. UNESCO adds that “learning foreign languages offers a means of gaining a deeper understanding of other cultures, which can serve as a basis of building better understanding between communities and between nations.” (UNESCO, General Conference, p 65, 1995). It goes on to say that educational institutions themselves must become “ideal places for the exercise of tolerance, respect for human rights, the practice of democracy and learning about the diversity and wealth of cultural identities” (UNESCO, General Conference, 67).

The Council of Europe showed its congruence with the United Nations and took it a step farther: the actual identification of the need for a European Language Framework set the stage for a strong move towards interculturalism in Europe. (Council of Europe R (98)6). Besides defining the European Common Framework of Languages, they also identified intercultural skills. The key “intercultural skills and know-how” include the capacity to bring the culture of origin and foreign culture together, cultural sensitivity and the ability of make contact with other cultures; the ability to be a cultural intermediary and “deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations”; the capacity to go beyond stereotypes. They defined intercultural know-how as openness towards new experiences, societies, peoples, cultures; the willingness to look at one’s own cultural
and value system in a relativistic way; the capacity to “distance oneself from conventional attitudes to cultural difference” (ECF part 5). This course was created with these competences in mind.

2. Methods

In light of the above background analysis, this course was developed in the hopes of improving English communication skills while beginning to develop intercultural competence, which compliments language learning. University students in Italy need to acquire both English language skills and intercultural skills in order to be competitive in the European Union and elsewhere. Most companies looking for new employees list both of these capabilities on a par with technical skills. It is this author’s opinion that the university system owes it to the students to give them the opportunity to develop a strong skill set in both English language communication skills and intercultural skills. Therefore this new method was developed in the hopes of achieving this double end. The purpose of this pilot course was to see how much progress could be made in English language competence as defined and measured by the European Common framework while also working on intercultural competence development.

Two Italian universities were used for the pilot program. Two different faculties followed the same course structure. Pre-course, mid-course and final evaluations were conducted both for diagnosis of intercultural competence level and oral English language ECFR level. Assessment tools based on ECFR evaluation methods and an instrument based on the DMIS by Milton Bennett were used (2003). The course activities were based on multimodal analysis (Baldry, Thibault, 2006) and cross-cultural website analysis (Toffle, 2012).

2.1 Goals of the course

The goals of the course were to improve English proficiency in order to function as an Independent User (ECF B2) and to introduce and promote the development of intercultural competence. Speaking and listening proficiency were the primary goals for the frontal lessons whereas reading and writing were the primary goals for the independent projects and assignments. The following goals were identified: 1) Improve English proficiency in order to function as an Independent User (ECF B2); 2) Introduce and promote the development of intercultural competence. Three sub-goals were identified and integrated into the main content. Students were required to a) conduct internet research in English; b) create a PowerPoint presentation in English with the goal of expanding computer literacy; c) deliver a professional research-oriented presentation in English developed by applying reading, writing and research skills.

2.2 Double Method Approach

A double-method approach was utilized. The linguistic/language instructional method was based on Multimodal Analysis (Baldry, Thibault, 2006) whereas the intercultural training method was based on cross-cultural communication research (Lewis, 1999) (Harris and Moran, 2007)(Gannon, 2000), (Storti, 1997) and intercultural competence skill development (Bennett, 1998).

2.2.1 Use of Multimodal Analysis

Although the actual use of multimodal analysis as a linguistic analytical tool was quite limited, the students needed to begin with it in order to understand how texts demonstrate meaning in various ways. This gave the students a basic framework in the analysis of texts in order to extract meaning and set the stage for the next part.

2.2.2 Cross-Cultural Website Analysis
Time is very limited in the English language program and so the ideal of producing enlightened interculturalists was challenged by the need to help the students arrive at a B2 level as fast as possible. The more realistic situation was to raise intercultural awareness and launch the students on their own path of search and discovery, to give them the awareness and inspiration to continue learning on their own either through study or participation in study abroad programs or other activities. In addition to this, the actual proficiency of the students had to be considered, and a goal of .5 ECF level growth was also very ambitious. The course was based on the principles of the European Linguistic Portfolio (ELP) and required the students to demonstrate the status of Independent User (B2 level of the European Common Framework). Both courses could be considered CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) courses because the English language was being taught and at the same time being used as a vehicle for learning content material, in this case, cross-cultural communication and building intercultural competence. Using the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method combined with the techniques of multimodal analysis and cross-cultural website analysis produced results of a 0.5 average increase in level in spite of the time constraints.

According to University of Cambridge ESOL analysis approximately 150-200 hours of guided learning are necessary to pass from B1 to B2) (Cambridge ESOL, 2013)

2.3 Procedure

Students were given the following diagram. The concept of cultural orientations as applied to English texts was explored with application of each orientation. (See appendix for explanation of orientations). Interactive team exercises and cooperative learning assisted them in building their interactive skills and confidence.

