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# Towards a Model of Cultural Inclusion in Second/Foreign Language Education

by

Dan Huai Lu



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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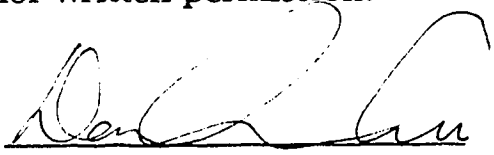

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Date June 20/95

## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father who died before I embarked on the academic career. He will be remembered as a man who worked hard all his life, was devoted to his family, and gave his children the liberty to pursue their own paths in life.

## ABSTRACT

This study is based on a research project conducted with the participation of 60 East Asian people who have experienced learning and using English as a second/foreign language. The major research themes were to investigate (1) how cultural knowledge is treated in second/foreign language education in East Asia, (2) the extent to which cultural knowledge influences learning and use of a second/foreign language, and (3) the development of a potentially effective approach to integrating cultural education into second/foreign language education. The research examines these issues from the perspective of an eastern teacher of English as a foreign language. By bringing East Asian learners' voices to the academic research, the author offers a new look into ESL/EFL education in East Asia. The project is aimed at contributing to a new model of second/foreign language education, providing insights into the essence of the current problems, and finding applicable solutions. The research is qualitative in nature and uses questionnaires, interviews and the examination of documentary materials to gather relevant data.

The major findings are (1) cultural knowledge is generally lacking in ESL/EFL programs in East Asia; (2) receptive language skills are emphasized more than productive skills resulting in grammatical knowledge being the focus of teaching/learning and as a result, learners often encounter cultural difficulties in understanding when in contact with native English speakers; (3) in a multicultural society where a target language is the main one, L2 learners subconsciously want to reserve their own ethnic and cultural identities.

Based on these findings a new model of second/foreign language education was proposed. While maintaining the traditional linguistic components — grammar, lexicon and phonology, the new model incorporates the teaching of cultural knowledge into second/foreign language programs. The cultural knowledge consists of cultural assumptions and customs, structures and styles of information and ways of speaking, all of which teach second/foreign learners how to understand and use the target language from the perspectives of its native speakers. Some concrete teaching methods are introduced to attain this goal.

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The completion of this research project and the thesis would not have been possible without the assistance and cooperation of a large number of people. Grateful acknowledgment is made to these people from the bottom of my heart. To begin with, I wish to express my appreciation to the committee for their advice and support.

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## INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Many native English speakers who have taught English as a foreign language in China return to their homeland perplexed about cultural differences. They come to see many events of daily life in very different terms. Instead of saying "Thank you"/"Thanks a lot" and so forth in response to a compliment or praise, Chinese are more likely to deny the praise. On the other hand, a Chinese person finds it hard to understand why English-speaking people show no modesty when they are faced with praise and compliments. The oriental custom expects people who are being praised to say something self-depreciating.

When a Canadian teacher talked with me about her two years of teaching in China, her most uneasy feeling and most unforgettable impression was the constant staring from some people around her. She took the stares or long-time glances as annoying manners which implied "rudeness" and "lack of education." In trying to explain her discomfort to students, she also found it difficult to provide a straightforward and comprehensive notion of the concept of "privacy" to which she was accustomed.

Some questions arise from these anecdotes: are English-speaking people immodest, as it seemed to some of the Chinese? Are the attitudes of Chinese toward praise insincere, as it seemed to the native English speaker? Do people's stares necessarily express contempt or scorn? In all cases the answer is NO. It is not probably well known to Western people that in Eastern countries like China, the practice of staring at strangers may be nothing more than curiosity, maybe even appreciation — as of beauty. Similarly, to Asians it may not be common knowledge that to English-speaking people, praise is to be accepted, generally with a remark like "Thank you." It is assumed that the compliment is sincere and that the praise is for some worthy achievement or thing. Therefore, there should be no show of false humility or pretended modesty. To Chinese, however, the customary reply to a compliment would be to claim that one is not worthy of the praise, that what one has done is far from enough, or that success is more a matter of good luck or some other circumstance. Direct acceptance of a compliment without self-depreciation would imply conceit or lack of manners.

So in the two cases previously noted, misunderstandings stem from differences in cultural customs and habits. When either the Chinese or native English speaker interprets what others say according to their own cultural norms, they fall within the boundary of ethnocentrism, i.e. "a tendency to view people unconsciously by using one's own customs

as the standard for all judgments" (Porter, 1972, p. 6). As a result, those customs of the out-group which are the same as our own are considered "good", while the more dissimilar they are, the more they are likely to be evaluated as "bad."

Events like these are fairly common when people of different languages and cultures communicate with each other. Because of cultural differences, misunderstandings may arise, even though the language used in communication may be grammatically faultless. The same words or expressions may not mean the same thing to different people. Because of cultural differences, a serious question may result in amusement or laughter and a harmless statement may cause displeasure or anger. Because of cultural differences, jokes by a person from another culture may be received with blank faces and stony silence. Yet the same stories in the speaker's own country could leave audiences holding their sides with laughter. Many of these misunderstandings are rooted in what second/foreign language learners experience and do not experience in their second/foreign language courses.

Since the term "second/foreign language" will appear frequently throughout the writing, an abbreviated sign "s/f" will be employed to stand for "second/foreign" hereafter for the convenience of the reader and writer.

Problems have existed in East Asian s/f language education for a long time: cultural knowledge is overlooked (Valdes, 1986); grammar is over-emphasized (Schnell, 1991); productive skills are inadequate (Richards, 1990); understanding of the target language is learned and practiced from a linguistic perspective only (Brown, 1980); the learners' linguistic competence to express in the target language is low and limited (Hendrickson, 1988); and misunderstanding and miscommunication are likely to occur among ESL/EFL learners and native English speakers (Richards and Schmidt, 1983). Further discussion of these issues will be made in subsequent chapters.

Taking some of these issues into account, this dissertation explores incidents of cultural miscommunications as perceived by Asians studying or working in English in North America, describes their experiences learning the English language and culture before arriving in Canada, and based on these incidents and language learning descriptions, proposes alternatives to ESL/EFL instruction in East Asia.

The learning difficulties and communicative problems were discussed from the perspectives of East Asian ESL/EFL learners and a teacher of English as a foreign language. The author analyzed the issues on the basis of the participants' responses to a questionnaire and interviews. Some cultural characteristics were approached in light of the

author's intuitive feelings as a native Easterner. The intended readers of this research project will be people in the East Asian ESL/EFL field, particularly those familiar with Chinese cultures. It is also hoped that the work will be interesting to those who teach ESL to learners from East Asian areas and provide insights into some Eastern cultural characteristics for those who are not aware of these.

At this point it is necessary to define the meaning of key background terms so that readers will be aware of the aspects of culture and s/f language education this work will deal with.

**What is Culture?**

Although the concept of culture was first defined in print in 1871 by E. B. Tylor, after all these years it still lacks rigorous specificity. A precise, inclusive definition of culture has eluded humankind for centuries. There are many abstract definitions of culture, most of which have been suggested by anthropologists.

Tylor's (1871) initial definition of culture included such component elements as knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and many other capabilities and habits acquired by people as members of society.

Kluckhohn and Kelly (1945) defined culture as "all those historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men" (p. 554).

The anthropologist Kroeber (1952) described four qualities of culture:

(1) it is transmitted and continued not by the genetic mechanism of heredity, but by inter conditioning of zygotes;

(2) whatever its origins, culture quickly tends to become suprapersonal and anonymous;

(3) it falls into patterns, or regulations of form, style and significance;

(4) it embodies values that may be formulated (overtly, as mores) or felt (covertly, as folkways) by the members of society.

Kroeber further stated that culture exists only when there is a society of individuals to share it. Conversely, every human society is accompanied by a culture.

Brooks (1968) identified five aspects of culture: (1) biological growth; (2) personal refinement; (3) literature and the fine arts; (4) patterns of living; and (5) the sum total of a way of life.

A document prepared by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in 1977 noted that culture is essentially a dynamic value system of learned attitudes, with assumptions, conventions, beliefs, and rules that permit members of a group to relate to each other and to the world.

These five definitions of culture are but a tiny drop in the ocean, compared with the total number of definitions which are made of the term in the research literature. It is said (Cheng, 1987) that there are people who examined more than three hundred definitions of culture and still failed to find a satisfactory one. This saying is perhaps not exaggerated. As a matter of fact, it is indeed very difficult to define culture in a narrow sense, because culture itself is such a broad concept. It encompasses nearly all aspects of human life and patterns for living. It's no wonder that Taylor (1986) defined culture as "the set of perceptions, technologies, survival systems used by members of a specified group to ensure the acquisition and perpetuation of what they consider to be high quality of life" (p. 2).

The definition most often cited in cross-cultural research is that of Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952). After reviewing over 150 definitions, Kroeber and Kluckhohn concluded that

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached value; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (p. 180)

The sociologist I. Robertson (1981) says that culture consists of all the shared products of human society. The implication of his definition is that culture does not merely include such material things as cities, organizations, styles of architecture, but also contains non-material things like customs, family patterns, marriage rites, languages, conventional usage of language accepted through common practice, and so on. To put it simply, culture is the entire way of life of a society, the ways of a people. It is a structured system of patterned behavior, some of which manifests itself in language, all of which impacts on communication.

The above are some definitions in a general sense. It is obvious that these statements extensively cover human activities and events. Language is not explicitly mentioned, but only vaguely referred to. For instance, when Tylor talked about "the capabilities and habits acquired by people as members of society" we may associate language with his broad definition; for, some theorists such as structural linguists regard language as a set of habits while others such as transformational-generative linguists take language as an innate human ability which is to be developed in appropriate linguistic environments. In Robertson's term, language is precisely a shared product of human society. Other definitions, although not specific with reference to language, include language. If we use Kroeber and Kluckhohn's definition, we may as well say language is acquired and transmitted by symbols. Included in Brook's statement is literature, which is expressed through language. According to UNESCO's definition of culture we may define language as "conventions and rules that permit members of a group to relate to each other and to the world;" in this way language as a part of culture is out of question.

Although we can apply these seemingly broad definitions to language to make it a component of culture, it can be said that language is not dealt with so explicitly from the perspective of culture. In most cases readers may not see the relationship between language and culture so clearly at first sight. However, when contrasting language with the details of the definitions of culture, one may perceive the inclusion of language in the scope of culture.

In s/f language education, culture is not meant in the sense of sophisticated tastes in architecture, music, art. Instead the term culture, as used in this research, refers to the total pattern of beliefs, customs, norms and habits that characterize and are related to the linguistic performance of a human community. While the author is aware that other culture-related factors influence s/f language learning they shall not be further discussed. Although topics such as the extent to which language and thought influence or determine each other and the relationship between language use, social class and context will not be discussed in this dissertation, a research review is included in Appendices A and B so the reader may have some idea of the origin and typical figures of these topics and may further pursue research with the help of the elementary knowledge provided in these appendices. The cultural elements related to language use are mostly non-material. Invisible externally, they exist in certain ways in people's minds. When cultural knowledge is mentioned in this thesis, it refers to the aspects of the target culture which play a role in how native speakers organize, interpret and deliver linguistic messages, speech behaviors such as gestures, body movements and communication-oriented culture-specific contextual messages.

Precisely in this sense language can be seen as a part of culture, for any language has internal structures and systems which guide its users to organize and interpret information according to tacit or implicit things shared by all members of a speech community. While these tacit factors are familiar to all people speaking the same language, they are confusing to learners of that language. It must be realized that although these cultural elements are learnable, not all of them are teachable. The most effective approach to learning the cultural elements of a language is direct and immersed contact with native speakers in real acts of communication.

## Culture in the Second/Foreign Language Context

Much academic research and discussion have been made in the last few decades on how s/f language learners react to new linguistic and cultural environments, what s/f language learners are most concerned about, and how cultural knowledge influences s/f language learning, i.e. learners' success in acquiring the target language, motives, needs, attitudes and emotional states. Observations and experiments were conducted by researchers in all language related fields to probe the role through which cultural knowledge influences s/f language learners' progress and behavior. In this section some recently published literature will be presented.

Gougeon (1993) described how ESL minority students in an urban center felt in the new linguistic and cultural environments. He reported that ESL students were alienated, displaced, and in denial of other cultures. They were distrustful of Western ways, resistant to adopting new values and stuck to the patterns of behavior of their home culture. This was particularly true at the initial stages of their stay in a new culture.

Mccargar (1993) developed a survey and administered it to 41 ESL teachers and 161 ESL students from 7 countries representing more than 10 cultures. His results indicated that, except for Japanese students, students expected a more teacher-oriented environment. The diversity of expectations concerning errors and error correction showed that s/f language students were more concerned about linguistic errors in the context of using the target language in the host countries. So, errors and correction were a sensitive factor in ESL classes. Usually students wanted more error correction than the teachers wanted to give. The implication of these findings is that s/f language learners' attention usually goes to linguistic skills when they learn the target language in the target culture. What they want most is the ability to use the linguistic elements without errors. Under the influence of the principles of curriculum and the current teaching methodology, the role of

cultural knowledge in understanding the implicit meanings of utterances is often overlooked.

Johnson and Rosano (1993) examined the relationships among measures of language proficiency, cognitive style and metaphor comprehension among native English speakers and ESL students. Native English speakers scored better than ESL students on academic measures of English proficiency. Although there were no big group differences on the level of cognitive sophistication, metaphor comprehension was positively related to a measure of English communicative proficiency. In other words, low proficiency disables ESL students to effectively get access to English metaphors, the comprehension of which requires the knowledge about the cultures of English-speaking nations.

In view of the fact that people have difficulty in cross-cultural communication, Albert (1986) outlined the factors which hamper the development of effective cross-cultural understanding and communication. Among the factors were cultural differences in behavior, erroneous assumptions about other cultures, and the importance of social support. His research showed that before any formal cross-cultural orientation, people behaved in ways which were governed by their own cultural conventions. They felt uncomfortable or unacceptable about the behavior patterns of people of other cultures. This kind of discomfort led to unfavorable impressions of other cultures. Their perception and assumption of the communicative intents of people of other cultures were based on erroneous impressions. To eliminate negative impressions of other cultures, it is essential to make use of social support. Cross-cultural awareness must be raised by providing notions of the target culture before wrong impressions develop.

Toffoli and Allan (1992) have found that when people are in a new cultural context learning a new language, they have a kind of confusion because of their internally contrasted life experiences in the country of origin and that in the new country. In such a psychological state, s/f language learners have the desire to keep memories of the past and heritage alive. It takes them time to get accustomed to what is seen and felt in the new environments. At the first stage, they may even be resistant to the new culture. Therefore, it is unwise to expect or advise s/f language learners to give up using their first language in order to intensify the practice of the new language.

Schnell (1991) investigated the situations of English language instruction in China and found out that 65 % of the students (the total number of the participants was 20) did not understand the main ideas or messages a native English speaker expressed, though they could have a good understanding of English vocabulary and grammar. He pointed out that this was the result of placing teaching/learning emphasis on vocabulary development but

neglecting interpersonal communication. Students should be taught not only the English language but also the cultures of the English-speaking world.

In terms of the age effect on s/f language and culture learning, Johnson and Newport's investigation (1989) tested the hypothesis that language acquisition must occur before puberty in order for language to develop. The study compared the English proficiency of 46 native Korean or Chinese speakers who had arrived in North America at ages of 3 to 39 and who had lived in North America between 3 and 36 years at testing. The participants were tested on structures of English grammar using a grammatical judgment task. The analyses demonstrated a strong advantage for earlier arrivals over the later arrivals. The test performance was linearly related to age of arrival up to puberty; after puberty, performance was highly variable and unrelated to age of arrival. The age effect also appeared on every grammatical structure tested. The results supported the theory on critical learning ages and proved that a critical period for language acquisition extends its effects to second language acquisition. The earlier the learning of a new language takes place, the better performance the learners will make in language learning and use, which in turn results in the early adaptation to the second culture.

With reference to the influence of cultural factors on the performance in the second language, Hannon and McNally (1986) conducted an investigation among 72 primary school children. Their findings suggested that poorer reading performance by ESL people was due to lack of understanding of the test items rather than poor reading ability. To get a grasp of the gist of reading materials, not only was the basic linguistic skill of reading needed, but also of the relevant cultural factors which contribute to correct understanding. Linguistic skills were important, but could not lead the s/f language learners to the right route along which understanding of linguistic input develops. In this respect, knowledge of the culture to which the target language is related helped much.

The knowledge of culture which greatly impacts communication is often tacitly or implicitly known by native speakers. For Example, after Chaudron (1988) investigated teacher-learner interaction in adult second language lecture settings, he suggested that learner comprehension would be enhanced if teachers modified speach rate, turn taking, prosody, stress, vocabulary, syntax and length of utterance. These tacit factors affecting communication all vary according to cultural norms. Similarily, Brown and Levison (1987) noted that while the subconscious desire of people to keep the interaction going is universal, the politness strategies required to do so vary from culture to culture.

> In general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face. That is, normally everyone's face depends on everyone

> else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' faces, it is in every participant's best interest to maintain each other's face. (p. 61)

The core of their theory consists of the concepts of negative and positive face. When a person is engaged in social contexts, he/she is concerned to preserve and present a public image. The positive aspect of a person's face is his/her concern and is to be thought of as a normal, contributing member of his/her social world. In this way his/her linguistic acts may be regarded as supporting the context in which he/she stays. On the other hand, a person wants to preserve some sphere of his/her own individuality, his/her own territory within which he/she has the right of independence of movement and decision. Within his/her private sphere he/she wants the right not to be imposed upon. This aspect of face is negative because it asserts the right to be independent of the social world. Brown and Levinson's view of social interaction consists in each speaker playing off his/her own positive and negative face wants against those of other participants in communication. This involves awareness and response to many tacit cultural factors.

These research studies show that the training of linguistic skills alone could not result in learner's ability to use the target language well in real tasks of language communication.

In the final analysis, the issues of culture in relation to language are an extension of the academic discussion of communicative competence. Since its introduction by Hymes in the mid-1960s, the term "communicative competence" has enjoyed increasing popularity among teachers, researchers and others interested in language. Although there are many definitions and interpretations of the term, it has been historically developed from Hymes. Hymes' concept complements Chomsky's distinction between linguistic competence and performance. For Chomsky competence exclusively refers to knowledge of the language system, i.e., grammatical knowledge.

Hymes (1972) put forth that competence should include "rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless." (p. 278) In his words, there are several sectors of communicative competence, of which grammar is one. The other four are possibility, feasibility, appropriateness, and occurences. First, competence is possibility: "whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible." (p. 284) It is concerned with whether a language structure is accepted as grammatical (possible) or rejected as ungrammatical (impossible). The second factor of competence is feasibility: "whether (and to what degree) something is feasible." (p. 285) For example, "the teacher the boy the man the woman married scolded irritated pulled a long face" is grammatically possible, but is

hardly feasible. Because of the general public's inability to process such sentences quickly, such sentences are rarely used to express the information it contains. The third element is appropriateness to context: "whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate." (p. 285) A sentence can be grammatically possible, pragmatically feasible, but contextually inappropriate. The fourth part of Hymes' competence deals with occurrences: "whether (and to what degree) something is done." (p. 286) In his own words, "something may be possible, feasible, and appropriate and not occur."(p. 286) This area is commonly understood as accepted usage. It is obvious that included in Hymes' concept of communicative competence is both tacit knowledge and ability for use. Among the four parts, the last three are involved with cultural knowledge. Since communicative competence is the goal of language teaching, introducing cultural teaching into s/f language education is just for cultivating learners' ability to use the target language feasibly, appropriately and idiomatically.

To serve the purposes of teaching a language communicatively, some linguists proposed a new approach for s/f language teaching: the functional-notional approach. Originated in West Europe in the 1970s, the core notion of the approach is that language teaching should focus on the real functions of language to develop learners' communicative competence. As Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) describe, "A functional-notional approach to language learning places major emphasis on the communicative purpose(s) of a speech act. It focuses on what people want to do or what they want to accomplish through speech." (p. 13) They hold that the function of language in society is to express things, ideas and thoughts through speech acts. In other words, it is not the form but the content of linguistic expression that should be the focus of language teaching and learning. On their list of language functions there are inquiry, request, invitation, introduction, agreement, decline, thanks, apology, fear, etc. They further explain, " the above are simple examples of the functions of language which all human beings wish to express at one time or other." (p. 13) "It is this sensitivity to individual needs which is the major characteristic of the functional-notional approach to language teaching. Many methodologies seem to ignore the fact that the ability to use real, appropriate language to communicate and interact with others is — and should be — the primary goal of most foreign language learning." (pp. 9-10) From these statements we may see that the functional-notional approach takes Hymes' concept of communicative competence as its theoretical grounds. Therefore, the functional-notional approach pays attention to using the target language appropriately in various cultural contexts, though it does not explicitly mention culture.

It is a positive sign that along with the appearance of the notion of communicative competence, the role of cultural knowledge in s/f language education and cross-cultural communication has attracted more and more attention, emphasis and interest. This general interest in language from the perspective of communication is a promising departure from the narrower and still popular focus on language as grammar and linguistic skills. The new dimension is essential both for a theoretical understanding of the importance of culture education in s/f language education and as a basis for practical application to language pedagogy. Research in this regard is useful in determining what must be included at the level of syllabus (the choice of linguistic content in s/f language teaching) and in developing procedures and techniques which are appropriate teaching strategies.

**Second Language vs. Foreign Language**

In a vast accumulation of research literature the terms "second language" and "foreign language" both appear frequently. Some theorists make a distinction between the two by saying that in the second language context, learners have many opportunities to use the language. Their exposure to the target language is greater because the language is spoken by people outside the classroom and is used by learners in many social contexts and for various purposes. In some cases it is even socially required. For example, English is used as a second language in the Philippines (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982).

In the foreign language context, the target language is generally limited to classroom study and use. Outside of the classroom the learners very rarely have contact with the language, not to speak of using the language for meeting real communication needs. Owing to the restricted opportunities of practicing the target language, the emphasis on teaching and learning in such contexts is likely to go on to receptive skills such as reading and listening. Productive skills like speaking and writing do not receive equal or adequate priority. One typical case as such is English in China and Japan.

In addition to distinguishing second language learning and acquisition in terms of social exposure to the language, these terms have also been differentiated in terms of cognitive maturity (Piaget, 1980). In today's literature, "acquisition" is used to mean learning of a native language (mother tongue) whereas "learning" is a specialized word for second or foreign language learning which takes place after one has learned a first language no matter what level of proficiency in the mother tongue has been achieved. This theoretical distinction may only be useful when there is an emphasized intention to make first language learning different from s/f language learning. It is confirmed by research that language

learning is involved with cognition no matter in what context it takes place. In view of this point, first and s/f language learning have something in common. Wherever one learns a new language, the learners' command of it advances with their progressive awareness of the language structure and other related elements (Chamot and O'Malley, 1986). In this way, s/f language "learning" bears some resemblance to the "acquisition" of one's first language in that both depend on or both are related to the extent of maturity of cognition. Since maturity of cognition cannot be separated from one's participation in social activities, the more extensively and deeply one is involved in social practice, the more rapidly one's cognition will grow. Social use of language, be it a first, second or third language, will contribute to a learner's cognitive development and dialectically, in terms of one's linguistic development. Successful social use of language also demands the application of cultural knowledge.