![Cross Cultural Website Analytical Model](image)
2.3.1 Preliminary Assessment

Students were given an initial oral exam based on the UCLES B2 First Certificate level. They were also given a brief written exam that included applied grammar and targeted writing. The majority of the students in the Communication Faculty received a score of B1.0-B1.5 level. There were no absolute beginners. The Social Worker group presented beginning levels significantly lower at an average of A2-A2.5. Overall, the weakest areas were listening and speaking.

2.3.2 Instructional Activities

During the course the students learned about multimodal analysis based on Halliday’s theories (Halliday, 1978) and the method developed by Baldry and Thibault (2006) as mentioned above. Several assignments in multimodal website analysis were completed. Being able to analyze a website, recognize its contents and interpret texts using multimodal analysis raised their level of consciousness about texts and prepared them to begin the second part of the course. The second part of the course consisted of cross-cultural communication training. They received the generally accepted prototype training adapted from the international management field for cross-cultural communication training: 1) raising cultural awareness, 2) developing cultural sensitivity 3) building cross-cultural communication skills. The third module was abbreviated and just included self-analysis of communication styles (see appendix). It is important to note that this training was limited due to time constraints and the third component was very superficially presented.

The final activities of the course focused on examining various websites and texts and applying the model of cultural orientations. Students were forced to think creatively and negotiate solutions together while applying the cultural principles and using English as the communication tool. Ongoing cooperative learning with small groups and pair work followed by reporting and discussion were a strong component in the frontal lessons. Group work was emphasized during class time which gave them an opportunity to express themselves and apply the concepts. Mid-term informal evaluation revealed that students were gaining confidence in their ability to use English as a tool for analysis, narration and reflective conversation. An attitudinal change towards different cultures as well as an increasing consciousness of their own cultural values and behaviour was noted through discussion and comments. Improvement varied but on average those tested showed improvement.

2.3.3 Final evaluation

Students selected a theme that was pertinent to their course of study. The Communication students selected from the following list: (1) people and food; (2) climate change; (3) European leaders; (4) East-West cultural differences. The Social Work students chose an area of social work that they were interested in: (1) medical social work; (2) child and family; (3) mental health; (4) immigration; (5) geriatrics; (6) substance abuse; (7) correctional institutions.

Both groups used Web Page Genre Schema for Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis (Baldry, 2006) as the starting point. They selected two texts around a central theme, one from a video or a website photo and one from a webpage. From this they were able to use and apply multimodal linguistic analysis to the chosen texts. After a brief multimodal analysis they moved on to cross-cultural analysis, using a format based on the cultural orientations mentioned above.

The students produced a research-based PowerPoint presentation and delivered it in English. They completed the oral and written English exit exams to measure progress and level change. They also completed an exit exam on intercultural competence, based on a different set of questions with the same target.

3 Results
Final results showed an improvement of (.5) to almost one complete ECFR level in 40 hours of frontal instruction and individual guided study. The intercultural competence level was initially found to be in the area of ethnocentrism but ended in the area of ethno-relativism, mostly in the ‘acceptance’ zone. (Bennett 2003). Apart from significant cognitive and linguistic growth, the students demonstrated a new eagerness to learn about new cultures. They also demonstrated the ability to view their own cultural values in a more relativistic way and seemed more tolerant of cultural differences.

4 Conclusion

The strategy of combining CLIL-type instruction, multimodal analysis and cross cultural training seems to be effective when the goal is to raise the ECF level and develop intercultural awareness. Various students commented that they felt that what they had learned about cultures and communicating across cultures would be very important in their future professions and private lives. The final exam revealed that all of them increased on the intercultural competence scale as well as ECF level. In order to better document the effectiveness of this method the assessment of ECF level should be more thoroughly documented in the areas of reading and writing. Other evaluations of intercultural competency could be used and/or developed. Due to the limited amount of time allowed for the course, the priority was set at improving oral communication during class time. Completed assignments were targeted at improving reading and writing skills but that was not the primary focus of the course. Future development would be useful in the area of self-assessment as it may save time and be just as effective. More research and development of assessment is recommended but the preliminary results were positive.

Appendix

PROTOTYPE TRAINING MODEL

The prototype training model consists of 3 essential modules plus one which may be omitted depending on time, training group and identified needs. It is the result of many different sources of management training from the international management field (Kohls and Knight 1994.)

It is important to point out that all cross-cultural communication training starts from the point of the individual: the individual must understand and accept the fact that he/she has a culture. Other individuals have a culture. Cultures create values. Values create behavior. Behavior can create good or bad relationships.