**Psychological Factors**

In addition to time, a learner of a new language has personal and social needs and desires in order to become a sufficiently competent performer in the target language. Only under proper and sustained social pressure or with special needs and desires, can a learner be urged to absorb as much new linguistic and cultural input as he/she can (Cassirer, 1962). Otherwise, either the new language and culture are ignored or the satisfaction of learning rests in meeting personal reading or listening needs. This explains why many East Asian immigrants to the English-speaking world remain limited in English proficiency for their lifetime and possibly even illiterate; in confining themselves to their native language communities, which provide them with their daily needs and desires, they have no actual needs or desires to use the new language and culture for communication with the mainstream society.

With reference to s/f language learners' psychological and emotional attitudes towards the target culture in the course of learning a s/f language, Schumann (1978) shows that a target language and culture can be approached in different ways depending on how we view our own culture in relation to the other culture. He distinguishes three typical strategies: assimilation, preservation, and adaptation. In the case of assimilation, s/f language learners give up their own life-style and values and adopt those of the target group. Preservation involves maintenance of the native life-style and values and rejection of the target language group. Adaptation is an attempt to preserve one's own life-style, while also adopting and incorporating elements of the target culture.

Which situation is the most common among East Asian s/f language learners is one aspect under investigation in this research project.

**Language Status**

Along with the advance of communication and transportation technology, the world we live in is becoming smaller. When planning travel, people are more concerned about travel time and time change than about distance. Distance begins to lose its weight in people's mind because a long distance can be covered within a short period of time on the condition that suitable transportation means are available. This technological and psychological change incurs a change of situation for s/f language education. People in various parts of the world are more tightly linked to each other now than in any single moment before. The close connection in business, cultural exchange, education, tourism and many other fields brings the language communication to the fore. In any place s/f language education can be seen and at any time the demand for use of an s/f language may arise. In Hong Kong, for example, English is designated as one of the official languages even though most people are low in the proficiency of the language. This status reveals its perceived social importance. Similarly, in China, English rose to the status of a foreign language popularly taught in schools about 15 years ago. With the change in the government's foreign policy, more and more opportunities in work, study and life emerged for people with English proficiency.

In the last analysis, both second and foreign language proficiency are related to cultural knowledge of the target language. The difference between the two lies in the fact that because learners in a foreign language context have fewer opportunities to practice their target language, their productive skills do not get equal or adequate emphasis. Due to the insufficient practice of productive skills, learners' skill development is not balanced, but lopsided. They are able to analyze the structures of sentences by using grammatical knowledge and therefore understand the meaning from a purely linguistic perspective. The linguistic skills of learners in second language contexts are more balanced and they are sensitive to some implied cultural messages due to their contacts with both the target language and people of the target culture. Besides, in second language contexts it is easier for learners to recognize the significant role of cultural knowledge in language learning and use, whereas in foreign language contexts, people will more likely become skill-oriented at the expense of all other related elements.

Now that more common points are found to exist between second and foreign language education and the differences between the two are not a focus in this research, the author has no intention of making specific distinction between the two or leaving them interchangeable.

**Competence, Awareness and Motivation**

As the name implies, s/f language education involves learners' acquiring competence to use a new language. By the word "competence" people usually refer to the degree of the learners' capability of using the target language. In this sense, competence is exchangeable with proficiency (Hymes, 1972; Clark, 1972). However, there is a distinction between linguistic competence and communicative competence in this thesis. As is commonly understood, linguistic competence refers to the s/f language learners' skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; or as in Chomsky's definition, it is knowledge about the rules of grammar of a language. It is a scale to evaluate how well learners acquire a given language from a linguistic perspective. Communicative competence is understood to include the underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication, such as knowledge of vocabulary and skill in using the cultural conventions of the target language. It is important to stress that communicative competence covers both knowledge and skill in using this knowledge when interacting in actual communication. As Hymes' viewpoints revealed above, the knowledge of possibility cannot be isolated from the knowledge of feasibility, appropriateness and occurrence. According to Canale and Swain (1980), knowledge refers to what one knows consciously or unconsciously about the language and about other aspects of communicative language use; skill refers to how well one can perform this knowledge from a communicative perspective. In other words, one feature of communicative competence is that the individual is being cooperative in Grice's (1975) sense of cooperation.[1] Whatever the message content, it is expressed in culturally understood and recognized ways.

The concepts of communicative competence have remained a topic since the term "communicative competence" was coined by Hymes (1972). In general, communicative

[1] H. P. Grice's "general principles of cooperative behavior" refer to certain conversational "maxims" which enable the participants in a speech event to assign appropriate illocutionary value to utterances and therefore maintain a topic of conversation. The maxims are a) quantity: say only as much as is necessary for understanding the communication; b) quality: say only what is true; c) relevance: say only what is relevant; d) manner: be clear, brief and orderly, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity. In some research, Grice's maxims are defined as rules of communicative competence.

competence is that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts. Savignon (1983), who carried out seminal work on defining communicative competence, notes that communicative competence is relative, not absolute, and depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved. It is not so much an intrapersonal construct, but rather, a dynamic, interpersonal construct that can be examined by means of the overt performance of two or more individuals in the process of negotiating meaning.

Current s/f language education in East Asia needs to shift part of the emphasis to the cultivation of the learners' communicative competence. Such competence will make the learners' linguistic skills come into full use to perceive and interpret communicative messages as intended by the native speakers (Cummins, 1981; Canale, 1983). It cannot be equated with grammatical knowledge and language skills, though they provide the basis for message interpretation. The development of communicative competence depends on the learners' maturity of cognition, experience in the new cultural context, contact with the target language and native speakers, as well as linguistic proficiency.

Application of cultural knowledge is at the core of communicative competence. It is the knowledge about cultural traits which highlight the difference between the learners' home culture and the target culture, the knowledge about how people of the target culture use the target language. This knowledge, when applied whether intuitively or out of conscious awareness, enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively. It helps the s/f language learners to penetrate the surface structure of utterances to get the genuine meanings. The contents of the knowledge, as it is drawn from the data obtained in this study, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

It is not easy for s/f language learners to achieve success in acquiring useful communicative competence and cultural awareness. Some research suggests that to some degree, progress in this regard is related to the learners' motivation in s/f language education. As it was first proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1959), motivation is thought of as the incentive, the need, or the desire that the learners feel to learn a new language. Generally speaking, two types of motivation have been observed to affect s/f language learning: integrative motivation, the desire to participate in the life of the community that speaks the language. It "reflects a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group" (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p. 132); instrumental motivation, the desire to use the language for practical reasons such as getting a job. It "reflects the practical value and advantages of learning a new language" (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p. 132). The present thesis will probe into the East Asian s/f language

learners' motivation and its effect on acquiring linguistic competence, communicative competence and cultural awareness.

**Productive vs. Receptive Skills**

When ESL/EFL learners are involved in cross-cultural communication, their receptive skills alone are not enough to make the communication successful because communication requires both decoding and encoding linguistic messages. Since communication is a two way street, there is a pressing demand for training of productive skills in s/f language education. However, it is typical of the traditional model of language education in East Asia that receptive skills are more emphasized than productive skills. There is an easy-to-understand reason to explain why receptive skills always precede productive skills. Just think of a child acquiring a language. During the beginning stage of learning, a child simply listens to sound and is not ready or able to produce it until much later. This silent listening is unavoidable. It paves the way for the subsequent development and greatly enhances the speed and quality of learning.

A number of studies are in support of this finding: Lenneberg (1967) studied a case of understanding language without ability to speak. A person had a normal and adequate understanding of spoken language and never spoke it because of a peripheral speech defect. Ervin-Tripp (1974) described English-speaking children enrolled in Swiss schools where the language media was French. The children were reluctant to speak out for a prolonged period. A similar phenomenon was found by Hakuta (1974), who reported that his subject was unable to produce anything although demonstrating comprehension of the target language.

Other factors such as a lack of peers who speak the target language natively in s/f language environments and incomprehensibility of the communication also imperceptibly aggravate the tendency of over-stressing the priority of receptive skills in the traditional s/f language model. In a foreign language learning situation, people pay attention to receptive skills because the need for the use of productive skills is usually minimal and limited, especially when the learners are out of classroom settings. Although it can serve the general purposes of the learners, this tendency covers an important aspect: receptive skills are related to cognition which is in turn influenced by culture.

It is true that learning a new language can be a one-way communication at the beginning stages. However, the silent period of developing receptive skills should not muffle the growth of productive skills, for s/f language education cannot meet the real need

of today's world for cross-cultural communication without consideration of training the learners' productive skills. In addition to that, cultural knowledge works positively to serve the s/f language learners' purpose of using the target language in communication.

The usefulness of productive skills — oral and writing proficiency — cannot be overstated. In developing cultural insights, literacy is likewise useful. Literacy is not only the basis of the receptive skills — reading and listening (while watching some visual materials), but also related to productive skills — writing and speaking (while looking at some written/printed materials. Particularly when people use literature as sources of cultural knowledge, literacy is significant both as productive and receptive skills. Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) mentioned this point when they said, "literature reflects all that is included in the term 'culture': people's customs, values, and beliefs; their character; and the historical/geographical background to their behavior. Also authentic use of language registers, dialects, and idiolects are ideally exemplified through works of literature and can provide excellent bases for class discussion." (p.131) Therefore, it is clear that productive and receptive skills cannot be absolutely separated in terms of acquiring cultural knowledge in s/f language programs.

## Process of Internalizing a Second/Foreign Language

In view of any s/f language acquisition that occurs after a first language has been internalized, the pattern of development does not actually follow the same pattern of development as when two or more languages are acquired simultaneously. Just as John-Steiner proposed in her 1985 article, successful acquisition of a s/f language occurs through the separation of the two languages at the production level (this refers to the system of sound and structure), while at the same time unifying verbal meaning and thought. This is a complex and diverse dual process which undergoes three stages of development.

The first stage fits Bain's (1991) characterization as "learning on the known." Figure 1 gives a visual presentation of the first stage.

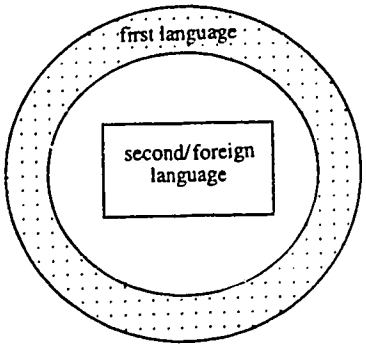


Figure 1 Inseparate L1 and L2

At this stage, the learner relies on the native language for translation and as a medium for internalization. In the course of doing so, the learner uses the concepts and linguistic forms of the mother tongue by trying to place them parallel with acoustic and semantic inputs of a new language. From time to time the learner mentally and psychologically leans against what he/she already knows about the mother tongue. It is likely that the learner goes back to his/her memory reservoir to search for corresponding concepts and forms when some new messages enter his/her mind from the environment in the form of a s/f language. As soon as the learner succeeds in finding out something that is useable and in keeping with the new concepts and linguistic forms, the new messages become translated versions in their minds and are assimilated as understandable meanings. This information processing mechanism works well on the condition that the learner is successful in paralleling all new concepts and linguistic forms in a s/f language to homologous concepts and linguistic forms in his/her first language.

However, it is not so effective and workable at all times and in all circumstances. There are two factors involved with this information processing mechanism, namely, (1) sufficient time for the learner to initiate and go through mental processing procedures; (2) the learner's adequate knowledge about his/her own mother tongue. In those cases the two prerequisites are not met; either learning of the target language is blocked or the communication with use of the new language breaks down. Many current s/f language education programs are formal language classes, in which the learner is not allowed or guaranteed the time minimally required for the learner to use the processing strategies. This gives rise to Krashen's (1985) assertion that when the learner is "asked to produce right away...performers 'fall back' on the first language...[They] simply think in the first

language, add vocabulary from the second language to 'fill the slots' and make [some] corrections using the conscious monitor." (p. 7)

Bain's second stage can be seen as an uneasy alliance of the two languages as Figure 2 shows:

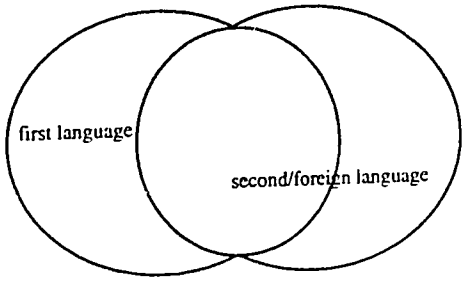


Figure 2 Partially Separate L1 and L2

This stage sees a struggle to break the dependence of the learner on the first language. Normally this stage lasts for a very long time. It even occurs repeatedly after the learner is independent of his/her first language to some degree. The major transition from the preceding stage to the current one is reflected by the extent of the learner's dependence upon the first language. Prior to reaching this stage of s/f language acquisition, the learner processes new messages expressed in the s/f language by employing the word-for-word strategy. There is a strong dependence upon the native language as the primary processor for both comprehension and production. At that moment, it is the only available measure for the learner, as he/she has not yet acquired enough of the s/f language to initiate independent processing.

Afterwards, when the learner's increasing exposure to the target language results in an enlarged subjective knowledge about it in the mind, then he/she has some freedom from the bondage of the first language. The learner can now fluctuate between the two languages. It is not enough for the learner to understand the semantics of individual words, phrases and sentences. It is necessary for the learner to get the ideas beyond the words and convey those ideas and not the word content of the original language. In order to attain this goal, it is essential that the learner break through the surface structure of the incoming linguistic forms and go down to the core of the meaning which is the deep structure. On no account can direct translation from the received messages into the learner's first language provide an easy access to the genuine semantic sense of the messages. Although some concepts and senses from the s/f language are now intuitively perceptible, they are,

however, not directly translatable, for no corresponding words can be found in the learner's mother tongue to represent him/her and there is no possibility of comprehending them within the familiar sentence structure of the learner's first language. The strategy of word-for-word translation, which the learner is so accustomed to and heavily relies upon in the first stage, is neither facile nor intelligible. Under this circumstance, the learner cannot choose but to try to comprehend whatever messages he/she receives straight from the perspective of the target language.

The third stage is one of unity of thought and diversity of expressions. Examine Figure 3.

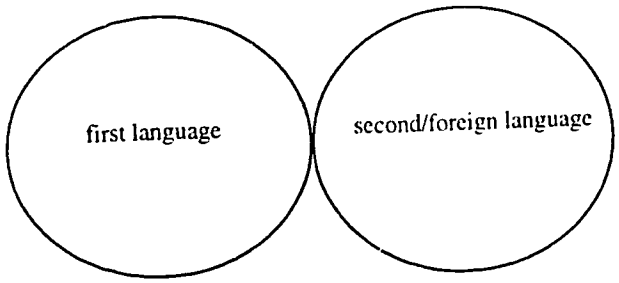


Figure 3 Fully Separate L1 and L2

This stage is characteristic of the learner's full mastery of the s/f language. It is concretely evidenced by his/her free use of a multiplicity of codes. After reaching this stage, learners are no longer confined to mere reliance upon their native language. They have developed an individualized notation system to capture meaning prototypes. The internal system brings feasibility of a varied and flexible use of multiple codes. People who learn and use an s/f language at this stage have a condensed and personalized method of representing meaning that frees them from over-dependence on either the source or the target language. They shuttle between thought and words, making efforts to transform meaning into speech. As Vygotsky (1962) describes this process:

> A speaker often takes several minutes to disclose one thought. In his mind the whole thought is present at once, but in speech it has to be developed successively. A thought may be compared to a cloud shedding a shower of words. Precisely because thought does not have its automatic counterpart in words, the transition from thought to word leads through meaning. In our speech, there is always the hidden thought, the subtext. Because a direct transition from thought to word is impossible, there have always been laments about the inexpressibility of thought.

How shall the heart express itself?
How shall another understand?
[F. Tjutchev]

> Direct communication between minds is impossible, not only physically but psychologically. Communication can be achieved only in a roundabout way. Thought must pass first through meanings and then through words. (p. 150)

This can be seen typically when people do not deal with linguistic forms one by one. Instead, they treat all that is heard or seen holistically. Their previous learning experiences eventually guide them into Gestalt psychology, this is to say, they finally come to realize that a whole is different from the sum of its parts. At this time, they are especially concerned with patterns of experience as wholes. They are capable of knowing both the superficial meaning and the implied message. The possibility of source language interference is minimized to the greatest extent or eliminated as they no longer jump back to their source language whenever they listen and read. They prefer to wait until the speaker has finished or until they have completed reading the whole text.

**Language and Thought**

Academic research in s/f language education cannot be isolated from theories of linguistics. Since language is a manifestation of thought, the relationship between language and thought is a constant topic to deal with. In terms of this relationship, the Whorfian hypothesis is a classical theory.

The Whorfian hypothesis claims that different languages represent different cultures and are also determined by cultures. In his work Whorf (1956) points out that language guides the direction of thought and speakers of different languages have different patterns of thought. In this way the structure of a language strongly influences or fully determines the way its native speakers perceive the world. The implication of the Whorf hypothesis for s/f language education is two-fold: (1) every language has a unique way of expressing ideas. Learning a new language is a process of learning a new mode of thinking; (2) the differences between human languages are the reflection of the differences between cultures. The key to the command of a target language is learning about the close alliance between language and the total culture of the target speech community.

The Whorfian theory has evoked much academic controversy since it came into being. Quite a number of experiments and research were conducted to prove or counter-prove Whorf's conclusions. The knowledge of the discussions of these experiments may

help readers further consider the issues of culture teaching in s/f language education. However, it is not appropriate to go deeper into this here. Details in this respect can be seen in Appendix A. For the purpose of the present study, the author contends that thoughts of different nations can be expressed and mutually understood through linguistic and non-linguistic expressions; otherwise, cross-cultural communication and understanding would be theoretically impossible. In s/f language education, the uniqueness of a new language is precisely representative of its related culture. Characteristics of the target language should receive adequate attention from both teachers and learners. One positive contribution of the Whorfian hypothesis is that s/f language learners must break away from the bondage of their own language and culture and try to deal with the target language from the perspective of its native speakers. To be specific, whatever concepts and expressions are new and different from one's own language should be the focus of attention in the course of learning a s/f language, especially when they may lead to potential cultural misunderstandings.

**Purpose of the Study**

A cultural mistake, termed neutrally as "culturally inappropriate speech and behavior", is by no means a bad thing. While it can have an unfavorable effect on communication, it can also mirror something that is worthy of deep contemplation and rethinking. The focus of this research is on the cultural aspect of s/f language education in Asia from the perspective of the learners themselves. The major goal is to develop a model of s/f language teaching and learning which incorporates cultural elements. In order to do so, it is paramount to identify cultural elements which play a role in the performance and teaching/learning of s/f language. Thus, the purpose of the work also includes:

(1) identifying the awareness East Asian ESL/EFL learners have of the role culture plays in their learning and use of the target language;

(2) describing the most common cultural and linguistic difficulties and their interpretation of these difficulties. The cultural aspects which the author looks into are as follows: (a) expressing apologies; (b) expressing differences of opinions; (c) accepting criticism in public; (d) accepting criticism in private; (e) encountering humor; (f) functioning within the educational system in another language and culture; (g) friendship; (h) privacy; (i) embarrassment; (j) eye contact; and (k) slang. In the author's experience, these aspects will show the differences between the East and the West. Although there are many other aspects of cultural differences, owing

to the limitation of manpower and time, the author cannot include and explore all in this thesis;

(3) proposing a new model of teaching/ learning for s/f language education in East Asia.

**Research Questions**

Each of the three research purposes gives rise to some specific research questions. What follows is an overview of the research questions which serve the research purposes.

1. For evaluation of East Asian learners' motivation and awareness to learn about the target culture, it is essential to determine:

a. what attitudes and motivations East Asian s/f language learners hold toward the learning of their target language and what potential and hidden influences, attitudes and motivations have on cross-cultural language communication and understanding; and

b. how well East Asian s/f language learners realize the necessity and importance of acquiring the knowledge of the target culture and what the relation between learning motivations and the learners' desires/attitudes to learn about the cultural traits of Western society is.

2. Cultural and linguistic difficulties are in fact a result of the learners' reliance on the linguistic and communication rules of their native language and social groups. Questions addressed to this issue are:

c. how do Asian s/f language learners respond to native English speakers in selected situations;

d. how might learners' culturally inappropriate language performance be categorized and classified; and

e. what are the possible psychological processes Asian s/f language learners go through when communicating in English.

3. A revised model for s/f language education can be established only when the deficiency of the present teaching model is located and practical solutions are proposed to fill up the existing gap between the current situation and what is needed. Research questions for this purpose are:

f. what are the weaknesses and limitations of the current teaching modes in s/f language education;

g. how can culture be integrated into s/f language education.

**Limitations of the Research**

This research concentrates on selected cultural problems in s/f language education when oriental learners are engaged in verbal and non-verbal communication with Western native English speakers. However, it can hardly cover all communicative problems encountered and experienced in the course of communication. Nor can it deal with all aspects of cultural learning. There is also the endemic problem of this topic having little prior research on which to build. Hence, there is the serious limitation of a scanty body of prior knowledge which is relevant to the cultural influence on Easterners' linguistic performance in cross-cultural communication.

Cross-cultural understanding in s/f language communication between Eastern and Western people is far from being thoroughly studied. What causes so many seemingly funny, but sometimes irritating and frustrating, obstacles has often escaped people's attention and serious examination. Although an increasing number of scholars in the fields of language communication (Canale, 1983; Wolfson, 1983; Scollon and Scollon, 1983; Richards and Schmidt, 1983) and s/f language education and cross-cultural studies (McGroarty, 1984; Hayflich and Lomperis, 1992) are beginning to take notice of the importance and significance of studying problems in this area, it remains by and large an underdeveloped field. Or, as a well-known Chinese proverb goes, "it takes more than one cold day for the river to freeze three feet deep." It is unrealistic to expect that such a long-existing hard nut can be cracked with a single strike.

**Summary**

Learning a s/f language is becoming an advantage for more and more people as a result of the increase of cross-cultural communication and the rapid advance of high technology throughout the world. High linguistic competence has remained an eternal goal for many, particularly in Asian countries. This is the current emphasis in s/f language education.

However, the reality of language use in actual verbal and non-verbal communication with native speakers of the target language reveals that language proficiency and the learners' scores in study programs do not reflect and match their communicative competence. Therefore, it is eventually brought to light that, by itself, linguistic competence

is not adequate to help s/f language users out. In other words, something else must function in language communication to ensure a smooth, mutual understanding. Not until the 1960s, did some pioneering research show that without acquisition of cultural knowledge about a language, language learning and use in communication will always be incomplete. Quite a lot of research work has been conducted by western scholars and teachers to criticize the linguistic-competence-centered curriculum and instruction in the East. Teaching of language skills including listening, speaking, writing and reading, factors affecting s/f language learning, importance of communicative competence and integration of cultural knowledge have been explored.