Module 1: Developing Cultural Awareness: The objective is to increase general cultural awareness of both culture as a concept and culture as the source of our own behavior. The immediate benefits are that we become aware of our own culture and how it influences our behavior. This module is the beginning step for cross-cultural communication training but often it is the only module that ever gets done. Organizations that sponsor training for their employees tend to focus on this module and then consider it finished. But it is only the first step.

Module 2: Developing Cultural Sensitivity: “culture and behavior are relative” (Moran 2007). This module aims at extending the knowledge and awareness acquired in Module 2 to a shift in attitudes and behavior. The individual begins to understand his/her own cultural values and behavior and is able to form relationships with individuals whose cultural values and behavior are different. This module is planned to develop cultural sensitivity. It includes simulations, experiential activities. It aims at enabling the students to project themselves into the lives of others. Some activities include nonverbal communication and its interpretations. Experiential exercises involve participants in simulations. The most common is a type of game involving interaction according to a specified set of rules, usually two cultures with two different types of behaviors and values. The interaction is supposed to emotionally drive home the point about cultural differences and how it feels to be in a different culture. Combined with other exercises and an experienced trainer, it is thought to be effective.
Module 3: Cultural Specifics  This module is the least difficult. It is similar to a travel guide activity and gives lists of do’s and don’ts. It is least effective used as a travelogue and most useful used as an application to the particular intercultural situation of the participants.

Module 4: Cross-Cultural Communication Skill Building. This module is the most difficult because it is the application of the previous modules plus a certain commitment on the part of the trainees to take a risk. It includes activities that assist the participants in identifying their listening styles, communication styles and negotiation styles. They learn about themselves and the styles of others. But the challenge is to extend these to understanding how the styles of others’ can be recognized and dealt with. A structure is provided, practiced and perfected. Then various simulations are implemented to practice application. The trainer needs to be competent at running experiential activities and simulations.

EXPLANATION OF THE CCWA MODEL

Action, Time, Environment, Collectivism, Individualism

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck were anthropologists who first proposed the idea of ‘value orientations’ within cultures to find solutions to the basic problems of life. They called these solutions “value orientations” (Kluckhohn, Strodtbeck, 1961:4) and suggested that understanding these orientations gives insight into a particular culture. The orientations themselves identify and define a particular culture. They were the first to define a culture as action oriented or being oriented; An action-oriented (doing) culture values activity, task completion, and action whereas a being culture puts more emphasis on relationships, connections and reflection (Kluckhohn, Strodtbeck, 1961:10-11). They also discussed the question of the human situation in terms of locus of control: control, harmony, or no control over natural events. (Kluckhohn, Strodtbeck, 1961:12).

Although the value orientation of relationships was initially identified by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) their idea of a culture as being more individualistic or more collectivist was carried further by Edward T. Hall (1976) and Geert Hofstede (1984, 1991). Hofstede identified the cultural characteristic of individualism in terms of a loosely knit social framework in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only (Hofstede, 1984). Collectivism, on the opposite end, is defined as a tight social framework in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups and expect their in-group to look after them, and in exchange owe absolute loyalty to it (Hofstede, 1984).

High and Low Context Communication, Space, Monochronic and Polychronic Time

Edward T. Hall basically founded the field of Cross-Cultural Communication with his famous work The Silent Language (1959). He defined the field of proxemics, the study of the use of space and nonverbal communication. His landmark book The Hidden Dimension (1966) identified the dimensions of space around people and how space is defined by different cultures. He also introduced the concepts of polychronic and monochronic time, which explain how different cultures use time in his book, The Silent Language (1959).

Space: Hall stated that the use of space is based on relationship (Hall, 1966, 128). He also noted that cultures define space differently. He developed the science of proxemics, which is the study of the use of space (Hall, 1966:128).

Context of Culture: Perhaps one of the most important contributions of Hall is his definition of high context and low context communication. In his book Beyond Culture, (1976) Hall identifies two very important aspects of a culture. A high context culture is one that emphasizes the context of a situation rather than the explicit word. High context cultures are highly socialized and members understand implicit meanings. The context of the situation communicates meaning and a member of a high context culture is aware of meanings other than those found just in words. Low context cultures tend to rely on the spoken or written word, and search for explicit meaning in words.
They need more explanation and very little is taken for granted. ‘No’ means ‘no’ and ‘yes’ means ‘yes’. High context cultures focus more on nonverbal communication, there is ‘reading between the lines’ and relationships are more important than tasks. Time is flexible and process is more important than product. Low context cultures often have weak bonds between people, and tasks are more important than relationships. Time is very organized and product is more important than process. High context cultures have a stronger sense of ‘in-group’ and favour family a community affiliation. They tend to have a more formal style of communication with the ‘out-group’ and are usually quite indirect. Often they prefer to use third parties to communicate ‘directly’. Low context cultures often tend to be informal even with strangers and have no problem with direct communication (Hall, 1976:83-128, Moran et al., 2007: 49-50). According to Hall, Japan has the highest context culture whereas the German speaking countries are the lowest context cultures.