How to integrate culture teaching with language skill training according to the learners' psychological and emotional attitudes is a real problem for s/f language education in East Asia. This research examines the relevant issues from the perspective of an eastern teacher of English as a foreign language. By bringing in the voices of Eastern Asian learners to the academic research, the author intends to offer a new look into which strategy is possible and applicable to East Asian s/f language learners.

This research, qualitative naturalistic inquiry in nature, employs a number of methods such as questionnaire investigation and interview. It takes us to the reality of East Asian ESL/EFL learners/users' performance, bringing to light that which is still weak in s/f language education.

# CHAPTER II

# METHODOLOGY

## Naturalistic Inquiry

The nature of this research project it is in the realm of naturalistic inquiry. As research methodology, naturalistic inquiry is a way of answering the questions of what there is that can be known and how one can go about knowing it. Lincoln and Guba (1985) mentioned:

> It has other aliases as well, for example: the postpositivistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, subjective, case study, qualitative, hermeneutic, humanistic. It has so many names because the persons who profess to practice it tend to take different views of what it implies, in the same way that persons who profess to be Christians may nevertheless prefer to be known as Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Adventist, Fundamentalist, Baptist, and so on. (pp. 7-8)

Because naturalistic inquiry has such features, some people suggested the term "qualitative research" be replaced with "naturalistic inquiry" (Borden and Bilked, 1982, p. 3).

No matter what it is called, naturalistic inquiry is in contrast to quantitative methodology. This study is characteristic of naturalistic inquiry in that it does not measure in numerical form the extent to which the ESL/ELF learners are aware of the usefulness of cultural knowledge in learning an s/f language, but rather describes the participants' feelings and attitudes towards cultural knowledge in s/f language programs using direct quotations from the participants about their beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts related to their understanding of the cultural knowledge of the West. In addition, a combination of specific qualitative research methods, such as questionnaire, interviews and document analysis, were applied to achieve the research objectives.

Most rudimentary data of this study were obtained through questionnaires and interviews. Prior to formal use of the questionnaire, it was examined by research experts and professors for advice and revision. Then, it was field tested on a small sample. The consequence of this two-step process resulted in careful revisions and some re-designing.

However, the written questionnaire imposed a certain limitation in that the responses obtained merely reflected the participants' immediate reaction rather than a whole range of their consideration pertaining to s/f language education and cross-cultural communication. The subsequent interviews were necessary and useful in gathering more

complete information for final analysis. The reason why interviews were arranged following the processing of the questionnaires was that the questionnaire responses could be used in the selection of the participants to be interviewed. The interviews provided flexibility in probing beyond the surface of the interviewees' responses to fixed questions and they created an adequate heuristic base for later research.

Naturalistic inquiry, as a research process, serves to promote understanding and positive interactions between people. It has intrinsic factors which play a part in breaking down interpersonal barriers and building and maintaining trust. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) First of all, it requires both the researcher and information-providers to spend time talking about common interests and concerns. When going deep into a topic both parties gain a clearer understanding of each other's viewpoints. In this way it helps to "seek to understand human behavior and human experience from the actor's own frame of reference, not from the frame of reference of the investigator." (Owens, 1982, p. 7)

**Methodological Considerations**

Before the data presentation, it is necessary to briefly restate the methodological consideration. As mentioned earlier, this research is naturalistic in nature. The work consists of a questionnaire investigation and interpretation of interviews. While the main focus centers on the inappropriate and non-essential cultural conflicts among people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, data on collateral themes such as prevalent teaching methodologies in ESL/EFL, linguistic strategy of avoiding misunderstanding, tolerance of alien cultural customs and paralinguistic behaviors were also gathered and interpreted.

Specifically, I will now state why the methods of questionnaire and personal interviews were chosen to implement the study. The general category of inquiry forms include data-gathering instruments through which respondents answer questions verbally or respond to statements in writing. In accordance with the definitions in some books on research methodology, a questionnaire is used when factual information is desired. When opinions rather than facts are desired, an opinionnaire or attitude scale is used. Such a strict distinction is theoretical in value. In practice, many questionnaires solicit both information and the respondents' opinions about the issues under investigation. Questionnaires administered personally to groups of individuals have a number of advantages. By administering the instrument myself, I had an opportunity to establish rapport and to explain the meaning of items that may not have been clear.

## Selecting Participants

I was interested in exploring the views toward culture of ESL/EFL learners from several Asian countries. With the help of the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars at a Canadian university I got a list of its members and their telephone numbers. By making phone calls I found twenty-eight people from mainland China to participate in the study. In order to get a sufficient number of people from Hong Kong, I asked for help from some personal friends from Hong Kong. They asked their acquaintances to take part in the investigation. As for the participants from Japan and Singapore, they were international students at local high schools and colleges. I met them through the introduction of a teacher who worked at a private school in Edmonton. Before recruiting them into the project, I had a talk with them to see if they could provide useful information for the research purposes. I selected those who could describe their personal experiences clearly and had some thoughts and feelings about the ESL/EFL programs in which they used to study. After I decided to have them on the participant list I explained to them what they were expected to do in the research investigation.

With reference to the languages used in data collection, I designed the questionnaire and all correspondence mail in English. When doing the interviews, I used both English and Chinese to talk with the interviewees.

## The Questionnaire and Interviews

The questionnaire contained some "closed-form" questions which called for short answers or check mark multiple-choice responses. By and large, these questions were designed to collect personal information for statistical purposes. Other questions were open-ended or of an unrestricted type which called for a free response in the respondents' own words. The open form provides for greater depth of response. Respondents can reveal their frame of reference and possibly the reasons for their responses. Since it requires greater effort on the part of the respondents, returns often take a longer time to complete. This type of item is sometimes difficult to interpret, tabulate and summarize, for the information gathered from respondents varies greatly in content and extent. Some information reflects only the personal experience of a given respondent. Flexibility of response allows respondents to deal with the same topic in different ways. Uniqueness in responses makes it hard to allocate this type of information into pre-set unified categories.

In this study, both open- and closed-type items were used. Each has its merits and limitations. For instance, by using the closed form, respondents seldom provide for

unanticipated responses. However, it is easy to fill out, takes little time, and keeps the respondents focused on the themes which are being explored. Besides, it is fairly easy for the researcher to tabulate and analyze. The open form gives the reins to the respondents for feedback, often soliciting unexpected statements from the respondents. But as its returns are sometimes meager, it takes a lot of time to follow up with phone calls or letters to ensure a satisfactory return rate. When I designed the questionnaire I decided to use closed-type questions for background information pertaining to the participants' gender, age, country of origin and ethnicity, use of language at school and at home, length of learning English, teaching methods and teacher sources; whereas, for the respondents' opinions on some important and sensitive issues, I designed some open-type questions so that the respondents would not be confined to the direction of my thinking and be guided implicitly. For some simulated communicative situations I provided the respondents with multiple-choice answers, for I supposed it would be more difficult for them to imagine possible responses when asked to give feedback in the open form.

As a method of inquiry, the questionnaire precedes the interview for several reasons. One is that responses to the questionnaire facilitate the selection of interviewees. The pencil-and-paper responses help reveal who understands the essence of the research project better, who responds seriously and responsibly, and who can potentially become cooperative informants. Information like this is favorable to rationally identifying participants for the interview. Moreover, no matter how carefully the questions in the questionnaire are prepared beforehand against the researcher's bias and impression, the answers will more or less provide data for whatever the designer desires to collect. Besides, a negative aspect of questionnaires lies in the limitation that participants confine their answers and scope of thought to the listed questions no matter whether they are of the open- or closed-type. The respondents' way of thinking is apt to be guided in the pre-planned direction of the question designer.

Interviews allow more flexibility in discussing issues and more time for making answers. In addition, interviews allow for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection. For the present study the interview complemented the questionnaire. It helped to concentrate on those themes and issues which were revealed in the questionnaire investigation. However, there are both advantages and disadvantages to interviews as there are always two sides to everything. Interviews allow participants to have the liberty to organize their own descriptions and to emphasize what they think is most important. At the same time, interviews allow the researcher to deepen his/her own self-understanding in the course of the research. In this way, neither the researcher nor the participants are confined

to pre-determined topics. Instead, both parties have the liberty to divert the on-going conversation to whatever they consider important and relevant to the topic about which they are conversing. Unrestricted scope of talk can always revolve around the central research themes and never get too far away as long as the interviewer keeps the general research topic and specific research questions in mind and tactfully guides the conversation in the planned direction.

There are also some disadvantages of interviews. Interviewees may feel obliged by the conversational situation to make comments, answers and reactions immediately in order to maintain the flow of conversation. The interviewees also have limited time to consider a question thoughtfully during the conversation, so the information which the interviewees provide instantly has a risk of reducing overall reliability. Typically, the number of respondents who can be reached is not as extensive as the number of participants of a questionnaire.

In view of the nature of this project, it was decided that two steps would be taken to meet its intended goals. The first step taken was a questionnaire investigation. All questions asked were pre-tested for validity and appropriateness, except for the questions dealing with demographic information, and revised according to the feedback provided from the pilot implementation. Eight people engaged in the pilot investigation. This was less than the originally planned number of ten because two intended participants were not available when the pilot study began. The author's intention of designing the questionnaire was to examine the participants' attitudes and responses to some common problems in daily language communication. In a sense, the questionnaire is equivalent to a test. For a test to be valid it has to test what you want it to and not inadvertently, something else. To be valid, a test also must be reliable. Perfect reliability would be achieved by a test if each time it was given the same participants made the same score (assuming that nothing happened in the intervals between testings to alter their knowledge or feelings on the topic tested). But everyone has his/her good days and dog days; so a participant's performance at different times is never quite the same. Moreover, there is simply no need for a concise and straightforward questionnaire like this to be administered twice to compare the results. Validity and reliability of the questionnaire were verified through the interviews that followed.

As the second step of data collection, the interview made up for the limitations of the questionnaire. During the interview participants were not limited to the questions in the pencil-and-paper work. They had extensive opportunities for probing some difficult and

obscure situations of s/f language learning and use. Free from writing the participants could orally discuss and reveal more personal experiences and feelings.

The second part of the questionnaire is characteristic of some simulated situations of language communication. In the pilot study I tried to solicit responses from participants based on personal experiences. However, this was cumbersome and uncomfortable for participants. So, in order to keep the focus of the research on track and to ensure the availability of relevant information from the respondents, I took up the advice of designing some simulated situations for them to think about.

When those simulated communicative questions were prepared, I intended to test the responses from the selected participants. Like other researchers I had a hypothesis:

My reading knowledge of the literature of s/f language education and my experience brought about a belief that current s/f language teaching curricula in Asia contained little about training of learners' cultural awareness and as a result, ESL/EFL learners would be weak in the performance of the target language. Because grammar had been emphasized as the focus of teaching, most participants of this study would show a solid mastery of the linguistic rules of English. They would be able to understand the language used in the simulated situations from the pure linguistic perspective. However, their difficulties lie mainly in making appropriate cultural inferences from the perspective of a native English speaker.

On this basis I decided to test this hypothesis by using simulated communicative situations, for it was found after the pilot study that the participants were slow at recalling experiences which were relevant and useful to my research themes. It was expected that the questionnaire would bring the participants' minds into some typical settings where their lack of cultural awareness would be easily exposed. With their weakness exposed I could interpret possible reasons to explain any inappropriateness. The work would also result in insights into current prevalent s/f language teaching methodology, curricula and instruction.

**Simulations**

The six simulated situations in the questionnaire pertain to communication settings with which a non-native-speaker of English would most probably meet in daily work and study.

(1) As social life is very common in North American society and everybody has his/her own schedule, it is usually an art to decline a time-conflict invitation. For Asian

people, direct refusal to a kind offer is not in keeping with oriental courtesy. However, false acceptance of an invitation is impolite in the West, because it will cause a waste of others' time. Therefore, it is a good testing item to judge Asian ESL/EFL people's awareness and attitudes to the relevant Western social norms.

(2) The second incident is only too common for an international student or scholar. As a rule, oriental philosophy teaches people not to speak aloud any opinions which are directly opposite to those of the teacher, especially in the presence of others. However, practice in Western schools takes silence as a sign of agreement with the instructor's opinions. A lack of questions in these situations often leads to a less than full understanding of such opinions. How Asian students and scholars behave in this situation will reflect the extent of their cultural awareness.

(3) The third incident, involving a direct confrontation, was selected to see if Asian participants' responses to this situation would cause misunderstanding to Western people. Usually, Asian people are not used to being involved in direct confrontation.

(4) The fourth incident was intended to test the difference between Eastern and Western ways of expressing gratitude for favorable deeds. Gifts are not usually used by Eastern people as a reward for the help of others. This is particularly true for favors between friends.

(5) The fifth incident was included to discover obstacles to understanding Western humor. This simulated situation was included because I often overheared non-native-English speakers talking about their bewilderment with Western humor, which is often a source of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

(6) The purpose of the sixth incident was to examine the different cultural assumptions surrounding the role of a teacher in the school system. In the West, school education encourages students to be independent and trains them how to become independent in every aspect and every stage of development. Such educational notions and routes are not so intensified in the Eastern school system, where students rely on teachers and the latter is responsible for making arrangements for the former at all stages of learning. Students are taught to follow teachers' instruction and to proceed step by step. Independence is based on the accumulation of knowledge and practice.

The subsequent ten probing questions were listed in an attempt to get a clear idea of the weaknesses in East Asian ESL/EFL programs, how East Asian ESL/EFL people realize the importance of cultural knowledge to s/f language learning, and what could be done to introduce cultural elements into s/f language education. All questions were open-ended in

the hope of soliciting maximum input from the participants so that the data analysis could be as insightful as possible.

A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix B. A summarized report of the questionnaire investigation is in Chapter Three.

**Limitations of the application of the questionnaire and interview**

Theoretically speaking, the selection of questionnaire and interview as two connecting research procedures is satisfactory for a research project of this size. However, some unsatisfactory results appeared in the end. Looking retrospectively at the whole process of collecting data the author found that there were some problems in preparing and using the questionnaire.

First, some questions were not carefully designed. For example, Question 3 had four choices as answers. But in fact the question itself consisted of two parts: the first part was a special question, to which the multiple-choice answers could be used. The second part was a yes/no question, to which the designed answers were irrelevant.

Secondly, some questions were asked in a way that could possibly provide the participants with a hint that implicitly elicited the author's desired data from them. Question 14 was a typical instance. As a teacher with experience in teaching English as a foreign language, I was aware of the ESL/EFL learners' first preference in their study of the target language. When asked what they hoped to improve, they would in all probability focus attention and answers on linguistic skills. This is the consequence of the long-term skill-oriented tradition in the field of s/f language education. Lacking adequate contact with cultural knowledge one can hardly realize the relationship between the training of linguistic skills and the cultural knowledge. Neglectful of this, I placed the choice of "improving cultural learning" side by side with the other three choices of "intensifying linguistic skills," thus leading the participants habitually back to their previous focus of attention. Owing to the inappropriate arrangement the last of the four multiple-choice answers did not elicit any useful information from the participants; instead the zero responses made the whole answer lose balance.

Thirdly, it might be more convenient for the Chinese participants to answer the questions in Chinese. Although the choice of language was indicated in the cover letter of the questionnaire, using native language was optional. If the questionnaire had been prepared in Chinese, the participants' responses might have shown more depth of feeling and thought.

There were also some limitations of the interviews. Among the five interviewees, none was Japanese. Since five Japanese participated in the first stage of the investigation it would have been a thoughtful consideration to select one or more of the Japanese participants for the interview stage of the study so that more information and data on ESL/EFL in Japan could have been obtained and included in the data analysis.

**Summary**

This research project was conducted with the participation of sixty people from East Asian countries who had personally experienced using English as a second language for work and study in North America. The research was a naturalistic inquiry making use of such techniques as questionnaires and tape-recorded interviews between the author and participants.

The naturalistic inquiry helped to create a free atmosphere which, in turn, was favorable for soliciting natural responses from the participants. It encouraged the participants to describe a culture from their own perspectives.

There were two steps used in collecting information and data: the questionnaire investigation and the interviews. The questionnaire investigation was made prior to the interview so that it could be used to select the most suitable people to be interviewed. In addition, such an arrangement helped to determine the topics of the interviews so that the author could explore the research themes in more depth. In order to ensure the validity of the question items appearing in the questionnaire, eight people participated in a pilot study. All the question items were re-examined and revised in light of the feedback of the participants of the pilot study.

Some simulated communicative questions were prepared on the hypothesis that grammar-centered training in s/f language programs would result in learners' strong performance of the target language from the linguistic perspective at the expense of the cultural perspective.

In the next chapter, the information and data of this research project will be presented. Notes will be provided to make the information and data clear to readers.

# CHAPTER III

# DATA PRESENTATION

This chapter will present the investigation results from the data collection. The data will be presented in the sequence they were obtained. When necessary, brief explanations are provided to make the background and central themes clearer. These results will lead to further analyses and critical comments of some issues in s/f language education.

The formal questionnaire investigation was done with sixty respondents participating. After repeated contacts by telephone and mail, all sixty questionnaires were returned completed. Most questions were answered independently by the participants except for a few delicate questions, to which the participants' replies are based on clarification and mutual discussion between themselves and the author. The following demographic data was extracted from all completed questionnaires.

## Part One — Background Information

**Sample group:** In general, the sixty participants of this research project were in Canada for academic studies and research work. The exceptions were three spouses of students who were engaged in local manufacturing and hospitality jobs. Among the fifty-seven student participants the majority were involved in educational institutions from high school to university levels. While fifty were students in a variety of majors including sciences, engineering, education, humanities and social sciences, there were seven visiting scholars. It was noted that approximately forty of the participants were either in master's or doctoral degree programs. The longest stay period was eight years and the shortest was approximately one year.

**Gender:** The sample comprised fifty-four males and six females. The percentage of male respondents was 90 per cent; female respondents made up 10 per cent of the sample. An even gender balance was not achieved. This was an imperfection of the participant population. The figure of female participants was far from the author's original target, for it was difficult to find and solicit a sufficient number of qualified female people from East Asia to participate. Regrettably, the unavailability of female participants was beyond the author's expectation and control. So, gender comparisons are not possible in this study.

**Age:** Five participants (8 %) were in their fifties, 11 (18 %) were in their forties, 27 (45 %) were in their thirties, and 12 (20 %)were in their twenties. The remaining five (8 %)

were teenagers. People in their teens, twenties and thirties make up the majority of s/f learners and so this sample was a fair representation of s/f learners. This ensures that research findings from this sample might have some applicability to s/f language programs. The figure below offers a visual percentage of the ages of the participants.

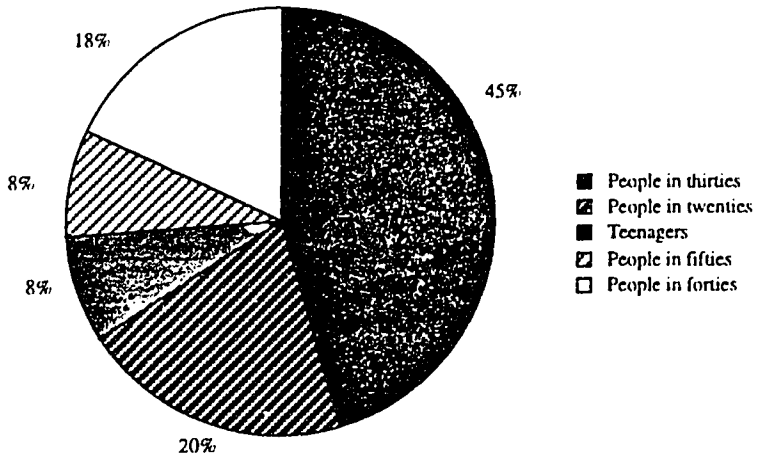


Figure 4 Percentage of the Participants' Ages

**Country of origin and ethnicity:** Countries of origin of the participants were spread throughout East and Scutheast Asia. Among the 60 people there were 22 from Hong Kong, five from Singapore, five from Japan and 28 from mainland China. Although the overwhelming majority were of Chinese origin, the awareness of Chinese culture varied greatly as a result of the different social systems under which the participants grew up and lived. None of them had spent much time in Western culture before coming to Canada to study and work.

**Language used in school education:** The respondents reported that Chinese (mainly Mandarin and Cantonese), Japanese, as well as some English were the languages used in classroom instruction in elementary and secondary schools and tertiary educational institutions they had attended. In Hong Kong, Cantonese is the major language of instruction though English is formally designated as one of the two official languages. In mainland China, English is normally taken as a study subject in elementary schools in urban areas, and in junior and/or senior high schools in rural areas depending on the availability of teaching personnel. In Japan, the case is similar to that of China. English is not learned before students reach higher school grades, usually grade six in junior high

schools. Singapore is a country where English is more prevalent than Chinese albeit a large portion of the population are Chinese descendants. There, English is learned and used as the first language from grade one of elementary schools whereas Chinese is taken as a second language. The Chinese language used in educational institutions in Singapore is Mandarin Chinese. None of the participants indicated any specific local dialect used in formal classroom teaching and learning. Quite a few Hong Kong students said that more and more schools in Hong Kong had begun to introduce Mandarin-learning courses as an independent subject. The rapid spread of Mandarin Chinese is due to the 1997 takeover of Hong Kong. This fact proves the extent of dissemination of Putonghua[1]

**Language spoken at home:** Except for participants from Singapore, where English is spoken among family members, all respondents spoke either native languages or their respective local dialects (including Cantonese) at home with parents, spouses and siblings. In Japan and China, English exists in classrooms only. Out of school, there is rarely any use of the language. In Hong Kong, the use of English cannot be said to be non-existent out of school settings; however, it is limited in most communicative settings. Singapore makes full use of English. No matter what the occasion, people in Singapore use English most of the time. However, because of their ethnic background and cultural tradition, the Singapore participants were able to speak Chinese. As regards the language use of children of those from mainland China, situations varied from person to person. Some people used a mixture of English and Chinese; a small number stuck to Chinese and local dialects when communicating with their children. They did that to maintain their heritage languages and to remind children of their original countries and cultural traditions. Obviously, they did not want to see the next generation lose their native languages in a second homeland.

It was found that with small children going to day-care centers and kindergartens, parents, in most cases, used a mixed language. With children who were in their teens at the time of leaving their native countries, parents tended to speak heritage languages or dialects. This phenomenon varied somewhat according to the competence of the first language. The more established the first language, the more frequently it was used in personal encounters and communication during daily activities. With high proficiency or

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[1] Putonghua is an officially designated common language in China. In the old days it was termed as Mandarin. In Taiwan it has a different name --- the national language. The Central Government of China advocates a country-wide learning/use of the common language for convenience of communication in government administration, business, industry and education wherever it is possible. However, the learning and use of Putonghua are not mandatory but contingent on specific conditions such as availability of teaching resources, learners'/users' capability to speak and comprehend.

complete mastery of native language and/or local dialects it was likely that people had a kind of "inertia" which prohibited them from active use of the target language among themselves.

**Temporal length of learning English:** There is a wide range of years in which these respondents learned English. All of them had learned some English before coming to Canada. The length of learning ranged from four to forty years. The people from Singapore, who made up almost 8.3 per cent of the participants started learning English from childhood. A number of participants from Hong Kong reported that their English education started from kindergarten and continued through high school. About 80 per cent of the respondents began English study as teenagers. The remaining 20 per cent were in their twenties when they received English education. This statistical data reflects a fact about the field of s/f language education throughout Southeast Asia: English has long been a subject in school education. Among all s/f languages which are taught in the region, English is the one which has the largest number of learners. Learning ages are from kindergarten to tertiary level.

**Teaching methods and teacher sources:** The majority of participants reported that their teachers were mostly nationals who had received language education and learned English either in their home countries or in some English-speaking countries. A small number of respondents had native English speakers as their teachers of English. The native English speaking language teachers came from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. It is quite evident from the proportion of native English speakers in teacher resources that opportunities for direct communication with English speakers were scarce for ESL/EFL learners in most cases. Limited contacts and insufficient practice with native English speakers are factors contributing to lower proficiency and inadequate knowledge about the target culture among ESL/EFL learners.

Regarding teaching methods employed in s/f language courses, some respondents were trained through the grammar or grammar-translation method. This is a teaching method with the longest history. In view of the fact that many controversial issues in the field of s/f language education surround this method, it is beneficial for readers to have an overview of it. (See Appendix C for a historical description.) Their teachers were mostly ethnic nationals. Those who were taught by native English speakers recalled that their teachers had relied upon the conversational approach in classroom teaching. However, they were not trained in this way through the whole process of learning, because not all of their English courses were conducted by native-English-speaking teachers. According to their recollections, native-English-speaking teachers resorted to such methods like that because

they were not skilled in grammatical analysis of sentence structures. In addition, native-English-speaking teachers felt awkward about implementing the traditional language teaching methodology. Their belief was that language is a means of communication; language learning is for communication; in this regard, conversation is a type of language use which is most often employed in language communication, so any methods of teaching conversation can meet learners' demands and develop learners' competence in using the target language.

About 60 per cent of respondents, approximately 36, felt that previously learned grammar was helpful in organizing and expressing ideas. Whenever they began to speak, to write, to listen and to read English, they unconsciously made use of their knowledge of English grammar. Some replied that without the help of grammar they would not be able to deal with problems they faced. Others revealed that their English writing was a process of translation in essence. As is known, in the case of translation, preconditions include the linguistic, textual and social systems of the languages and cultures involved; translation cannot proceed without a translator's use of grammar. This favorable opinion of grammar study was common among adult learners. Young learners were inclined toward the view that more and consistent practice is a key to success. Grammar does not play a decisive role in language learning though a good mastery of grammar is helpful, especially in language proficiency tests such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language).

**English proficiency:** Fifty-two people, close to 87 % of the participants, felt that they possessed sufficient reading knowledge before coming to Canada to experience more contact with their s/f language — English. After stepping into the English-speaking world, most of them felt it difficult to use the target language except the people from Singapore, whose difficulty in using English was less than the participants from other regions. The difficulties for participants from Singapore was mainly in culturally determined aspects such as idiomatic usage of words and expressions and ways of structuring information. For most ESL/EFL learners when a change took place in the status of the target language, that is, from a school subject to an imperative means of daily life including work and academic study, their limited proficiency became an immediate mental pressure and real obstacle. Some of them did not use much English daily because of their inability to use it at will. Unless necessary, they could only remain silent. However, reality made them aware that English was a must in whatever field of study and work they wished to pursue. In order to survive and progress in work and study, most participants took ESL classes. Their major purpose was to enhance their competence so that they could reduce or even rid themselves of difficulties with which they were faced. The length of learning in an ESL

program varied from six months to several years. Although eager to practice English to increase proficiency, they still spoke native languages to communicate with people from the same countries. All of them felt that their English had improved after studying for some time. A few participants believed that the increase of proficiency was due to the consistent contact with the language, not from in-class study.

Here it must be pointed out that ESL education in countries like Canada is considered necessary and is very popular. Participants felt prepared to pay for ESL programs as long as a high education quality was guaranteed. A second point revealed by participant responses was that people could not have their s/f language proficiency substantially upgraded unless they had an urgent need for the target language and were determined to go all out to learn it. The participants shared the experience that more contact with the target language was an asset in successfully increasing proficiency levels.

## Part Two — Assessment of Second/Foreign Language Use and Learning and Behavior in Cross-Cultural Communication

In the second part of the questionnaire, six simulations were designed around possible communicative settings in daily study, work and life in Canada. Respondents were first required to think of all probable responses they might offer in each of the simulations and then select one from among the given multiple-choice responses that was most likely to occur as their actual response. Other questions were designed to solicit opinions about cultural difference, s/f language use and teaching from the participants.

### Question 1: What would you say and do to a Canadian friend who invites you to a dinner party which is in time conflict with your schedule?

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) Accept the invitation on the spot and at a later date tell your friend that you could not make it for some reason. | 0 | 0 |
| (B) Decline your friend's invitation immediately with thanks. | 27 | 45 |
| (C) Tell your friend about the time conflict and discuss another possible date with him. | 32 | 53.3 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (D) Accept the invitation and adapt your own schedule to the time of the party. | 1 | 1.7 |

This simulation involved a time conflict with one's own schedule. All but one of the participants responded, more or less, in the same way. All imagined that they would decline the invitation with gratitude, directly and on the spot, or set another suitable date through discussion. The exception was to change one's own schedule to adapt to the time of the invitation. The general response to this question was contrary to the author's expectations. The author's original hypothesis — that a time-conflict invitation would be accepted with gratitude before it was rejected with a decent and justifiable reason — was not supported. This shows that traditional customs and cultural beliefs pertaining to courtesy and politeness are disappearing with each passing day and their influences are by no means as strong and general as some scholars researching East-West cultural differences propose. Time-conflict invitations are not unusual in daily communication. Oriental cultures lay emphasis on courtesy and politeness toward others. In earlier times people would not reject invitations from others, for they were afraid that a direct rejection would disappoint the inviter and this was regarded as rude or disrespectful by most people. But the acceptance of an invitation and a later denial with a plausible reason easily arouse misunderstandings in outside groups. They might conclude that Orientals are not honest ; they are not serious to earnest invitations from others; their seemingly friendly words and attitudes are treacherous. The response to this testing question indicates a good change taking place in the next generation of oriental people. Direct decline of a time-inconvenient invitation or appointment helps prevent misunderstanding and saves time and trouble for all involved. This event can also be explained from another perspective: Western social, cultural and behavioral patterns are finding a way into the minds of Asian people, leading them to gradually break with traditional norms and patterns which are at variance with concepts, needs and tendencies of the times. This result suggests that the oriental world is changing to catch up with the modern concept of efficiency, that is, "time is life, time is precious."

**Question 2: What would you likely do when your own opinions are different from or even opposite to your professor's?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) Put forth your own opinions immediately and ask for comments on the difference. | 7 | 11.7 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (B) Write down the difference and try to consult more materials to judge by yourself which is correct or reasonable. | 29 | 48.3 |
| (C) Take a note of your teacher's or professor's viewpoints and discuss them with him/her after class. | 14 | 23.3 |
| (D) Talk with your fellow students about the difference between your and the teacher's or professor's opinions. | 10 | 16.7 |

The question was intended to test attitudes toward higher authorities in education and toward privacy. In the school systems of oriental countries, teachers generally enjoy respect from students. This respect was reflected in participant responses to this question. Forty-three participants (approximately 72 %) selected choices B or C as the best response. When returning the questionnaire, one participant explained that his response and attitude were dependent on when and where this situation took place and what kind of problem it was. If it pertained to a serious academic problem and it was in a classroom, he would prefer to wait until class was over and in a casual way discuss the points on which he held different opinions with the teacher. Such an attitude was common among participants when they selected choice C as their answer. In brief, if they felt that their different opinions might bring about some disadvantages to the teacher's "face", or to put it in other way, would cause embarrassment to the teacher, they would rather hold their thoughts and not exchange opinions with the teacher. If the problem occurred during a teacher's office hours and there was no one else present, they would likely voice their different opinions.

From the heterogeneous replies about the possible handling of this situation, it appears that the traditional Eastern cultural moral tenet regarding "face saving" still works to varying degrees among the participants in this study. In the words of one participant, "never touch a person's face even if fighting with him/her; never rake up a person's faults even if having a quarrel with him/her." People following the oriental Confucius tradition avoid immediate embarrassment and insult by withholding any opinions which might be disadvantageous to another person's honor, reputation and dignity. Even when occasion requires, they will talk about opinions that conflict with others' in a mild and tactful way so as to try not to incur the other person's embarrassment or disgrace. Even when dealing with non-Eastern people, Easterners subconsciously tend to transfer this deeply-rooted behavior pattern to cross-cultural communication.

The same question might incur quite different attitudes from native English-speaking people. The different attitudes in the same circumstance are an example of cultural collision, which pertains to the understanding of the concept of "privacy."

From an Eastern cultural perspective, directly putting forth the opposite opinion in is a sign of disrespect for the privacy and authority of the instructor. From a Western perspective the behavior is normal and acceptable, for an educational institution is a place of learning where everyone is equal before academic knowledge and truth. It is never a moral defect to discuss or argue with others about issues on learning.

However, the concept of "saving face" is in fact not unique to Eastern culture. As aforementioned in Chapter I on Brown and Levinson's theory on politeness, it is universal. In order to keep communication going on, the participants of language communication usually follow the principles of cooperation. Unless extremely necessary, they will not interrupt others' speech to cause potential displeasure. However, the degree to which different strategies to save face are used vary according to linguistic cultural norms.

**Question 3: What will you do when you are faced with a direct and sharp criticism from your partners? Will you take a different attitude on a public occasion and on a private occasion?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) Listen to the criticism attentively to see if there is some reason for it. | 20 | 33.3 |
| (B) Leave the criticism maker at once without saying anything more. | 16 | 26.7 |
| (C) Defend yourself by strongly arguing with your partner in public. | 5 | 8.3 |
| (D) Remain quiet on the spot and exchange opinions with your partner privately afterwards. | 19 | 31.7 |

In responding to the question, most respondents gave imaginative answers as they had no first-hand experience dealing with this situation. Sixty-five per cent of the participants replied that they would feel very embarrassed in this particular case, but they would not defend or make counter-criticism immediately. Instead, they would remain quiet and calm, listen to the criticism with great care, and then consider seriously whether the criticism was to the point or unreasonable. Their attitudes would depend totally on the nature of the criticism. They would likely not take any action against the criticism unless the

criticism was unbearable, irritating, ill-intended or they felt very uncomfortable with it. Besides, the extent of compromise would be different on public and private occasions. This attitude can be regarded as another example to corroborate the Eastern morality of saving face for oneself and others.

Questions 2 and 3 bring out an important issue in language use and cross-cultural communication: how to understand the concept of "privacy." Generally speaking, people in the West place a high value on privacy. A common English saying goes that "A man's home is his castle." The implicit message is that a person's home is a most sacred place to him/her; nobody has the right to enter without permission. So is it with a person's life and personal affairs. Questions about a person's age, salary, family background or marital status are usually not asked in the West though they are not absolutely culturally taboo. Questions of this kind, if asked under inappropriate situations, could be understood as prying into an individual's personal life and affairs. These questions are regarded as pertaining to one's privacy. The English word "privacy" is difficult for some Chinese to translate accurately into Chinese, not to speak of a comprehensive interpretation of its connotation and implication. Seeing that no satisfactory equivalent term can be found in Chinese, some participants admitted that the Western concept of "privacy" was so alien that it was hard to grasp. What is regarded as "privacy" in the eyes of Western people is not thought of as such in the Orient.

The Japanese participants felt that the understanding of privacy in the English-speaking world was quite different from what they knew in Japan. One participant recalled an illustrative example of innocently invading privacy. Early in her university study, she opened a classmate's composition exercise book to read the teacher's tutorial comments. Later, she was severely criticized by the teacher. She replied in the questionnaire that she did not know that reading an English teacher's comment on another person's written work was encroaching on that person's privacy. Her only purpose was to try to learn something about composition writing from the teacher's tutorial comments.

This participant's experience shows a typical problem in understanding "privacy." Obviously, the dictionary meaning of the word can neither offer them any useful definition nor help them accurately understand its reference. With no cultural teaching, or better, cultural immersion education, the real sense of the word can hardly be acquired by non-native English speakers. Likewise, Western people may feel confused about the oriental concept of privacy. They may find it difficult to understand why Eastern people are not willing to announce a pregnancy to others, especially to strangers, or why young lovers scarcely kiss good-bye and hug each other in public. The difficulty of mutually

understanding each other's notion of privacy indicates that privacy is indeed a major issue in cross-cultural communication. Without knowledge and mutual respect for each other's privacy, language and behavior in this regard can cause problems at any time. Arriving at a mutual understanding of privacy is an aspect of merging cultural education in the course of s/f language teaching and learning.

Compared with people from other countries, the participants from mainland China are especially puzzled about the concept of privacy. One explanation for the unfamiliarity with this concept stems from the traditional living arrangements in China. Villages with scores of families densely packed into a small area have been typical of the Chinese countryside for centuries. Even in towns and cities in North China, the quadrangle with several households around a single courtyard is a common residence. The close vicinity of residences provides opportunity for continual contact among members within the compound. With such an arrangement it is almost impossible to maintain privacy. This is quite different from the single family dwellings in the West, which often stand individually surrounded by a sizable yard or garden. The two styles of residence serve as an origin for the conflict between the different value systems.

Another interpretation may be the communal spirit or spirit of brotherhood that has been a derivative of the close living arrangements that have long prevailed among the Chinese. The long existence of close contact and a certain amount of mutual dependence and concern mean that an individual's affairs are also very much the affairs of that individual's family, neighbors and even the larger community to which he/she belongs. This is a characteristic of Chinese culture. It is no wonder that Western visitors to China are perplexed when they learn that a personal affair such as a quarrel between two neighbors must be handled by a neighborhood community office. How different this is from the privacy so treasured in the West!

In connection with Western feelings about privacy, there are certain English expressions meant to be deliberately vague. For ESL/EFL learners who are unsure of the scope of Western privacy, it is advisable to make it known to them that when a person says "I'm going out," one should not ask where. When he/she says "I have an appointment," it would be improper to ask with whom or what kind of appointment it is. Likewise, when a woman claims she has a headache, it would not do to be over-solicitous as to ask what the trouble is, or whether she needs some medicine. If she really is in distress, she will probably say so. The expressions mentioned above are often polite excuses for not doing something or not accepting an offer or invitation. They are often "defensive" expressions to stop further questions.

On the other hand, Western people who are often involved in cross-cultural communication with Eastern people may benefit from knowing that questions like "ni dao nali qü?/ni dao nali qüguole?", which can be literally interpreted as "where are you going?/where have you been?", are not asked to purposefully interfere with one's private affairs; instead of ill intention, these words are ordinary friendly greetings similar to such Western daily greetings as "how are you?/how do you do?" To these verbally specious "invasions" of privacy, a simple, short and vague phrase like "dao qianmian qü", which means "going ahead or going somewhere," suffices to be a good and appropriate answer; although to Western ears, these answers are utterly irrelevant to the point of the question.

**Question 4: What would you do to express your appreciation if a Canadian friend did you a service, say, fixing your car in his spare time?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) Say thanks to the friend and promise to recommend his service to other acquaintances. | 19 | 31.7 |
| (B) Invite the friend to dinner in a restaurant at a convenient time. | 17 | 28.3 |
| (C) Buy a gift for him with a note of thanks. | 11 | 18.3 |
| (D) Offer to pay for the friend for the time he spent on the car. | 13 | 21.7 |

This question turned out to be a good one to reveal participant comprehension regarding Western customs. Twenty-eight participants (46.7 %) chose to entertain the friend in a restaurant or to buy a gift as a token of gratitude. The choices are plausible but not appropriate to Western cultural norms. Offering a favor or service between friends is common in daily life. However, rewards for such favors and services may not be identical in form. The difference is related to Eastern and Western concepts about friendship. The offer of money for such favors and services may be understood as an insult to the person who renders the favor or service, because it looks so commercial that it suggests a distance in the relationship, or some mercenary intent on the part of the benefactor. The relationship between friends in the East, especially between people of Chinese origin, implies an obligation for one person to help another. The favor is then reciprocated when the opportunity comes along. Western people see friendship in terms of both exchanging favors, mutual obligations and duties and as an emotional tie between people sharing common interests. So when favors or services are rendered, the favor or service providers

could be duly rewarded with a reciprocal favor or service or cash. The benefactor may not necessarily accept the money reward, but it is definitely appropriate for the beneficiary to make the offer.

**Question 5: You are now talking about a comedy with some friends who are native English speakers. You cannot find the funny things which cause their happy laughter. What prevents you from feeling the same way as they do?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) Because I am not familiar with the culture of the English-speaking people. | 4 | 6.7 |
| (B) They are fussy with trifles which are actually not funny. | 3 | 5 |
| (C) There are too many informal expressions which I have never heard of. | 21 | 35 |
| (D) Comedy actors and actresses usually speak too fast for me to follow. | 32 | 53.3 |

The original intention of this question was to investigate the participants' opinions about humor performed in their target language. Over half of the participants attributed the difficulty of understanding to linguistic factors such as too many informal expressions or the fast speech by actors and actresses. The overall response was against the author's prior expectation, for only four out of the sixty people mentioned that cultural difference added to the difficulty of understanding.

Comedy is a special form of language use which is full of pleasant wordings and amusement. An understanding of comedy requires not only comprehension of the surface meaning of expressions but also perception of the implied funny messages. Although people share some common sense about funny phenomenon, not all amusement can be realized by people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In addition to the surface, semantic meaning of words in comedy, knowledge about a people's cultural beliefs, national customs and behavior patterns is beneficial for outside people to enjoy a comedy of another nation. Sometimes, the double meaning of phrases may be the source of humor. It requires a high level of comprehension to realize where the humor exits.

The participants' responses to the question revealed that they were aware of the function that linguistic knowledge plays in understanding humor in a s/f language. The

result also demonstrated that they were concerned more about enhancing language proficiency than about acquiring cultural knowledge.

**Question 6: Suppose you are going to write a term paper and hesitate at some topics. You ask a Canadian teacher for advice. But he/she insists that you decide on it by yourself. How would you interpret this behavior?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) The teacher does not take responsibility for the students' academic progress. | 16 | 26.7 |
| (B) The teacher is impatient with you because you take up too much of his/her time. | 9 | 15 |
| (C) It is not his/her business, so he/she is not obliged to advise you. | 19 | 31.6 |
| (D) The teacher wants you to be more independent and to take initiative in your own educational process. | 16 | 26.7 |

The four answer choices can be classified into two: choice D is the positive understanding of the teacher's behavior; the other three are negative impressions of the teacher's insincerity. Close to three fourths of the participants, 44 in number, did not show adequate knowledge of the common practices in North American educational institutions. The objectives of school education in North America are to train students to think and learn independently. The value of education lies in enabling individuals to tackle and solve problems on their own. This includes coming up with one's own questions concerning a subject-matter area, identifying fundamental issues, and devising a plan of investigation. Teachers are there, not to hold the students by the hand and instruct them each step of the way, but to offer them guidance and suggestions and to help inspire, develop, and refine student ideas.

In the East, in the eyes of students, teachers should be all-knowing and a source of ideas and knowledge. Whenever students get stuck in the process of learning, teachers are supposed to assume responsibility to provide guidance by offering concrete ideas as to how students get rid of the difficulties confronting them. This may be why some participants interpreted the teacher to be insincere and irresponsible.

**Question 7: Do you have any problems or difficulties in face-to-face communication with native English speakers? If yes, please specify some most serious cases.**

With reference to problems and difficulties in face-to-face communication, although a number of people thought they had not had any, 42 participants replied that they had had some. In summary , the following are some general communicative obstacles to East Asian ESL/EFL learners:

1. Sometimes native English speakers cannot understand the English sentences ESL/EFL users make.

   Twenty-two participants mentioned their frustrations on this point. A typical response among them was "I prepared my speech notes carefully with the help of all reference books available to me. Sometimes I discussed with others in our study group. However, I can tell that my teacher of English (a native English speaker) had difficulty understanding my presentation. To be frank, we are both frustrated."

2. Topics on jokes, literature, history, arts, fine arts, sports cannot be explored deeply between ESL/EFL users and native English speakers. This is partly due to the lack of common background knowledge and experiences and partly due to the limited vocabulary on the part of ESL/EFL users.

   The responses to Question 5 illustrated the problems. Some people gave more evidence when replying to this question. One student wrote, "My communication with native English speakers is confined to some common topics such as life habits and daily activities. Very seldom do we touch upon other fields. I know that ice-hockey is a popular sport in Canada. I would like very much to know about it though I won't learn how to play. But I simply cannot think of any word relating to the sport. When some Canadian fellow students talked with each other. I tried to join, but failed. Both lack of knowledge and of vocabulary are blocks to me."

3. Words ESL/EFL users select do not express exactly what they want them to mean. Likewise, some words and phrases in the sentences of native English speakers are puzzling to ESL/EFL learners, as they cannot get genuine meanings if they interpret them according to the definitions and explanations of dictionary entries.

   A number of people mentioned, "For the same meaning native English speakers use sentence structures, words and phrases which are different from what I can make according to grammatical rules. Without grammar things were even worse." One ESL learner wrote, "In some cases even if I consult the dictionary for every new word, I am

afraid that an accurate comprehension is beyond me. I doubt some meanings are unique to English, that is why we feel so difficult to comprehend from our perspective."

4. ESL/EFL users are not accustomed to the native English speakers' body language and other non-verbal ways of expression. As one participant replied, they are "not sure of w. they express each time I see the facial expressions and body movements of some native English speakers until I get clear understanding from subsequent verbal expressions. It seems to me, they are more inclined to use gestures and facial expressions than us." Eye contact was typical of the problems in this regard. Some ESL/EFL users do not like looking at other people at all times when speaking with them; nor do they feel at ease being looked at in this way. In oriental cultures too much eye contact is not encouraged and even warned against. A long time stare at others, especially in public or social settings, is traditionally and generally taken as a kind of disrespect and rudeness.

   This common practice seems contradictory to the illustrative example at the beginning of the dissertation. However, it must be realized that people subconsciously turn attention to something when they feel curious. China had remained closed to international communities until the late 1970s. When it began to open the door to the outer world, people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds came in for a variety of purposes. For many native Chinese people, especially those in remote inland areas, it was the first time foreigners appeared in front of them. The teacher who told the author her negative impression of people's looks went to work at a local college at that time. The historical background of her poor impression could explain to some degree why she was looked at by others.

5. Slang is very troublesome for ESL/EFL learners, as they often identify with the smallest elements in whatever they hear and see. This receptive manner is predominant in ESL/EFL learners' comprehension skills. However, this habit obviously blocks their access to the real meaning of slang. A key to understanding slang is a holistic point of view, i.e., the whole is more than the sum of its parts. In addition to this, the meanings of slang can rarely be found in ordinary dictionaries. An example was cited about the word "bad paper": "I never dreamt that 'bad paper' was 'non-sufficient-fund cheque' if my friend had not told me that."