**Time** Hall proposed the concept of *monochronic* and *polychronic* time which denote a very serious difference in the use of time between cultures. Hall states that “ *monochronic* is characteristic of low-involvement people, who compartmentalize time; they schedule one thing at a time and become disoriented if they have to deal with too many things at once (whereas) *polychronic* people, possibly because they are so much involved with each other, tend to keep several operations going on at once, like jugglers” (Hall,1966:173). Moran ( Moran et al. 2007) states that “ the fact a culture is polychronic or monochronic is a very important aspect in defining cultures”.

**Collectivism, individualism, power distance, masculinity, femininity**

Geert Hofstede (1984, 1991) is a European research consultant who developed ‘dimensions’ of national character based on a 20+ year survey of employees from 40 countries in global corporations worldwide. These dimensions are based on a continuum from very low to very high.

**Collectivism vs. Individualism:** As mentioned earlier, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck were the first to apply these concepts to a culture. Hofstede applied and further developed these concepts in his research. He focused on the degree to which a culture values individual achievement or collective achievement and relationships. A society that is highly individualistic values personal success; individuals find their value in their personal achievements; relationships are basically weak and the nuclear family is predominant. A collectivist society favours extended family and relationship networks. Responsibility is collective rather than individual. Individuals find their value as part of a group. The group takes predominance.

**Power distance: Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical:** If we visualize the concept of power as being a continuum between equality at one end and hierarchy at the other, we can understand what Hofstede is saying. A culture with a hierarchical focus creates organizations with a vertical structure; a sense of formality and “knowing one’s place” is predominant. Hofstede (1984) has defined power distance as a continuum that has a strong influence on organizational leadership. Power begins at the top and goes down. On the other hand, an egalitarian culture is based on consensus, a horizontal structure in which people tend to be less formal, even to the extent of calling the boss by his/her first name. Cultures are situated in various positions along this continuum, with varying degrees of hierarchy or egalitarianism.

**Masculinity/Femininity:** Masculinity is defined as “the extent to which the dominant values in society are assertiveness, money, and material things, not caring for others, quality of life, and people” (Hofstede, 1984). Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct. A feminine society is one where social gender roles overlap. Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede, 2001).

**Data Orientation**

**Data Orientation-Information gathering process:** The process of gathering information plays an important part in analyzing cultures, especially in the textual sense. Richard Lewis has proposed another way to look at cultures; ‘data-oriented,’ ‘dialogue oriented’ or ‘listening’ in their process of gathering information (Lewis, 1999: 45-46).
He says that Northern Europeans prefer to “gather solid information and move steadily forward….the communications and information revolution is a dream for data-oriented cultures…” because they can quickly access the information that ‘dialogue-oriented cultures already know’ (Lewis, 1999: 46). He identifies ‘dialogue-oriented’ cultures as including Indian, Arabic, Italian and other Latin cultures. Note that these are the same cultures that Hall identified as ‘high context’. On the other hand, ‘listening cultures’ combine printed and database information with a “natural tendency to listen well and enter into sympathetic dialogue” (Lewis, 1999:47).

Thinking pattern: Linear vs. systemic or holistic: Currently there is a significant amount of research being done on cognitive patterns, thinking styles and different types of intelligence. It can be said that every culture tends to favour a particular thinking pattern or style but it is necessary to be aware of the fact that diverse individuals exist within cultures who may exhibit other thinking patterns. But it can be said that cultures tend to prefer particular patterns. Low context cultures tend to prefer a linear pattern whereas high context cultures tend to prefer a systemic pattern. Stewart and Bennett (1991) carried out extensive research on thinking patterns within cultures. They stated that culture influences patterns of thought. Native English speakers prefer a more linear and direct approach to problem solving and thus communication. Stewart and Bennett identified some patterns: factual/inductive, axiomatic/deductive and initiative/affective. (Stewart and Bennett, 1991). Tuleja and Rourke (2009, p. 69) extended this explanation. They identified different approaches for thinking and problem solving- for example they found that the U.S. dominant cultural thinking and problem solving approach is highly linear whereas native speakers of Russian, Romance Languages and Asian languages prefer a circular approach. They also found that native speakers of French, Spanish and Italian tend to use a more ‘circuitous approach’ (Tuleja and Rourke, 2009, p. 69).

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