**Question 8: Are you aware of any differences between native and non-native English and the characteristics of how native English speakers organize their sentences? Please give a few examples.**

In terms of how native English speakers organize speech, fourteen people gave positive replies, but did not cite any concrete examples to prove they understood. The rest showed ignorance of the way native English speakers organized information and expressed it, although they had been studying and working with English-speaking people for some time. One respondent found that native English speakers like to put forth principal information before giving accessory messages. This feeling was evidenced by the fact that main clauses are placed before all kinds of modifying clauses in most cases. As regards the differences between the way ESL/EFL users speak English and the way native English speakers express themselves, most participants felt that many differences existed. However, no one was sure of what such differences were. In fact, it is easy to feel the differences but not easy to explain the issue in detail. One response was, "I believe that I could tell more if I took note of every difference I feel or observe. However, it is impossible to do so as a learner."

The feedback to this question tells us that knowledge in this regard was not explicitly taught in the English classes which the participants had taken. Some people who were teachers of English in their home countries felt that this might be a blind spot even to the teaching personnel who are non-native English speakers. It is suggestive that there is much room for contrastive study of the target and native languages. If the result of relevant research can be applied to classroom teaching, it would definitely help s/f language learners clarify what they feel and find in this field, since the participants of this study showed that they had a vague feeling of the existing difference after studying for some time.

**Question 9: What is most helpful to your understanding, organization and expression of ideas?**

When asked how they understood and expressed linguistic messages, most participants thought that the knowledge of grammatical rules and lexicon played an active role. To sum up, 38 participants thought that English sentence patterns, grammatical rules, usage of individual words and phrases, and a large vocabulary were crucial to precisely understand others and organize and express one's ideas. But about one fourth mentioned that the linguistic knowledge which they had acquired before would not help them out in all communicative settings. Sometimes they could not catch the real meaning of some English

sentences even if they knew all the words. A number of respondents parenthetically made mention of their trouble in understanding and using euphemistic expressions as well as the derivative and implied or extended meanings of words. In fact the difficulty lies in the lack of knowledge of what is generally termed as idiomatic usage, which was roughly equivalent to what some participants mentioned about usage of words and phrases. Idiomatic usage is not governed by linguistic rules. Instead, it is culturally specific. The knowledge of these aspects is the key to fully understanding messages. They are not included in any one of the three focuses of the current s/f language education, i.e., grammar, lexicon and phonology.

I will go into the details of some specific examples provided by the respondents in the next chapter.

**Question 10: Are you interested in learning some cultural knowledge which is related to using and understanding a second/foreign language?**

Question 10 is pursuant to the issue which some preceding questions already touched upon. All participants made positive answers. The general response of the participants only demonstrates that personal experience of using the target language in communication with native speakers will likely make learners realize the role of cultural knowledge and therefore arouse or intensify the learners' interest in acquiring cultural knowledge.

It should be noted that participants had stayed in the English-speaking world for some time and gained some experiences in communication with native English speakers. As shown in Question 7, they encountered all kinds of difficulties in the real use of English. The realities of s/f language use make them aware that linguistic knowledge cannot satisfy communicative needs and cannot help s/f language learners/users over language barriers. To fully understand all messages in an s/f language, the learners must be able to perceive genuine meaning from the cultural and customary perspective of the target language. Ability to do this will beneficially complement the learners' pure linguistic competence in understanding and expressing. However, it is obvious from the participants' learning experiences that cultural knowledge is a weak link in their language programs. It is still a gap which demands attention and effort to fill up.

**Question 11: Which of the statements below most accurately describes your feeling about the Canadian culture after you have stayed in it for some time?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) It makes me conservative in being assimilated into an alien culture. | 7 | 11.7 |
| (B) It enables me to see the strong and weak points of my home culture and urges me to learn more English but not the Canadian culture. | 9 | 15 |
| (C) It encourages me to merge into the culture which I live in and to break away from my home culture. | 3 | 5 |
| (D) It helps me make up my mind to learn English well, to learn about the Canadian culture and to preserve my own cultural identity. | 41 | 68.3 |

With this question the author was to investigate whether personal stay in an English-speaking country would change Asian s/f language learners' attitudes toward culture learning and assimilation. Basically there were two sharply different answers. Forty-one people, which is well over half of the participants, selected choice D as expressing their feeling and desire best. They wanted to learn the target language, learn about the target culture, and at the same time keep their original cultural traits. Seven people (11.67 %) showed hesitation or reluctance to assimilate into an alien culture. Five per cent , that is, three participants, wanted to give up their original cultural identity and merge into the target culture. The remaining nine participants desired to learn the target language only.

One noticeable thing was that the desire to learn about the target culture was related to the ages of the participants. Youngsters are more inclined to a new culture with which they have contact. It is natural for young people to think that way since they have accumulated less experience with their own culture and therefore, are more flexible in learning about the world. On the other hand, older people preferred to retain home cultural traits and felt it hard to accept the notion of a new culture. This was especially noticeable when some cultural notions were opposite to those of their own, they almost always stood on their own side. They felt that staying overseas made them more aware of their own cultural identity. Actually, they set up intangible subjective defenses against any possible change. This psychological phenomenon is described by some cross-cultural researchers as "the ego-defensive function" (Brislin, 1990). Holding an attitude like this is to protect oneself from a harsh reality. In fact, it is a manifestation of prejudice. It is hard to find any correlating factors between the respondents' attitudes and the years of their stay.

**Question 12: What are the most frustrating things in your use of English in communication with Canadians?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) It is difficult to choose words and phrases to organize and to express ideas in the proper way. | 19 | 31.7 |
| (B) I can understand Canadian people but they cannot understand me. | 11 | 18.3 |
| (C) Language is not a major barrier. It is difficult to find topics of common interest. | 17 | 28.3 |
| (D) Others (please specify) | 13 | 21.7 |

Each of the designed choices were chosen by some participants. Word selection and sentence organization were the major problems in this regard. Because of insufficient ability to use the target language mutual understanding becomes difficult and problematic. Some people felt that the English learned in the classroom was not enough for real communication. The limited English they had acquired through language training only enabled them to express some basic ideas and talk about general issues. It helped little when they wanted to illustrate their ideas in depth. A striking contrast to the low productive competence was that some people were able to understand more both orally and in written form. Therefore, it was shown that among the four linguistic skills, the two receptive ones, listening and reading comprehension, were easier for the s/f language learners to reach than the other two productive skills, speaking and writing.

As regards the participants who chose the fourth option by making their own statements, their frustrations were various. To sum up, they felt that language barriers created communicative problems and prevented them from bringing their initiatives to full play in work and study. Some people mentioned that non-native fluency of English and foreign accents incurred discrimination. Other participants thought that the biggest frustration was the repeated effort necessary to make oneself clearly understood. Still others wrote that some native English speakers were impatient with non-native speakers and would not allow the latter enough time to communicate. Although some aspects of their frustration involved other fields such as politics and multiculturalism, s/f language proficiency turned out to be a common concern. Based on this, it can be asserted that s/f language competence is of utmost importance in an immigration country like Canada. Non-native English speakers are usually greatly concerned about upgrading their level of proficiency. Any effective solutions will attract attention from them.

**Question 13: What do you think of the culture of the English-speaking world?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) It has more strengths than East cultures. | 5 | 8.3 |
| (B) Basically it is just about the same as other cultures. | 8 | 13.3 |
| (C) I am not as comfortable with it as with my home culture; however, it is worthwhile to obtain some knowledge about it. | 37 | 61.7 |
| (D) It is so strange to me that it is absolutely impossible to arouse my initiative to get accustomed to it. | 10 | 16.7 |

Seventy-eight per cent of the responses concentrated on choices C and D. A single question like this does not suffice to indicate an hostile attitude. However, it is suggestive of a potential tendency that an alien culture does not find an easy way among s/f language learners from Asian countries. The psychological status could not be facilely revealed. Looking into the reasons from an historical perspective, we may get an impression that Eastern people generally prefer to stay in their places of ethnic origin. The historically formed long-term cultural trait makes people intrinsically resistant to something new and different from their own. When s/f language learners are immersed in the English-speaking world, they are likely to have psychological resistance to the culture which looks incompatible with their familiar home cultures. In some cases, such sentiment may develop into prejudice and stereotype which are harmful for many reasons. This issue will be dealt with in detail in the subsequent chapter. However, the participants were aware of their current existence in the culture of the English-speaking world, therefore they argued through their response to the question that it was advantageous to learn about the culture.

**Question 14: According to your experience what is your major weakness in using English?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) My trouble lies in English grammar. | 5 | 8.3 |
| (B) English pronunciation and intonation are the most difficult part for me to handle. | 12 | 20 |
| (C) I need further training in using words. | 43 | 71.7 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (D) My linguistic skills are well trained, however, I must learn to use the language from a cultural perspective. | 0 | 0 |

This question required participants to do some self-evaluation. Their responses might help locate weak areas in ESL/EFL teaching so that training programs might have a direction to go toward. As a result, 55 participants (91.7 %) did not regard grammar as a weak point. Forty-three people (71.7 %) had a demand for further training in using words. Twelve participants (20 %) thought pronunciation and intonation required more attention and practice. None chose the increase of cultural awareness as a matter of first importance. This reflected the status of culture education in the minds of general s/f language learners. Compared with intensifying linguistic skills they gave a decreased priority to learning the target culture. The overall response to the question was an indication of ordinary learners' preference when they are engaged in s/f language learning. It was also an indication of the deeply-rooted influence of the traditional s/f language teaching model. It demonstrated that when general learners learn a s/f language, they usually focus attention, time and energy on acquiring or enhancing linguistic skills for immediate practice (Richards, 1985). The reason why knowledge about the target culture does not attract much obvious interest is two-fold. The well-established currently dominant teaching model covers the function of cultural knowledge and it leads people onto the course of practicing and acquiring skills. The function of cultural knowledge cannot be easily felt, especially when learners are at initial stages and have little need or no opportunity to use the target language for real communication. In the context of the traditional approach of learning a s/f language, where linguistic competence is of utmost significance and is a determining factor and criterion to the success of s/f language education, it requires great effort to introduce cultural learning into s/f language programs. More participation in communication and use of authentic materials in classroom teaching might bring out the importance and usefulness of cultural knowledge to s/f language learners.

It is a good beginning step that some ESL/EFL learners have come to realize the necessity and usefulness of using cultural knowledge to interpret and organize messages. In addition, more academic research work has been directed to the role of cross-cultural understanding in s/f language education. Not only language educators, but also psychologists, applied linguists and sociologists are paying attention to the communicative problems in the use of s/f language. However, the influence of the traditional approach is tremendous because it has existed and prevailed in the field of s/f language education for a long time. It is not an easy task to change it and to infiltrate new ideas into the current

framework of s/f language education. Learners are unaware of the urgency of introducing cultural elements to linguistic competence because they have not experienced much benefit from doing so. This might explain why raising cultural awareness was listed in this questionnaire as the matter of least urgency.

**Question 15: What is an effective way to learn or upgrade English in your opinion?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) Create as many opportunities as possible to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing. | 18 | 30 |
| (B) All-round increase of linguistic skills together with the knowledge of the cultural traits which are related to language use. | 11 | 18.3 |
| (C) Keep the learners' native languages away to the maximum degree and concentrate on the target language only. | 10 | 16.7 |
| (D) Compare English and the learners' native languages to find differences and similarities. | 21 | 35 |

Twenty-one people (35 %) agreed that the contrastive method would best increase learners' knowledge of the differences and similarities between the target language and the learners' home language. Ten answers (16.7 %) focused on exclusive use of the target language. Eleven participants (18.3 %) thought that the training of linguistic skills should be combined with the development of cultural awareness. The remaining 18 (30 %) wished to concentrate on skill practice. The investigation showed that the currently prevalent language-skill-centered curriculum and classroom instruction were far reaching in its influence. When people are involved in s/f language education, they are consistently trained that way and gradually become neglectful of other useful approaches. There is no denying that s/f language learning is basically a skill training process. However, as it was theorized in the beginning chapter, language is the vehicle of thought and different languages are related with different modes of thinking. To learn a new language one has to learn about the culturally determined mode of thinking and its derivatives such as cultural customs, patterns of behavior and life styles so that understanding of the new language can become reliable and get onto the right track. Just as Cassirer (1962) said in *An Essay on Man*, "here it is not sufficient to acquire a new vocabulary or to acquaint ourselves with a system of abstract grammatical rules. If we do not learn to think in the new language all our efforts

remain fruitless" (p. 133). Again, most participants did not demonstrate much perception of the role of culture, it is more evidence of the long-term lack of attention to this issue.

**Question 16: Which of the following statements can best describe your purpose for learning English a second/foreign language?**

| Multiple-choice Answers | Number of Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| (A) A new language like English can help me know more about the advance of science and technology. | 7 | 11.7 |
| (B) English is the most powerful language compared to other languages. | 2 | 3.3 |
| (C) With a good command of English one can merge into the mainstream culture of the English-speaking world. | 1 | 1.7 |
| (D) Promotion in salary, rank, and social status becomes possible and easier if one is capable of using English as a s/f language fluently in either English- or non-English-dominant societies. | 50 | 83.3 |

Obviously, this question was designed to examine learners' motivation for learning an s/f language. As estimated, the overwhelming majority of participants, about fifty-seven (95 %), proved themselves to be instrumentally-oriented learners through their selected answers to the question. Among the three exceptional responses only one (1.7 %) was interested in integrating into the target culture while the other two (3.3 %) learned the language out of personal interest or admiration. This being the case, it is unrealistic and unwise to expect or demand s/f language learners to surrender their original cultural identities and to relinquish their native languages. In most circumstances s/f language is either taken as a school subject or learned for practical reasons. Without utilitarian purposes people can scarcely spend time and effort on learning a new language, because by nature human beings are reluctant to learn a strange tongue unless they are prompted by personal concerns. If a first language can serve all purposes well, there is no internal motive to work on a new language. This result attested to Gardner and Lambert's (1959) research conclusion on instrumental motivation (see Chapter One for details). Language is a tool, which people use to gain a variety of benefits for themselves. Because this principle is true in nature, s/f language teaching and learning can never cease, particularly in today's world, when cross-cultural communication gives more impetus to the desire and need for a second

language. In addition, many s/f language learners find it convenient and personally beneficial to learn a second language.

**Results of Interviews**

As a complementary step of data collection, a few interviews were arranged after the questionnaire investigation was completed. The interviewees were selected from among the participants of the questionnaire investigation. At the time I distributed the questionnaires, I purposefully inquired about future availability for interviews. Approximately half of the people refused to spend more time on the project for a variety of reasons: being too busy to afford time, being close to the end of their study program and preparing to move. After screening the replies to the questionnaire, I decided on the names of the prospective interviewees based on their availability.

**About the Interviewees**

Five participants were invited to take part in the interviews. They were Aaron, Bacon, Conan, Dalton and Esther. For reasons stated earlier, there was only one female person among them. Conan and Dalton had taught English as an s/f language in their home countries. Aaron, Bacon and Esther showed more interest in this research than others by providing long and detailed answers to the questionnaire. Dalton and Esther came from China; Bacon and Conan were from Hong Kong; and Aaron came from Singapore. Previously as a university teacher and currently as a graduate student, Dalton did some academic research in s/f language teaching and he had years of experience of teaching English as a foreign language at the post-secondary level. Although he learned English in a non-English-speaking context, he was very fluent and capable of commenting on s/f language education issues from academic perspectives. Esther was a student of engineering and a lab assistant for seven years. In her studies and work she had much contact with native English speakers. She had work as a supply teacher at the elementary school level for a short time before starting specialized studies. Conan was a teacher of English in Hong Kong before he came to North America to pursue his university degree. As a middle school teacher he also taught other subjects. Bacon completed his secondary school education in Hong Kong and therefore was aware of learning and using English as a second language there. Aaron picked up English from childhood and grew up in an English-Chinese bilingual environment. He was able to speak and understand Chinese, but unable to read and write it.

All participants signed consent forms allowing the author to use their opinions and comments in the thesis. The purpose of the interview was to expand, clarify and verify selected viewpoints on important issues contained in the questionnaire. The interviewees had no time constraint while filling out the questionnaire so that they were free to elaborate on what they thought.

Prior to the interviews, I sent a letter of introduction to the selected participants to review the purpose of the interview. In the letter, the five people were informed of specific topics to be discussed during the interviews. The topics suggested included their knowledge about s/f language education in their home countries, a description of their personal experiences of teaching or learning English, the situations surrounding the teaching of cultural knowledge in ESL/EFL programs, their attitudes toward learning cultural knowledge, and culture-related difficulties in learning and using a target language. The interview topics are included in Appendix B for readers' reference in further exploring the issues of cultural knowledge.

I assured them that their real names would not appear in any written form, they could avoid answering questions with which they were uncomfortable, and they would have the opportunity to expand, change or delete any comments they made. They were encouraged to express different viewpoints and provide their thoughts regarding relevant topics. In short, every effort was made to create a risk-free and comfortable interview environment.

Appendix E contains a sample of interview transcripts. As the five interviews were centered on the same topics, only one interview was included in the appendix. To cut down redundant information and to avoid unnecessary repetition, I decided to adopt a suggestion by an interviewee. Instead of making separate statements of each interview, I picked up the most relevant data and summarized the results of the five interviews. Below are the themes which were discussed in the interviews and summarized from the talks with all the five interviewees.

## Overall Situation of Current Second/Foreign Language Education

All five participants held that throughout East Asia today, English was the s/f language of greatest importance. As Dalton put it, this could be justified by two facts: "it has the largest number of learners/users and it receives the first preference when an s/f language is considered as an elective course." In many places, English has become a compulsory course in school. Aaron mentioned that English was actually the first language

for people in Singapore. The use of the language was common and was required in many places there. Generally speaking, people from Singapore had a fairly good command of English. The average proficiency was sufficient for communication purposes. Therefore, he complained,

> Now that many international students come to North America for academic studies this tendency is growing and will not cease in the future. At least, it can be expected that more students will come from Singapore. This is an economic and cultural contribution to North America. However, we are required to take TOEFL with students from other countries. But they do not speak English as the first language while we do. Even the title of the standardized test does not apply to our situation of language. So we Singapore students should be exempt from any proficiency tests like TOEFL.

Esther and Dalton said that over the past few decades China had established a huge and complete system of teaching English at secondary and post-secondary educational institutions. English teaching was common and achieved certain success. This could be evidenced by the high TOEFL scores obtained by many Chinese students. These scores were so high that even native English speaking teachers and the officials from the Educational Testing Services at Princeton were surprised. On some tricky testing items some people could outperform native English speakers, especially on selected grammatical and lexical items. However, learners concentrated on English study only for the purposes of achieving good school results and getting ideal job positions. In Esther's words, "It doesn't make sense to spend money, time and energy learning a foreign language if not for any particular purpose such as being admitted into a good university or recruited by a business company offering good salary and benefits." No matter what level of proficiency they reached, they would not use the target language out of school and job settings. As long as their proficiency could meet the requirements of study and work, learners/users would stay with it comfortably and there was no urgent need to upgrade. Even if people wanted to improve their English, time and energy were spent on linguistic skills and it was seldom that people thought of learning about the cultural traits of the English-speaking world. Dalton used his own case to illustrate.

> In my case, I learned a bit of the culture of the English-speaking world mainly through the reading of novels. In classrooms our teachers touched on this aspect only when they felt it necessary to say something about the background of a certain plot, a certain character and a certain situation so that students could have a better understanding of what they were reading, what was being discussed in class at that time.

Conan talked about the situation of teaching English in Hong Kong. There, English was a government-designated official language. In spite of the government language policy, "English teaching was not so time and cost effective as people imagined." I

attributed the unsatisfactory teaching to the "emptiness of bilingualism in Hong Kong." The reality of language use was that the majority of people spoke Cantonese Chinese, because most people have limited demand for English in their daily lives, study and work. On some official occasions English was the required language, but simultaneous interpretation or immediately subsequent translation of Chinese was always available. People were not inconvenienced in this respect. On the other hand, Hong Kong's colonial status as a key international commercial, financial and industrial metropolitan city required its residents to have a command of English. Conan said,

> Such a situation caused some pressure to ESL/EFL education. This was why English had been a required subject for school education all the time. Although the Hong Kong government designated Chinese as an official language in 1974, English teaching has not been improved very much. Even at school, nobody cares if you do not speak English.

The governmental demand for English and the public preference for Cantonese Chinese constituted a dilemma in ESL/EFL education in Hong Kong. This situation was peculiar to Hong Kong and it could best answer the question of why ESL/EFL education still remained weak there.

To sum up, English is the first priority among all foreign languages in East Asian countries and regions. This is the result of the language being more and more accepted worldwide as the common medium of communication. Due to the limited need for using the s/f language in social and daily life, most learners are concerned about achieving proficiency which is sufficient to meet their immediate practical purposes.

### Awareness of the Relevance of Cultural Knowledge

The popularity of English as an s/f language should have encouraged the inclusion of learning the cultural knowledge of the English-speaking world. However, the interviewees mentioned that although English teaching was underway everywhere, culture teaching was generally weak in the classroom. Bacon insisted that linguistic competence should be the focus of ESL/EFL teaching, because it sufficed to have strong linguistic competence of an s/f language in the society. He said,

> All school subject tests and proficiency tests were designed for testing learners/users' pure linguistic skills. As a student, the first and foremost objective of learning English should be to achieve good study results. No matter how familiar you might be with the culture of the West, it does not at all help improve your final exam scores.

He continued,

> The cultural knowledge about the English-speaking world was inaccessible in a non-English-speaking environment, because there were not many chances to have contact with the cultural traits. Moreover, general learners did not need to know much about the target culture, since they lived in the native cultural environment.

He thought that cultural knowledge was helpful to some research workers and people of high social status who had frequent contact with native English speakers. Aaron talked about the intimate relationship between culture and language and the usefulness of learning about a target culture in an s/f language program. However, he thought that culture was difficult to teach and learn through classroom instruction. In his words,

> It is advantageous for a learner of English to learn about cultural traits, particularly what is impolite and rude. But culture is comprehensive. Almost everything in life is cultural. Then a question: what is the starting point of teaching culture?

On the whole, the interviewees thought that it was not so urgent and necessary to introduce cultural knowledge into s/f language courses. As far as time was concerned, there was no direct and obvious advantage to spending learning time on this aspect. For general learners, their contact with the target language was not that much. The limited time should be spent on the training of linguistic skills. This attitude showed that when cultural knowledge was compared to linguistic skills, people preferred the latter.

### Resources of Learning Target Culture

It was a shared opinion of the interviewees that the resources of learning target cultures were limited in East Asian ESL/EFL classrooms. The reasons for this were many. Dalton taught English as a foreign language for many years. He admitted that he did not have much knowledge about the culture of the English-speaking world before living in the West the last few years. He believed that his case was neither rare nor unique. Since teachers had limited or no knowledge in this respect and could not "be" the resources, how could they expect students to learn about target cultures through classroom teaching? He said,

> The problem is that most non-native-speaking ESL/EFL teachers do not know much about the target culture themselves because they do not have adequate personal experiences and do not receive any training in this field. To make a metaphor, they are empty pails themselves; how can you expect them to pour out water to students?

Dalton recalled his experience of learning English and said that he had learned about a bit of the culture of the English-speaking world mainly through reading.

> In classrooms our teachers touched on this aspect only when they felt it necessary to say something about the background of a certain plot, a certain character and a certain situation so that students could have a better understanding of what they were reading, what was being discussed in class at that time.

Esther held that casual chats with people who used to stay in or had come from English-speaking countries and reading feature reports occasionally seen in newspapers and magazines were the ways to learn about the English-speaking world. In her own words, "it is always interesting to hear those overseas people talking about the language and cultural barriers they experienced."

Aaron suspected that s/f language learners would benefit from contact with native speakers of the target language. He had studied with native English-speaking teachers for some time, but gained little about the cultural traits of the English-speaking world. Instead, he said, "you cannot imagine how much I learned about the West from television cartoon series. Don't think cartoon programs are for children only." Television programs taught him a lot. According to his experience, English movies, television series, plays and some other television programs were cultural resources. A native English speaker without special training in culture teaching would not be more helpful in this regard than a well-trained non-native speaker, for the latter was specialized in the skills of collecting and teaching useful information about the cultures involved.

The interviewees maintained that the lack of appropriate teaching materials on cultural traits was a problem in teaching and learning. It added to the inaccessibility of the target cultures for s/f language learners. In their opinions, reading comprehension was a useful skill for learners to absorb information and knowledge. This was particularly applicable to ESL/EFL learners in a non-native English speaking environment. Unfortunately, well-compiled textbooks and other relevant reading materials were hardly available for classroom instruction although these were very essential resources. If materials of this kind were available, learners could at least self study cultures through extensive reading which had the function of "killing two birds with one stone": s/f language learners could not only get some basic concepts of the target culture, but also enhance their reading skills.

### Attitudes Toward Target Culture

This topic was the continuation of the relevant questions in the investigation of the first stage. The author got an impression after reading the replies to the questionnaire that a

number of participants were sensitive to alien cultures. To be more exact, they were not comfortable with the cultures in which they were living at present. I imagined that this general attitude made an impact on the people's motivation for learning about the target cultures. I intended to find out more about these attitudes through the interviews.

Out of the five interviewees, three mentioned that it was difficult for them to adjust to the new culture. They did not have any intention to merge into the mainstream culture of North America. In Dalton's words,

> Although I feel that it is good for non-native-English speakers like me to acquire some knowledge about the culture of the North American English-speaking world, I do not intend to give up my own cultural beliefs and habits. It is not because I am preservative. Canada is a multi-nation country. The government advocates multiculturalism.

When asked to explain why this was the case, Bacon talked about the importance of retaining one's own cultural identity when away from one's home country. He thought that it was a shame to either lose one's home culture involuntarily or to give it up to a new culture voluntarily. Especially when living far from one's own cultural environment, one must be on the alert against any temptation or tendency to be assimilated into a new culture. Otherwise, it was no good to go back to one's own native place. He said,

> Suppose you are back home and your likes, dislikes and habits are different from others, say, your family members and friends, how would you feel about the difference? If I were in that case, I think I would feel embarrassed.

It would be a difficult to have that experience. Everyone must keep social relations with the members of the same ethnic group. Being alienated from them would bring out a feeling of loneliness and isolation.

Aaron and Esther adopted an open attitude toward Western culture though they avoided making comments on whether they were for or against the desires to merge with the target culture. They contended that Western culture was characterized by being comparatively more straightforward and direct. It contained more original human nature. Compared to Eastern culture, which had become more complex than ever, it had fewer masks making things relatively simple and easy to deal with. Under the influence of these strengths of Western culture inter-personal relationships were in general harmonious. In their opinions, that was a major contributor to creating high working efficiency and democracy. Esther commented, "apart from language barriers, I enjoy dealing with white people. They are not so complicated as some of our country folks." They further pointed out that it would yield benefits to Asian ESL/EFL learners if they could learn from Western cultures. Aaron said,

> I think it will cause no harm but only benefits to ESL/EFL learners if they begin learning about or following the West culture. Since they are now staying in Canada and English is the dominant language, why not to know about it? You can hardly improve your English unless you live with Canadians.

Looking into this in more detail, he would rather call this psychological characteristic "prejudice" ("chengjian" in Mandarin Chinese). In the next chapter, I will elaborate on this cross-cultural psychological phenomenon.

It can be seen from the above presentation that there were two kinds of attitudes toward Western culture among Asian ESL/EFL learners. It must be reiterated that one thing was common between these two "camps": both held that there would, at the very least, be no harm obtaining some basic knowledge about Western cultural traits. The difference lies in that those who were not willing to merge at the expense of their own cultural identities only wished to get some perceptual and rational knowledge about Western culture while those who were really interested in Western culture desired either to assimilate and merge into Western society or to make good use of cultural knowledge for securing advantages and benefits.

### Culture-Related Difficulties in Language Learning and Use

By this topic I intended to categorize the Asian ESL/EFL learners' difficulties in learning the target language and culture. The information and data provided during the interviews were from the linguistic and cultural perspectives.

They said that when the sentence structures of English were in keeping with the corresponding structures of their native languages it did not create much trouble. Normally in this case, learners could understand correctly and make appropriate responses. Dalton said,

> When the word order in a sentence is similar to Chinese, it causes less difficulties. I find that my reading speed is higher when the sentences in the original texts are not very different from the sentence structures of Chinese. But if too many idiomatic expressions appear or there are less similar structures, I often feel that understanding costs more time and therefore the speed is reduced.

Sometimes the literal meaning of every word was simple and easy to understand, but the overall meanings of the native English speakers' utterances were hard to understand. In other words, the literal meanings of words did not match the context in which the words appeared; the learners had difficulty getting the real messages from the literal meaning of

words. Examples of difficulties pertaining to euphemistic expressions, set phrases, idioms and slang were cited.

Another difficult point discussed was the different ways to organize information. Conan mentioned his roommate's trouble getting the gist of reading materials when he went over some academic articles written by Western scholars though he had a clear mind about the structure of every sentence. He said,

> Each time he asks for help, I find his trouble is not with individual sentences. Instead he is not clear about why the information in texts must be interpreted in certain ways. Although my English proficiency is better than his, I am not in a position to explain that clearly. Personally I don't think it is a problem of vocabulary and grammar. If I wanted to express the same meaning, I would not organize sentences that way. There must be something behind it. It requires more expertise to do it. Maybe such phenomenon is a good topic for your research.

Esther noticed that native English speakers used different words to express the same meaning, depending on the situations. She added by citing a few examples,

> Such words as 'kids', 'bucks' and 'guys' rarely appear in TV news reporting programs. You may often hear these words when you look at garage sales. Whenever there is a need for these meanings, you will most likely hear 'children', 'dollars' and 'people' or 'folks'. If you would like to verify, you may as well watch TV for sometime to see whether you can catch any word like these. In her opinion, the choice of words varied from person to person and, more importantly, from occasion to occasion.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that when a word or phrase seemed to refer to the same thing but actually did not, it became another source of confusion to ESL/EFL learners. Some concepts and things exist both in the East and the West; however, the coverage of meaning and cultural messages were different. Such differences could not be found by EFL/ESL learners without the help of dictionaries. Examples of this will be analyzed in Chapter Four.

The interviewees expressed one common frustration in using English. This feeling was said to be shared by many other ESL/EFL learners. In communication with native English speaking Canadians, they often experienced difficulties in expressing what they wanted to. They organized sentences according to the grammatical rules of English. To their disappointment, native English speakers could not understand their so-called grammatical sentences. Such miscommunication was especially obvious when they had complex ideas to express. Dalton thought that it was not the problem of linguistic skills but one of cultural difference. He further expressed that there were indeed some differences in ways of thinking and organizing information between Eastern and Western peoples. Although most concepts were identical and the basic information structures were similar or

close to each other, each ethnic nation had some unique sentence structures. The information expressed in these unique structures could be incomprehensible for non-native speakers of the language unless the information receiver knew these special structures through learning. For this reason, s/f language learners/users would encounter difficulties in cross-cultural language communication. For s/f language education any such difference should be made clear to learners so that communicative barriers could be reduced to the minimum.

Euphemisms and connotations are another source of difficulty. Esther and Bacon expressed that it was inconvenient for ESL/EFL learners that the meaning of some words could not be learned through dictionaries. An English word entry in dictionaries usually has several listings of meaning. Often it was still difficult for them to determine the exact meaning of some words even if they tried to make the meaning out of the contexts. Only cultural background knowledge could help them out. In Esther's words, "I believe that if you know more about the cultural and historical background of some euphemistic and connotative expressions, these things are not troubles at all."

### Age and Teaching Methodology

The age of learning an s/f language was an incidental topic dealt with during the interviews. Related to this topic were the comments and feelings regarding the s/f language teaching methodology. Some interviewees like Aaron had not thought much about the topic before they participated in the research project. When I asked for their comments on the optimal age for learning an s/f language, most of them preferred to have an early start because they felt that they had better memories when they were young. Dalton and Esther did not start learning English until they were eighteen years old. They felt a strong influence of the native language. Each time they organized ideas in sentence form, they had to go through a process of translation no matter how hard they tried not to think of it. Based on his learning experiences Dalton said,

> It is hard for an adult learner to avoid translation at the beginning stages of learning a new language....This is because you have mastered your first language already and therefore cannot get rid of the influence from your first language. When you want to say something, you simply don't know how it is expressed by native speakers. What you can do in this case is naturally to organize your ideas according to the grammatical rules you have learned. In this way you are actually doing translation.

This feeling is in keeping with what Bain (1991) illustrated when he described the three stages of acquiring a new language. The participants agreed with the viewpoint that

translation was a manifestation of the influence from the first language. Since the first language could not be avoided, they suggested making use of it to facilitate learners' acquisition of the target language.

As regards the most effective teaching methodology, the interviewees did not say much about it. Bacon and Esther said that grammar was an emphasized part of teaching when they were in the s/f language classrooms. Bacon said,

> Although I have stayed here for three years, I still have difficulties in listening and speaking. I don't think I am a slow learner. My difficulties only reveal that teaching grammar cannot help learners overcome all difficulties.

Esther added, "I am confident of my writing ability. I feel my writing is stronger than speaking. I think my knowledge of English grammar helps me out in writing." Unlike child learners who can "acquire" a new language, they thought that they had learned the grammatical knowledge consciously and with the help of the knowledge of the first language. In the course of learning they compared the target language with the first language, although such comparison was not always perceivable and felt by others. They maintained that some teachers encouraged learners to consciously think in the target language; in fact, it was "almost impossible to do so, if your first language was ready for use. "This was particularly difficult to do at the initial stage of learning," Esther concluded.

**Summary**

Based on the collected information and data presented above, it can be concluded that most s/f language programs in East Asia take English as their first choice. In many places English is a required school subject. This situation, plus the worldwide tendency toward increasing use of English, enabled this language to become the one with the largest number of learners.

In general, East Asian ESL/EFL education is grammar-centered. This is the result of historic development. It is characteristic of the learners' strengths in using grammatical rules to organize information. While remaining a school subject, English is not used much in people's daily lives, except in a few countries such as Singapore. Most learners are attracted to English for various utilitarian purposes. Little practice of the target language and limited contact with native English speakers causes people to concentrate on "book English" only. When there is a need to use it for real communication, people are mainly concerned about enhancing linguistic skills. With the grammar-translation method prevalent in ESL/EFL education, this situation has existed for a long time, making the grammar-

translation method prevalent in ESL/EFL education. On the other hand, grammar helps learners much in understanding and expressing ideas.

The real use of English in cross-cultural communication can make learners realize the limitation of linguistic skills. Grammatical knowledge is useful, but it is by no means a guarantee of correct understanding. High proficiency in English helps one to receive and produce messages on the one hand, but it does not work effectively at all times and under all circumstances. In many cases, comprehension of the real meanings cannot be made from the literal meanings of the words. It requires understanding situations where language communication takes place and knowledge about the speakers' cultural norms, social behavior patterns and lifestyles. These aspects are manifestation of the role of culture in cross-cultural language communication.

ESL/EFL education in East Asia still falls short of teaching cultural knowledge. A large number of learners are weak in understanding messages from the perspective of Western culture. In addition, responses to the questionnaire and interviews revealed that the classroom focus on linguistic skills confined people's attention to acquiring specific language skills at the expense of learning about Western culture. Some people hold stereotypic notions and negative attitudes toward Western culture. Lack of learning resources aggravates the situation.

For adult learners, the currently-prevalent grammar method is effective. When one begins to learn a new language with the fully-acquired first language, it is impossible or extremely difficult to get rid of the influence of the first language. The first language helps adult s/f language learners in some ways. It is wise and practical to make good use of the learners' first language. However, it requires much effort to integrate culture teaching with the training of linguistic skills.

The next chapter will go into a further analysis of the salient themes which have emerged in this chapter.

# CHAPTER IV

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSES: ISSUES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

The results of the questionnaire and interviews presented in the preceding chapter disclosed some themes which proved to be common concerns for s/f language learners/users, namely, the role that cultural knowledge plays in s/f language education, some areas where culture teaching is needed in ESL/EFL programs in Asia, some difficulties s/f language learners face when interpreting native speakers' messages, and some attitudes Asian s/f language learners hold towards western culture. In view of their relevance and significance to s/f language education and cross-cultural communication, I think that they deserve further discussion to examine or verify some relevant theoretical viewpoints. In this chapter, I shall make some interpretations and comments with regard to the findings of the data collected.

On the whole, the experiences of the participants lends supportive evidence to the essence of culture: it is a guiding force to its members and it has coagulative ability in a society. Since the participants were not specialized in social sciences and humanities research, they cannot be expected to have a clear notion of what culture means. However, they grew up in a cultural environment which shaped their behavior patterns, modes of thinking and life styles. Not only their social behaviors and thinking but also their performance of language were governed by cultural influences. This can be seen from their responses to the questionnaire and their interview data. For instance, in their homes they preferred to speak their native languages or dialects. Although all of them learned English as an s/f language at school and were fully aware of the usefulness of the target language to their further education, careers, academic research, professional activity, business, international communication, entertainment and other possible fields where English is involved, they did not practice it out of school of their own free will. This would imply that although English is the preferred s/f language in Asia, it is learned primarily for "instrumental" purposes (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, 1972).

The hidden prohibitive force comes from the culture in which they live. As is self-evident from the participants' background information, dominant in their previous living environments are their traditional cultures. Naturally related to the cultures are the heritage languages which the participants learned as their mother tongues and used all the time in their daily lives. Cassirer (1962) says that language has a fundamental psychological

characteristic. The emotive power of one's native language is embodied by the lingering preference of words from the home culture. The well-completed acquisition of the functions of language enable people to perceive the world as a coherent, stable place in which to live and act. In the process of the questionnaire and interview investigation the participants showed an awareness of the usefulness of cultural knowledge in using the target language. On the other hand, they still focused their emphasis on linguistic skills. This is likely results from the long-term influence of the traditional skill-oriented teaching model and the rewards bestowed by institutional structures (e.g. examinations focus on this area).

Preference for the familiar native language always prevails in one's home culture. In this regard it may be noted that although ethnically Chinese is the native language for the majority in Singapore, people often speak English no matter whether they are at school or at home. A possible reason for this phenomenon is that English is the government-designated official language. In the early days of Singapore, English was incorporated into all social institutions, and was mingled with the cultures there. Today, English has substantially become the first language, or at least one of the first languages, for most residents of Singapore despite the prevailing non-Western culture. This is particularly true for the younger generation. Although the dominant culture is non-Western, people use English as a common communication tool. Since language reflects its culture, the English spoken there contains some characteristics which are peculiar to Singapore and are not the same as the common features of English spoken by Western English speakers. The most typical evidence can be found in the pronunciation and intonation of the Singapore speakers of English. Another indication in favor of this point is that while speakers of English in Singapore use standard grammatical linguistic structures in their expressions, fewer western idiomatic forms are used.

A Singapore participant talked about his personal experience in dealing with Canadian people. Reduced as the language barrier was, he often felt confused about the use of some words by Canadian people. When I asked for details, he cited the example of using the word "refill." This word is more often used by Canadians than by Singapore people to mean "a product packaged to replace the contents of a container" (*Webster's II Desk Dictionary*, 1988). In oriental languages, the word can be used for liquid things, but is seldom used for solid things such as "refilling the value of a copy card." To his way of thinking, "the difference is in fact the habits of choosing words; If we have more contact with Canadians or other Western English speakers, such word usage will appear in Singapore too." However, he did not think of anything related to cultural influence. Since

people from Singapore are east-oriented in their mode of thinking and behavior patterns, they are intrinsically east-minded. Their use of English reveals their oriental cultural background.

Examples such as this are many. The phrase "morning person" is another example. One participant told the author that he had tested some of his friends to see if they could understand the phrase and most were confused. It does not mean that there is no such concept in the minds of oriental people. The point is that Eastern and Western people use different ways to express the same concept. In the above case, oriental people express the same meaning in the form of a sentence, instead of a phrase. The Chinese sentence "ta xiguan zai shangwu zuoshi" is equivalent to the English concept "morning person", but literally means "He is used to doing things in the morning."

These examples are the evidence which refute the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, that is, different languages divide up reality in different ways and language determines the shape of thought, guides the direction of thought and in return is influenced by different patterns of thought. It shows that different people view the same thing from different angles; they have different starting points and focuses of attention. The different points of view result in different modes of thinking; on this basis people use different ways to express their thoughts. Once the ways of expressing are accepted and recognized by a society, they become a social convention for every member of the society to follow. Linguistic conventions are culture specific. These unique ways of structuring, organizing and expressing messages are a component part of culture. They play a role in the speech community of the language and are adapted by the culture. To learn a new language one must learn about these uniquenesses, for they are often trouble spots in the course of learning and use.

**Culture Is a Determinant of Language Use**

Language is an integral part of culture. Some social scientists (Lyons, 1981; Barthes, 1984) consider language to be the corner-stone of culture. Were there not language, they maintain, culture would not exist and be known. From another perspective, it can be said that language is influenced and shaped by culture; it reflects culture. Reciprocally, language also influences and shapes culture. The interaction between the two was discussed in Chapter One.

In the broadest sense, language is the symbolic representation of a people, and it comprises their historical and cultural background, their approach to life and their ways of

living and thinking. In this project, English is spoken by all participants but is not their native language. The investigation shows that they tackle those culturally awkward communicative situations on the basis of their own culturally determined patterns of behavior. Because their responses situations were the best and most appropriate choices in their opinions and to their cultural norms, misunderstandings and even conflicts with those who are not familiar with Eastern culture become possible. Clearly they are in Bain's (1991) second stage of s/f language learning , a stage characterized by an uneasy alliance of the two languages.

A typical example, in this respect, is the response Esther chose to make when she was unable to answer her teacher's questions. She held that in a learning setting in Asian countries, a student would feel ashamed when he/she could not give answers to the teacher's question in class. This feeling is often displayed by the student sitting silently with bowed head. She said, "no matter how hard you urge the student to try to answer again, he will not follow your instruction. What is more, he will not readily admit to others that he cannot answer." By no account is this attitude related to the student's refusal of the teacher's request or his/her thinking scornfully of the teacher, except in extreme cases. Maintaining silence is just one cultural form of handling embarrassment in the East.

In school settings, a good attitude to classroom instruction or the ability to memorize what is taught in class are responsibilities which students are supposed to take. When a student fails to answer questions in an examination or quiz, that irresponsibility becomes a source of embarrassment and unease. If one knows this cultural feature, it is not hard to accept and understand a student's reaction to the difficult situation. Esther's and others' responses verify that people's speech behavior is formed on the basis of the culture which they acquire while growing up. This tenet is well illustrated by the structure of particular speech behavior known as "conversation," which was proposed by Grice (1975). Grice argues that ordinary conversations are governed by a certain set of conversational rules, which he refers to as ' maxims" (see the footnote of Chapter One). Here, the conversation should not be narrowly defined as verbal exchange. Instead, it should include non-verbal speech behaviors. In order to keep conversations flowing, these rules must be mutually shared and observed. Once any or all of them are violated at a given point in a conversation, misunderstanding or breakdown of the conversation may occur.

As mentioned by Conan, an interviewee,

> People usually begin conversations with some common greetings. But if you understand these greetings from the word meanings you have misunderstandings. When I first met people in Canada to talk as

> sometimes confused about their intentions. I think they were confused about my opening remarks too, because I started with what I thought appropriate.

Such greetings are not governed by linguistic rules. Instead, people start conversations according to the cultural customs to which they are accustomed. Therefore, the topic of these conversation openings must be interpreted culturally, not literally. "How are you?" as a conversational opener in English is thus mutually understood by the participants as not being an inquiry into the state of one's health. Likewise "ni chiguo fan lema?" which means "did you eat your meal?" as an opener in some Asian languages is not a genuine query about one's eating habits.

In both cases, the point of the conversation opener is to "warm up" for a suitable pattern of interaction. In each particular case the intention of opening a conversation is expressed from the speaker's own cultural customs. For an s/f language learner, the target language is a new means of expression. For a long period of time when beginning to learn an s/f language the learner can only organize messages and information in accordance with his/her native cultural customs. Before assimilating adequate cultural awareness, s/f language learners will stay with ways of organizing and expressing information in light of the customs of their home culture. In other words, the learners' level of proficiency does not help much to improve the case. Proficiency, the purely linguistic component of one's communicative competence, is the knowledge of how sentences are created as grammatical linguistic units for expressing meaning. It does not tell the users how to create proper speech behaviors, or termed academically as speech acts (Searle, Kiefer and Bierwisch, 1980), such as greetings, requests, apologies, denials and so on, to successfully realize communicative goals.

Here, it must be pointed out that, in general, improper speech behaviors, although usually unexpected, are not intentional. In most cases, they are caused by people who do not speak the same language or code and therefore do not share a common culture system. All parties base their expressing and understanding of the messages on their specific knowledge about the mother tongue and native cultural notions. Insufficient awareness of the other party's language and culture prevents one from perceiving a situation from the other person's perspective. This deficiency likely results in the inability of an s/f language learner to understand the linguistic message of the target language in a correct way. Judging from this, we can see that in a non-target-culture environment, success of s/f language learning cannot easily take place hand in hand with developing awareness of the target culture, because the mainstream language used for actual communication is not the learners' target language and does not reflect the target culture.

As displayed in Figure 1 in Chapter One, by speaking the native language the learners remain in a system of home culture and retain the perception mode and cognition style of their own society. As a result, their comprehension is confined to the boundary of the home language and culture. Their speech acts are formed on the basis of the customary practice of the home culture. This can be seen from the participants' responses in the questionnaire and interviews. When the notions of the home culture happen to overlap with those of the target language, understanding gets onto the right track and speech behavior looks and sounds natural and normal. Otherwise, either the learners themselves feel lost in comprehension or the native speakers of the target language might feel the learners are behaving in an inappropriate or even outrageous way. The feeling manifests itself as linguistic barriers or cultural inappropriateness. The decline of such feeling is gradual (through the process displayed in Figure 2 in Chapter One) and results from an increase of both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) contends that language makes the person as much as the person makes language. Implied in this saying is that because language is encompassed in culture, speakers of a given language will unavoidably bear all or part of the cultural characteristics of that language and their speech behaviors cannot go beyond the boundary of cultural norms. With adequate familiarity with a culture both in its historical and contemporary forms, one is not supposed to have much trouble understanding the speech and behaviors of speakers of the language. This substantial change will not occur before the learners reach the final stage displayed in Figure 3 in Chapter One.

The main point which needs to be stressed here is that language and culture interact and that understanding of one requires understanding of the other. Because one's speech behaviors are formed and guided by cultural customs, s/f language learners must pay attention to the development of awareness of the target language. A sound knowledge about a culture depends mainly on a command of the language intimately related to the culture. One can never know enough of a culture if he/she does not have a command of the language. Likewise, one cannot learn and use a language well without knowledge about its culture. And both are in a constant state of change.

### Mismatch Between Linguistic Elements and Contextual Meanings

Sociological and anthropological research shows that cultures are unique. Cultures are diverse, so are languages. The diversities of cultures and consequent differences of

languages lead naturally to difficulties for s/f language learners in the performance of the target language.

This theoretical viewpoint was evidenced by the participants' firsthand feelings while living in Canada and getting involved in direct communication. In answer to a question about whether some difficulties exist in language use and whether these difficulties are linguistic or cultural in nature, quite a number of people expressed that one frequent and obvious difficulty was that they failed to match the literal meaning of words with the real intended sense of the speakers. These participants thought that the sentence structure in which the words were placed did not constitute a problem to them. Word meaning was clear too. However, the context indicates that their understanding did not hit the point. Something else is meant beyond the words. To put it simply, denotation of the words is clear, but contextual meaning (connotation) is beyond reach.

A mismatch such as this is due to the lack of awareness of contextual situations which are characteristic of the target culture. The participants' feelings corroborate the following quotation by Nessa Wolfson (1983):

> Since how people speak is part of what they say, language learners may be unable to interpret the meaning of an utterance even though they 'know all the words'. Worse, they may interpret what they hear according to the rules of speaking of their native language, thus frequently misunderstanding the speaker's intention and perhaps perceiving insincerity or offense where none was meant. (p. 62)

Contextual meaning is often missed and understanding becomes more problematic especially when proverbs, idioms, sayings, set phrases and even slang and euphemisms in the target language are contained in utterances. All these linguistic elements are hard nuts for s/f language learners to crack. Being the products of culture, they bear abundant cultural background messages. Understanding of these linguistic elements requires one to stay away from the notions of the home culture and to penetrate surface meanings of the target language through to the cultural core. This can hardly be realized by reading only the individual component words. A story was told by a foreign student. She was sitting by a window reading a magazine. Suddenly, she heard someone yelling "Look out!", so she stuck her head out the window. Just then a board hurled down from above, narrowly missing her. Half in anger, half in fright, she looked up. There was a man on the roof doing repairs. "Didn't you hear me call 'look out'?" the man asked. "Yes, and that's what I did", she replied. Whether the story is true or fabricated, it illustrates the common problem with idioms for the s/f language learners. It is another example of the difficulty of understanding linguistic units like idioms from the individual meanings of all component

words unless people perceive them as a whole according to the contexts in which they are used.

Some participants talked with deep feeling about their difficulties in perceiving the genuine sense of such linguistic units. As one of the interviewees Dalton said when talking about his feelings on the mismatch between literal and actual meanings,

> "Some other cases are different. Idiomatic usage, set phrases, slang and conventional ways of expression are another source of learners' difficulty. On this point, if a learner knows more about the cultural background and historical context, then the extent of difficulty will be much less. Such language phenomena cannot be adequately explained from the pure linguistic perspectives. They have certain cultural or historical reasons behind them. Maybe no one is the authority in explaining or retrieving these reasons."

But in s/f language education,

> "General learners are only concerned about the current exact meanings and the contemporary usage. We do not intend to retrieve in what historical or cultural contexts or backgrounds these phenomena came into being. We only face the reality, that is, we cannot find or determine their meanings in dictionaries. Grammatical or lexical analyses do not help much in these cases. Most of time what we can do as learners is merely guessing.

Although guessing in the linguistic context may be accepted as a good and wise strategy for learning an s/f language, for the sake of accuracy it cannot provide much assistance. The person who makes a guess runs the risk of going far away from the original meaning. It is particularly risky to make a guess without logical reasoning and without considering all possible cues from the cultural background. On this point the Gestalt principle applies. Because the holistic meaning is not the total sum of the individual meaning of every word in some linguistic units, the method of single word understanding is doomed to incur a mismatch between the whole and its parts. These language elements should catch more emphasis in s/f language programs, for they appear very often and represent an active use of the target language.

### Teaching/Learning Methods

Seeing that many years of effort did not always yield expected fruit in the learning of the target language, a question with regard to the effectiveness of teaching methodology arises. The questionnaire showed that the prevalent methodology in ESL/EFL classrooms in the countries and areas from which the participants originated was the grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches. English grammar occupies the center stage in most classroom instruction. It attracts both teaching and learning attention. The two

approaches have long histories in s/f language education. In my opinion, all subsequent teaching methods and approaches draw on the experience of them. To consider culture teaching in s/f language programs it is beneficial to have some elementary knowledge of the major schools of teaching methodology. For a better understanding of the historical courses followed by the two approaches and their influences over the subsequent methods and approaches, Appendix D is included.

The grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual method are sometimes cited as a contrast to show the advantages of new-born approaches. "Approaches that do not normally result in the ability to communicate are grammar-translation, audio-lingual, and the various eclectic cognitive based methods" (Terrell, 1988, p. 66). It is held that communicative problems are derived from this tendency. When touching on the defects of the two approaches, Terrell continues,

> In the case of grammar-translation, students can translate from the target language to L1 and usually have a good knowledge of the grammar of the target language — especially if asked to perform on grammar tests. They normally neither speak nor understand the spoken language, nor should they be expected to do so. Students in an audio-lingual approach usually have excellent pronunciation, can repeat dialogues and use memorized prefabricated patterns in conversation. They can do pattern drills, making substitutions and changing morphemes using various sorts of agreement rules. What they often cannot do is participate in a normal conversation with a native speaker. (p. 66)

A critical analysis of these approaches will bring about a clear understanding of why it impedes s/f language learners' growth in communicative competence. There is no denying that the grammar approach has its own rationale as the footing of its existence. Otherwise, it would not be so firmly entrenched in the field of language teaching and learning in Asia. Looking retrospectively at the grammar approach, it has a long history of being used as a teaching method. In fact, it is the first approach labeled for use in s/f language teaching and learning. It was over one hundred years ago that it received a theoretical elucidation and summary.

It should be pointed out that since the grammatical approach has received many criticisms, the import of translation was re-evaluated and has gone down very much in use. Some teachers use it only as a means of checking the learners' progress of study and they do not see it as a necessary step. Such examples can be seen in Singapore where the grammar approach is by and large still in use, but no translation practice is included. Singapore is not an isolated case. In Hong Kong, translation is seldom done as an exercise of language skill or as a method of testing. There, the language teaching goes along the grammar approach in that the learners' mother tongue is heavily employed. However, the

aim of teaching grammar is to help the learners gain the ability to directly understand the original target language without translation. One feature of such direct understanding is that the learners are required to get rid of translation as a means of understanding and to get the gist from the original by using a clear awareness of the language structure, which is the outcome of grammatical analysis.

Theoretically, the above poses a question on the possibility of avoiding translation while using this method to teach an s/f language. Although some participants thought that it was possible, there is still room for further exploration and discussion. By intuition the author doubts that translation can be really avoided by learners who have acquired the native language and perceive the messages of the s/f language with the help of grammatical knowledge. Even if translation is not used as an exercise to practice the use of grammatical rules or as a medium to check the learners' comprehension, the transfer of the first language goes into the perception of the target language automatically. According to the contrastive analysis hypothesis, when one begins to learn a new language after having acquired the mother tongue, the established linguistic system of the first language will exert influence on the acquisition of the second language. In language contact, the automatic transfer of the first language structure to the s/f language performance is negative when the structures in the two languages are different, and positive when the structures are the same. Some psycholinguistic research in the 1970s (Dulay and Burt, 1974; White, 1977) also reveals the influence of the first language on the second one, especially for adult and beginning level children learners, though it proposes that such influence is not harmful and negative at all times. The transfer between the two languages can be explicit in the form of translation and implicit in the form of borrowing and code switching.

In comparing the participants' positive and negative feelings about the grammar approach, almost all participants spoke of the necessity of learning grammar in s/f language education. Those who received language training through the grammar approach felt that without the knowledge of grammar it was impossible for them to organize and decompose information received in the target language. This comment is positively in favor of the grammar approach. It shows the role which the approach has in the learners' acquisition of the target language. Furthermore, as Higgs (1984) shows, this position is common among s/f language learners.

The participants realized that too much reliance on grammar delayed the comprehension of new messages. They complained about the fast speed of utterances which native English speakers use while communicating with them. Behind the complaint is the fact that they could not quickly respond because they needed time to mentally analyze

the structure of the utterances they heard. The habitual reliance on language rules, not idioms, brings about a concomitant consequence: every phenomenon in language must come to grammar for its final judgment. A great satisfaction is felt in sentences that can be logically explained and justified by grammar.

While the grammar approach has its strength in upgrading the learners' competence to read and translate and in sharpening the learner' logical thinking and argumentation, its weakness consists of the over-use of the learners' mother tongue so as to obliterate the positive function of one's first language in s/f language learning, over-emphasis on the role of knowledge of language structure, and too much concentration on reading at the expense of the all-round cultivation of linguistic skills. To the traditional model of s/f language education the grammar approach has contributed much. This model can be illustrated in the following figure.

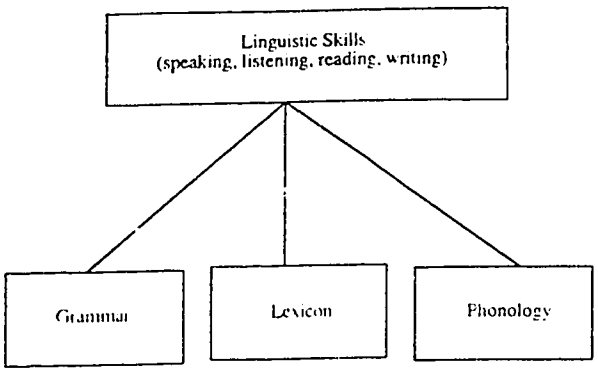


Figure 5 The Traditional Model of Second/Foreign Language Education

This model takes linguistic skills as its ultimate goal and the knowledge about the target language structure as its foundation. To acquire such skills learners need to have notions of the components of the target language. Skill practice is done on the basis of the perceptual and rational knowledge of the language structure. In other words, the skill practice is not merely imitation. Instead, it is based on the learners' knowledge of the linguistic components of the target language, which in general include grammatical, lexical and phonological elements. Therefore, the traditional model of s/f language education is skill-oriented and knowledge-based. The grammar approach meets the requirements of the model by laying emphasis on the learners' rational knowledge of the language structure. But the personal experiences of the participants of this study prove that rational knowledge of the target language, although useful and helpful, does not lead to communicative abilities. In view of this fact, the weight of grammatical knowledge must be re-evaluated if any attempt is made to improve upon the traditional model.

**Ages of Learning and Proficiency Levels**

This is another finding of the study. Some young participants were not as worried about their progress as the middle-aged participants, for they believed that young people would grow faster in later stages of language learning. On this point, the middle-aged people felt discouraged by the ages at which they started s/f language learning. For them age was an important determinant in learning success. They were biased against old age in learning a s/f language. They could see no advantage of having a good mastery of a first language when it was applied to learning an s/f language. They had never heard about the advantages of older learners over younger ones.

It was found from the participants' self-evaluation that proficiency in s/f language was somewhat connected with learners' ages. The author noted that the speech of the older participants was characterized by phonological distortions or a general foreign accent; younger people were more fluent and more confident of being able to acquire sufficient proficiency in the future.

With reference to the relationship between age and success of s/f language learning, there are a number of theories in the fields of linguistics and s/f language education. Lenneberg (1967) postulates that age plays a decisive role in s/f language learning. There is a critical period after which the target language learning becomes tougher and there is no hope for learners to master it as they do the first language. The critical point of age is set around 14. After this age learners' organs of speech become less flexible and imitation of native pronunciation becomes less easy. However, learners past that age have advanced cognitive development which is described by Piaget as the formal operational stage. Since their acquisition of the first language is completed, the previous linguistic experience and the cognitive maturity give them an advantage in terms of the rate of learning. Such factors as anxiety, motivation, self-confidence also contribute to making them more self-conscious.

On the other hand, some theorists do not see age as a critical factor in the success of s/f language learning. They maintain that young people's s/f language acquisition is effortless and unconscious while older people acquire an s/f language by conscious learning. For example, Krashen (1981) summarizes the age differences in second language acquisition as the following:

1. Older learners are faster in the early stages of second language acquisition because they
   * are better at obtaining comprehensible input (conversational management);

* have superior knowledge of the world, which helps to make input comprehensible;

* can participate in conversation earlier, via use of first language syntax.

2. Younger learners tend to attain higher ultimate levels of proficiency in second language than do adults because younger learners have a lower affective filter.

Krashen's summary shows the advantages older learners have in s/f language learning though he is among those theorists who disagree on the determining role of age.

However, the participants who talked about their proficiency in ESL/EFL expressed a common experience and feeling that age was an important factor with regard to the increase of s/f language proficiency. The earlier s/f language learning starts, the better the result that will be achieved. On the basis of the research finding, the author holds that age has something to do with the proficiency of s/f language. There seems to be an optimum age for people to learn a new language. There does seem to be increased difficulty learning an s/f language after middle age. It is true that much research (Macnamara, 1973; Fathman, 1975; Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1978) shows that language aptitude increases with age up through college or university. Older learners make progress faster than their younger counterparts. However, just as s/f language performance of the participants in this study showed, one can hardly repudiate that few older learners can speak with pure native accents. In addition, older learners generally have difficulty in memorizing linguistic elements such as words and idiomatic expressions. In the performance of the target language, older people are usually below the young no matter whether fluency or accuracy of pronunciation and intonation is considered.

Low proficiency is mainly due to the slow progress of language skills, poor memorization of and limited assimilation of the knowledge of the structure of the target language or inadequate application of language learning strategies. Furthermore, lack of practice is also a factor which is responsible for learners' limited proficiency. Just as some older participants acknowledged, they wanted to learn English well for the benefit of their work, study and life; however, they simply didn't know how to make rapid progress. They had exerted themselves to the utmost, but the measured achievements were not satisfactory. To be specific, for example, they tried to memorize the new words and expressions. However, they failed to have a long-term memory of them. They tried consciously to use some idiomatic expressions in writing and conversation but they could not always be sure of correct usage. Repeated failure to achieve ideal results made them feel constraint in language use. They thought that it was age that stood in the way of making progress. They

admired young learners for their rapid progress after spending the same amount of time and energy on study.

### Cross-Cultural Encounters With Native English Speakers

As is clear from the participants' backgrounds, most had little experience with cross-cultural communication until they came to North America. What linguistic and cultural difficulties they encountered in the new world would be of reference value to the academic research of s/f language education. Exploration of their past experiences can also contribute to research by providing insights into some common sensitive problems.

### Prejudices, Stereotypes and Discrimination

At first sight, it is tough to know the extent of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. Few people were willing to give a quick response to this issue when tasked during this investigation. However, it is a major element with regard to the key problems in s/f language education and cross-cultural communication.

Prejudice and stereotype are two words which are in some cases interchangeable. One's attitude toward something is a form of manifestation for both. In broad terms, they refer to people's reaction toward a concept. In everyday language, they are related to people's feelings, beliefs, and readiness to act. The concept can be a person, group, event, object, or abstraction. According to McGuire (1969), there are three components by which attitudes can be analyzed: affective, cognitive and conative. The affective component refers to people's emotional reactions, or their "gut feelings". It can be summarized by people's subjective feelings of goodness or badness. The cognitive component refers to people's belief and information about the object. These may be totally correct from a person's own viewpoint but absolutely bizarre from an observer's perspective, or not based on factual information. The conative component refers to people's behavioral intentions toward the object. These might include a desire to or not to form friendships or a willingness to or not to spend several years in another culture.

Very often beliefs have affective overtones, and the combination of the cognitive and the affective is a good example of the interrelationships among the components. The belief that a certain group is lazy involves affect, since "lazy" is an emotionally laden adjective. Although there is consistency among the components, there are certainly exceptions, especially when actual behavior is considered. In cross-cultural relations,

people may have positive feelings about a target culture and its language but may not behave in a manner which conveys this. Some research literature (Brislin, 1981; Triandis, 1990; Berry, 1990) describes this phenomenon as the discord or friction between "in-group" and "out-group." Some people remain on the alert against so-called out-group culture, language and manners of behavior. They do that because of the in-group demand to maintain social distance, or simply they lack knowledge concerning how to approach and interact with people from a different background.

An understanding of these three components helps elucidate the differences among prejudice, stereotype and discrimination. Prejudice refers to a person's emotional reactions and thus represents the affective component. Prejudice may be formed with an absence of direct contact or materials about others. It is usually negative, often hostile, and not based on first t. Stereotype most frequently refers to a person's beliefs about out-group me s therefore a manifestation of the cognitive component. It is a categorization o idual elements concerned with people which masks differences among those elements. Stereotype does not necessarily contain something hostile and unfriendly. It is necessary for thinking since people cannot respond individually to the millions of isolated elements they perceive in life. They must group elements together into categories and then respond to the categories. Discrimination refers to a person's behavior which puts out-group members at a disadvantage and, consequently, represents the conative component.

It was found from the participants in this study that their reaction to out-group people tended to be unstable in their initial stages in North America. These ESL/EFL learners/users reacted with a variation of attitudes to different situations. They engaged in friendly, positive behavior toward out-group people in certain situations but held those same out-group people at an arm's length in other situations. The difference across situations seemed to be along a dimension of perceived intimacy of behaviors. In formal settings requiring decent behavior and etiquette, they acted in a friendly and positive manner. But it was less likely for people to go beyond the casual friendships. For most of the time, they just exchanged routine greetings and some basic information which does not involve any confidential personal data, i.e., one's life experience, history of work, or extent of education. One participant said that she did not believe that release of such information was helpful to mutual understanding or to further increasing each other's knowledge and trust. When the s/f language learners found that it was difficult to get cultural understanding from out-group members or when they felt discriminated against by out-group members, it was likely they developed unfavorable emotions toward the

mainstream society which they are in and negative beliefs about the out-group people whom they contact.

The s/f language proficiency may play a certain role in this regard. Low proficiency may not only cause fr on for all concerned, but also create or deteriorate into misunderstandings. W asked whether language barriers created a source of estrangement and frustration, about twenty people (33.3 %) said no and the rest (66.7 %) said yes. During the interviews some participants maintained that if s/f language learners could understand native English speakers fully and make themselves fully understood, cultural prejudices could be eliminated bit by bit and mutual knowledge could be increased gradually. In other words, they took low proficiency of language as the key point, contending that competence of s/f language was directly related with the extent of prejudice. Although such opinions are not in agreement with the author's beliefs, they represent some s/f language learners' thinking. While such conviction existed, some others held that prejudice was people's affective feeling; there was no reason to propose that it was due to insufficient language competence. To their way of thinking, prejudice came from the subconscious desire for self-protection and the lack of the knowledge about the target culture.

Objectively looking at the psychological state of the people involved in this study, it can be inferred that to a certain ext some of them were governed by a kind of prejudice and stereotype. The chosen answers to Question 13, "I am not as comfortable with it as with my home culture" and "It is so strange to me" were a clear indication of this psychological phenomenon. As a visible minority, a number of participants felt invisible discrimination in North America. Not only is this feeling unfavorable to their language performance, but it also exists as a hindrance for them to improve upon their cross-cultural awareness. Dalton talked about it when he said,

> Not a few people are disappointed after they try hard to merge into the Canadian social and cultural circles. They say the cultural separation can hardly be eliminated. That is one of the reasons why the conversations with native English speakers are often around the topics of some daily concerns ....Some people even say it is enough to be able to talk about some common issues, for it is unnecessary to further upgrade the level of linguistic proficiency.

A few people said that no matter how hard they tried to merge into the mainstream culture, they often found themselves isolated and separated from the Canadian social and cultural scenes. The feeling of being dislocated and transplanted into an entirely different environment often resulted in alienation, loneliness and encapsulation. It is this psychological status quo that prevents them from long and deep talks with native English

speakers and confines their talks to a limited number of ordinary conversation topics. Due to this consistent psychological displeasure they felt less inclined towards improving English than they used to before living personally in this alien land.

This experience supplied direct evidence to support Schumann's (1978) assertion that social and psychological distance between the s/f language learners and the target language group have the effect of either promoting or hindering the extent to which the s/f language learners will learn the target language. In his detailed exploration of acculturative influences, Schumann (1978) points out that social distance pertains to the individual as a member of a social group which is in contact with another social group whose members speak a different language; it involves such sociological factors as domination versus subordination, assimilation versus adaptation versus preservation. Psychological distance pertains to the individual as an individual, and involves such psychological factors as resolution of language shock, culture shock, and culture stress, integrative versus instrumental motivation, and ego-permeability. This study's findings proved that the more social and psychological distance there is between the s/f language learners and the target language group, the lower the learners' degree of acculturation will be toward that group and language. Conversely, more social and psychological proximity will bring about a higher degree of acculturation. The extent of acculturation will contribute to the learners' motivation and the level of success in learning the target language.

After comparing the degree of linguistic development exhibited by six second language learners of English, Schumann concluded that a lack of linguistic development is the consequence of being socially and psychologically distant from the target language group. Such social and psychological distance is created by the s/f language learner because he or she wants to stay away from the target culture and to retain the life style and cultural characteristics of the native country. Contrary to this conclusion, most participants of this study expressed their wishes for learning about the target culture, though their limited s/f language proficiency stood in the way of communicating with native English speakers. However, due to restricted access, their wishes could not be realized. In other words, when they stay within the Western culture, their psychological state is dual: on one hand, they may have prejudice against the out-group members; on the other, such an emotionally detrimental reaction to the mainstream of the society may change into stereotypes about the target culture which are unfavorable for developing positive motivation to learn more about the target culture. Besides, less contact with the mainstream society makes them feel ignored and left out in the cold. Likewise, the feeling of discrimination by out-groups could possibly depress their desire to acquire a high proficiency of the target language. In short,

s/f language learners may not necessarily stay away from the target culture. However, it is not always possible for them to socialize successfully with native speakers. This may reduce the learners' motivation, which consequently results in slow linguistic development.

It can be seen from the feelings of the participants that people engaged in cross-cultural language communication are very likely to have a ready-made prejudice and it is easy to have these prejudices expanded when they suffer from additional unpleasant experiences. Although some s/f language learners/users are well above the survival level of proficiency in the target language, they may still keep a certain social and psychological distance from the target culture as a result of feeling discriminated against. When this situation appears the first priority is not to expand communication and to encourage cross-cultural contact but to eliminate or minimize the existing prejudice and discrimination which is harmful to the learners' active motivation of upgrading s/f language proficiency and communicative competence. If properly motivated, they would have their performance of the target language improved. However, if the focus of curriculum and inst· ·on is fixed on the linguistic side, their linguistic progress can be "frozen" instead o. .g upward even though they live and study in the world where the target language is a common means of communication. By "frozen" it is meant that they are fixed in one place and highly resistant to change both linguistically and socially. In this project, such stopover proved to be a major roadblock to further advancement.

**Interpretation of the prohibitive function of prejudice**

In s/f language education, prejudice is dangerous because it has the power to fossilize a learner's motivation and thus slow down his/her progress in s/f language learning and adaptation to a new culture. This is one of the conclusions growing out of this project. Two people made mention of their internal prejudice about Canada, though they felt uncomfortable to admit that they harbored such unfavorable feelings toward their host country. Their overall feeling in the capacity of foreign students is one of being kept at a distance despite the warmth and friendship of some Canadians. Besides, it was found that they had thought that discrimination was universal in North America. Although they had never been to Canada before and had had no contact with Canadian people, they had formed a prejudice. It is obvious that the prejudice they carried was not out of their real personal experiences but the result of social influence. Nothing can be more influential to a member of society than a general preference of the public. Society influences people in all kinds of ways, making them know what is right and what is wrong, what should be encouraged and what should be opposed, so that it guides them towards meeting the

common norms it requires. Meanwhile, an individual makes his/her unique response to the influences of society and reacts to the social surroundings. In this way he/she displays subjective initiative. The psychologist Vygotsky made a socio-genetic thesis on human development. When he talks about the child's individual language and cultural development, he says (1978):

> The greatest change in children's capacity to use language as a problem-solving tool takes place somewhat later in their development, when socialized speech (which has previously been used to address an adult) is *turned inward.* Instead of appealing to the adult, children appeal to themselves; language thus takes on an *intrapersonal function* in addition to its *interpersonal use.* When children develop a method of behavior for guiding themselves that had previously been used in relation to another person, when they organize their own activities according to a social form of behavior, they succeed in applying a social attitude to themselves. (p. 27, italics in the original)

To put it simply and alternately, any function, including language, is formed on two planes, first on the social plane and then on the individual plane; first among people as an inter-mental category and then within the person as an intra-mental category. This is the alleged socialization. It is a process of an individual adapting to the society and culture which he/she is within and becoming one of its members by acquiring the society's mode of thinking and the manner of behavior. In the process of individual socialization, a person is in the face of influences from all kinds of sources in society, school and family. It is through the process of socialization that an individual reproduces the modes of cognition, emotion, evaluation and behavior which are peculiar to a certain society. When the process of socialization is completed, one is able to function as freely as one can in accordance with the conventionally accepted patterns. As Cassirer describes (1962):

> Language, taken as a whole, becomes the gateway to a new world. All progress here opens a new perspective and widens and enriches our concrete experience....Here it is not sufficient to acquire a new vocabulary or to acquaint ourselves with a system of abstract grammatical rules. All this is necessary but it is only the first and less important step. If we do not learn to think in the new language all our efforts remain fruitless. In most cases we find it extremely difficult to fulfill this requirement....When penetrating into the "spirit" of a foreign tongue we invariably have the impression of approaching a new world, a world which has an intellectual structure of its own. (p. 132, 133)

Based on the above we might take prejudice as a social product. ESL/EFL learners bring along with them all kinds of prejudice to the new environment to which they move. They approach everything they encounter within their traditional cultural modes of cognition, emotion, evaluation and behavior. The existence of prejudice makes them blind to the impact of culture on language learning and use or reduces their motivation to learn

about the target culture. Some participants mentioned that English was a difficult language in which it took several years of work to acquire minimum proficiency. In their opinion, English was not as easy to learn as their native tongues and not as colorful in expression as their first languages. This impression of the target language shows that before reaching certain levels of proficiency ESL/EFL learners may feel that the target language does not show as much humor and vivid expression as their mother tongues. With this feeling in mind, they will probably content themselves with a proficiency level at which they can survive and meet basic communication needs. It is obvious to see that such contentedness is likely to become a stumbling block to further progress in study.

### Insufficient Content of and Contact with the Culture

The majority of participants lacked basic knowledge about Western culture, such as the ways of understanding humor and the concept of independence. Various prejudices further prevented them from direct contact with western people; the absence of effective contact intensifies their prejudices, interferes with their motivation and lessens their confidence in enhancing their proficiency level and getting along well in cross-cultural communication. Through the questionnaire investigation and several talks with selected participants, some difficulties for Asian ESL/EFL learners were identified such as difficulties in dealing with different structures and styles of information, straightforwardness and euphemisms, body language, and cultural distinctions and connotations. In the space below, the author will classify and illustrate these difficult areas to provide insights for s/f language education and cross-cultural communication.

### Difficulty in Dealing with Different Structures and Styles of Information

This difficulty is reflected through the participants' responses to Questions 7, 8 and 12. An experienced ESL/EFL teacher might have such a feeling: the utterances and writings by ESL/EFL learners sound and read much like translations of the learners' mother tongues to a teacher who happened to know the learners' first language. Any sensitive person might easily tell whether an article was written by an ESL/EFL user or by a native speaker of English. Although quite proficient in English some participants admitted that they were unable to tell the cultural meanings contained in the styles and information structures of the native English speakers. They felt it was particularly difficult to know the slight differences in styles and structures that reflect cultural differences. Persuasive writing, lecture style and face-to-face interaction are three areas where the participants had such difficulties. The

same problems also exist when ESL/EFL learners are in the face of straightforwardness, euphemisms and connotative meanings.

Here, style refers to a choice of words, which mark out the speaker or writer as different from others or different from other types of choice he/she makes in other situations. By information structure the author means the various ways of arranging messages, data and facts. In view of the participants' proficiency and difficulties, it is clear that the ESL/EFL learners do not know the differences in the structures and styles of information between English and their first languages.

The point here is that proficiency in the target language has something to do with the ability to perceive delicate cultural meanings. Sufficient proficiency is the basis on which to comprehend the received linguistic messages and to perceive and think about the meanings in the way that native English speakers do. Nevertheless, proficiency itself does not automatically incur the ability to perceive and think like a native speaker. To realize cultural meanings, a basic knowledge of the culture is a must. In s/f language learning, it cannot be assumed that this knowledge grows with the acquisition of proficiency. It requires separate efforts to learn about.

**Persuasive writing**

After an in-depth discussion Esther described one most obvious difference of language use between English and some oriental languages such as Chinese. In persuasive writing such as social or political essays and speeches, English-speaking people tend to be less strong in tone than oriental people. The idea is to let the facts speak for themselves. In other words, the facts themselves should be able to convince the reader. Therefore, in this type of writing and speeches, one finds rather sparing use of such phrases as we must, we should not, it is wrong to, it is absurd, cannot be denied, resolutely demand. The tone is usually restrained. The language is generally moderate.

Similar to the above, a misunderstanding was found in the participants' attitudes to the writings in Western style. A number of participants felt that it was difficult to gain much useful information from reading writings by Western people. Arguments were scattered throughout the writings. Main points did not stand out. Conclusions were stated briefly. On the other hand, the difference in the structure of style and information leaves a strong impression upon native English speakers. The author heard some native-English-speaking teachers talk about their feelings of the writings and speeches made by East Asian ESL/EFL learners/users. They felt that affirmative expressions were overused and that hard-hitting

essays or editorial comments did not always have the effect of persuading the reader. They thought that only writers who did not have a strong case often resorted to fiery language, rather than relying on facts and reasoning.

**Lectures**

The difference in lecture styles was discussed. Some participants said they could not learn much from class lectures by western teachers. The difference does not merely pertain to language use. It is also a cultural difference, which can be related to educational institutions and seen in the different teaching styles. Questions 8 and 12 brought out some issues in regard to the difference.

In Western schools, instructors lead students to find as many facts and relevant statements as possible. Prior to class students are assigned many readings; but when the class meets, the instructors seldom cover the actual details of the readings. They devote much of the class time to inspiring students and enlightening them on the topics being discussed. Students bring up questions or points of interest which are related to the reading or the subject matter being discussed, and then interact with one another. The instructors share their own views and those of others in the field with students. But they do not always provide a conclusive answer to the problem raised. Students must prepare on their own for class presentations and make responses to critical comments. Even to some controversial questions no conclusion is made at the end of class.

Such a lecture style is very strange to oriental students. They are used to listening to instructors for conclusive statements especially when they have debates between different views and controversial questions. It is puzzling to people from oriental cultures that instructors do not make a conclusion for debates and controversial discussions. In accordance with oriental educational practices, it is the instructor's responsibility to help people get a clear idea of what is on the right track and what goes in the wrong direction. A speech by a teacher which bears no authoritative and conclusive tones sounds too soft and is not persuasive to oriental ears. What is more, it may create an illusion that the teacher is unsure of himself/herself and it is this uncertainty that makes him/her beat around the bush instead of hitting the point squarely by providing conclusions and judgments. It is possible for students to develop other conclusions. They may feel the teacher lacks personal confidence, responsibility, adequate care and concern about classroom teaching and students, and erudition.

In contrast to English speeches and writings, most school teachers in East Asian countries stress making one's own stand clear. Because the teacher is the sole authority in the classroom, the teacher's comments are the final judgment; the students are supposed to take notes and memorize them following class. For any controversial questions, the teacher is responsible for providing explanations and conclusions. If a teacher did not provide students with some conclusive remarks for different viewpoints and controversial questions, students would have no idea of where to take the next step. From the perspective of Eastern educational ethics, if a teacher cannot guide the students forward step by step in academic studies, it is a dereliction of duty by the teacher and waste of students' time and money.

All these phenomena show that s/f language learners tend to rely on their own cultural habits in using a new language. This adds to the difficulty of getting rid of the influence of the home language and culture and adapting to new linguistic and cultural environments.

**Straightforwardness vs. Euphemisms**

One noteworthy finding results from the responses to Question 5 and the interviews. It is about expressing and understanding messages in straightforward and euphemistic ways. The frequency of imperative sentences is an illustration. Bacon mentioned that the use of imperative sentences occurred more frequently in oriental languages than in English. Other participants told the author that they felt very comfortable with the Canadians' requests. When Canadians expressed requests and orders, they would in most cases use a form of question instead of imperative sentences. For instance, when an employer asks a newly hired typist to prepare a business letter, he/she will in all probability say: "Would you mind typing this letter for me?" to avoid imperative sentences like "Type this letter for me." Linguistically, questions of this type are still questions. But analyzed from a pragmatic and functional perspective, questions used under such circumstances lose the function of interrogation. Actually they have the function of an imperative sentence. They are used to express the speaker's request, desire, wish, hope and demand. Compared with imperative sentences questions sound more polite and pleasant to the ear. It is often more readily accepted by the listener. Questions like this are interrogative in form, but imperative in essence. On the other hand, in oriental language use requests and the like appear more often in the form of imperative sentences.

While people may think that high frequency of imperatives shows frankness and straightforwardness, some participants felt that native English people used too many euphemistic expressions. Their first impression of the English-speaking world in this regard was generally favorable in that the language was full of polite ways of speaking and its speakers never talked harshly. However, later some of them felt that too many euphemistic ways of speaking created understanding problems for ESL/EFL learners. Esther talked about her misinterpretation of a native speaker's good intention. One day she lost her way. In a hurry to get back home, she got on a bus and asked a person nearby whether the bus went to her intended destination. She hoped for a direct affirmative or negative answer to her question. To her perplexity she heard such words as "I am afraid not", "why don't you ...." She was not sure if the person could help her out. Such phrases were ambiguous and unclear as a reply to her question which would be answered in a direct fashion if asked to oriental people.

Although happy with indirect requests, the participants were not used to some indirect expressions, for they felt that indirect expressions covered the meanings and made understanding difficult. Let us have a look at these aspects.

**Indirect expressions**

In literary works indirect expressions are of higher frequency of occurrence and are difficult to deal with. For example, pickpocket is replaced by *light-fingered gentleman*, strike is replaced by *industrial action*; pornographic books are covered by a neutral title *adult books*. A number of other notions are also expressed in euphemistic terms, such as physical shortcomings, old age, certain functions of the body, and sexual acts. Examples are the use of *plain* for *ugly* in describing a person's appearance, *heavy set* or *on the heavy side* for *fat, slender* for *skinny, physically handicapped* for *cripple, senior citizens* for *elderly people.*

Conan had studied for his MA degree in the United States. He mentioned certain trends in American euphemisms. One of the trends is that more euphemisms are used in recent years to talk about social life and social affairs. The names of some professions are very misleading. A typical example is the use of *sanitary engineer* for *garbage collector, involuntarily leisured* for *unemployed.* In times of economic recession, people become sensitive to the word *poor.* Therefore, several other words have been used to take its place. He cited what he had read from a book:

> At first I was *poor*, then I become *needy*, later I was *underprivileged*, Now I am *disadvantaged*. I still don't have a cent to my name, but I surely have a great vocabulary.

**Expressing gratitude**

Different uses of the polite word "thank you" by Eastern and Western people reveal another cultural difference. This was an example by Conan to illustrate cultural difference. In the Western world "thank you" is widely used. Besides "thank you" some other similar expressions of thanks are often used to show mutual respect or to express feelings of gratitude for favor, patronage, assistance, cooperation or help from other people. Almost every day and everywhere in the work place and in the home, people can hear it from time to time. Not only is the word common in society but in family settings as well.

In some oriental areas "thank you" appears often to people with whom the user is not well acquainted. But it is not used much between people who are familiar with each other. To put it more clearly, the frequency of using the word is in reverse proportion to the extent of familiarity among people. Between family members the word is heard even less often. If family members said "thank you" to each other, it would be a very odd thing. The cultural tenet to govern the use of the polite word is that familiar people do not have to be confined to these etiquette words. To people who are out of one's familiar circles, it is essential to treat them with etiquette. This includes the use of polite words. Owing to the difference in expressing thanks, some oriental ESL/EFL learners felt strange when they heard expressions of etiquette so widely used in the West. They might not be aware of the etiquette of the West, where polite words are addressed to in-group people or to out-group people. It works in family relationships, too.

This is enough to imply that straightforwardness and euphemism are not the same in the East and the West. Direct transfer of them from one's home culture to the target culture will cause discomfort, confusion and even misinterpretation of the speaker's intention. In addition, there is a trend to increase euphemistic expressions in English. More euphemism constitutes some difficulties for non-native English speakers in having immediate and accurate understanding. It is easy to see why it happens. As is clear to us, euphemistic expressions do not provide meaning overtly. The hidden meaning requires more cognitive effort to perceive it. Sometimes, its understanding requires cultural background information. Furthermore, s/f language learners' correct understanding of indirect meaning is influenced by the degree of perceived similarity. Perceived similarity contributes to immediate and complete understanding of euphemistic expressions of the

target language. Conversely, learners' perceptual mismatches and perceived differences between speech conventions of home language and those of the target language may cause problems of understanding, misinterpretation or negative impression. The implications for ESL/EFL programs are that much attention ought to be directed to providing the knowledge of the culturally-governed meaning systems and the skills to draw the correct inferences from particular cultural cues, situational factors underlying speech and behavior, or background information. Efforts should be made to insure that a positive first impression is made and similarity is sought to promote positive understanding.

**Body Language: A Mirror of Differences**

It is common sense that people cannot speak without making motions, gestures or behaviors. These are covered by some general terms in the research literature: body language, sign language, kinetics, and para-linguistic elements. Since Edward Hall's The Silent Language (1959), in a more comprehensive way, opened up the field of non-verbal communication cross-culturally, body language has become an object of academic research and has been discussed in the context of linguistics, semiology and cultural studies. The result of this research is in support of the generally accepted viewpoint that body language, although limited in its function of expressing meanings, is an essential part of language communication and therefore, cannot be overlooked in s/f language education. It is verified through Question 7 and other incidents which the interviewees talked about that body language reflects cultural differences which usually make an impact on the learners' perception of the target language and the target culture. The result also indicated that it was a difficult area for the participants.

Sapir (1921) makes a very penetrating comment when he analyzes gestures which bear communicative meaning. He says:

> ...we respond to gestures with an extreme alertness and, one might almost say, in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all. (p. 45)

This statement hits the point. It brings to light the complexity of body language. All difficulties in appropriately understanding what is implied by body language lie in the fact that its meaning is made and interpreted by a delicate system which is culturally determined and governed. Although it is now realized by people that body language has its own system, the description and analysis of the system are far from enough. In addition, the importance of body language seems to be recognized only by researchers and theorists. Effective instruction of body language is still lacking in s/f language classrooms.

Owing to a shortage of knowledge in this respect, the participants had some trouble with body language. For example, some male persons were not sure if it was indecent to look squarely at conversation partners of the opposite sex. Some female persons could not make certain if they should take the lead in shaking hands with male people on social occasions. Some students had no idea of what they were supposed to do when making a presentation in class — to read the manuscripts consistently or to look at the audience without looking at the manuscripts.

**Eye contact**

In general, oriental people are not accustomed to direct and long-time eye contact since it is regarded as impolite, rude and ill-bred in oriental cultures. Although they do look at strangers when feeling curious, their eyes move away immediately when their eyes are in contact with the strangers'. They do not know the "rules" about eye contact in the West, such as to look or not to look, when to look and how long to look, whom to look at and whom not to look at. Others are not confident of the appropriate ways of responding to native English-speaking people's applause. In accordance with the common practice in oriental cultures, a speech maker returns hand claps while looking at the audience at the same time that the audience applauds. However, if this practice is transferred to the West and if the audience is not aware of the implied thanks by the speaker, this act might be seen as applauding oneself which is considered improper and immodest.

**Smiles**

Conan talked about this instance to show cultural difference. An oriental student might smile at the teacher when being criticized for missing the deadline of a course assignment. The smile may be an indication of his/her internal embarrassment, regret and compunction, a positive sign to show the student is all ears. The smile is only an emotional mask. Instead of exchanging eye contact, the student may bend his/her head low when found at fault. The gesture may be understood as a sign to acknowledge his/her fault. However, he said,

> These gestures might not be in keeping with the Western customs as far as I know. If this is true, then the real meanings of these gestures may be missed or misinterpreted by people who are not aware of Eastern cultural customs.

In current s/f language training programs, chances are slim for learners to gain knowledge of body language and other non-verbal ways of expressing. For the sake of

convenience to make a start, these things can be roughly classified into two categories: non-verbal and extra-verbal. Non-verbal refers to facial expressions, gestures, body movements, turn-taking in conversation and the use of space when talking. Extra-verbal refers to audible signs that are part of the verbal system, such as tone of voice, stress, pitch, rhythm, volume, speed and pause. Sometimes, they are also called paralinguistic features or prosodic features.

The findings of the research showed that these categories would fill up a dead corner in classroom instruction and would meet the learners' practical needs. Currently, s/f language programs are short of instruction in these categories. It is believed that this is one of the reasons why learners are ignorant of the communicative meanings expressed through these categories. Some problems in cross-cultural understanding are the result of a lack of training in these aspects.

All these phenomena reflect an unfilled portion of s/f language education and cross-cultural communication. They are like a mirror which shows cultural differences. The same gesture or behavior may have quite different meanings when made by speakers of different languages. The same approximation may be regarded as intimacy among people of one ethnic group, but as a serious offense against decency in another. People of different cultural backgrounds use seemingly the same signs to express different cultural meanings. Without the personal experience of living in a culture or knowledge obtained through education, one will, more or less, have trouble in understanding. The difficulties which the participants encountered are suggestive of the necessity of understanding body language from cultural perspectives. This is because the meaning of these messages is not determined by structural rules of language, but by cultural conventions. Language instruction which teaches only the linguistic structure of the target language, will provide learners with knowledge of how to organize sentences in a correct way. But what else is involved in transmitting messages is beyond its reach. When body language is included, the learners' communicative skills will be complemented so that communicative errors and difficulties in these aspects can be much reduced. By obtaining knowledge of body language learners will increase their awareness of the target culture, which in turn will facilitate their understanding of either verbal language or non-verbal messages of communication.

**Cultural Distinctions and Connotations**

As mentioned in Chapter Three, connotation is a meaning or idea suggested by words in addition to the formal meaning or nature of words. It is determined by contexts and cultural customs. A simple match of dictionary meanings with the words used in some specific contexts often results in a failure to catch the implied real messages.

As I recall, Samuel Johnson made such a comment in his work *Johnsoniana*:. It went something like,

> Dictionaries are like watches; the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true.

The explicit message in this quotation is that no dictionary can contain and give precise definitions of words. A more implicit message, the author feels, is that the mastery of word meaning is a tough thing and the use and understanding of word meanings are likely problematic.

Some people may doubt the above statement, since there are now countless dictionaries published everywhere and every year. To their thinking, as long as one does not mind taking all the trouble to look for the accurate meaning in dictionaries, one will sooner or later find the appropriate definition. People holding the doubt are obviously ignorant of the complexity of word meaning. It is true that a native speaker of a language does not feel it difficult to use contextual clues to determine the meanings of words in usual cases. That is why one cannot facilely ascertain the difficulty of telling the correct meaning to make sense. If one has the experience in learning an s/f language, one will share the same feeling as described before. Learning another language helps to see the cultural influences on word and word meaning. This was the common impression of the participants of this project.

In view of ESL/EFL people's uncertainty about word meanings, some questions were asked to the participants (Questions 5, 7, 9, 12 and 14). It turns out that the cultural distinctions and connotations of words are another source of difficulty for both language learning and the use of the target language in cross-cultural communication. In some languages, there may be only a single word for a certain object, creature or concept, whereas in another language, there may be several words, even quite a large number. Generally, the more words there are to refer to the same thing, the finer the distinction there might be to lay stress upon various aspects of the signified. For example, there is only one word in Chinese for the animal "camel." In English "*camel*" is a general word for the animal. "*Dromedary*" refers to a camel having one hump on its back and "*Bactrian camel*" is the word for a camel with two humps on its back. Arabic is said to have more than 400

words for the animal. This greater number of words relating to the camel is an obvious reflection of the nation's long history and large demand for using the animal as a means of transportation. The 400 or so definitions may show differences in the camel's age, sex, breed and size. They may indicate whether the animal is used for carrying heavy loads or not. It is said that there is at least one word to indicate that a camel is pregnant. Any person who has no actual experience living in the Arabic world and contacting local people there may feel puzzled over such semantic distinctions.

English has far more loan-words than any other language. The fact that English absorbs and assimilates so many words of foreign origin is closely bound up with the psychological characteristics of the English-speaking nations. Looking back at the history of the English language, we may find that English never misses any foreign words which are of novel, unique and unconventional features. The British linguist Brian Foster makes a penetrating exposition of national psychological characteristics of the English-speaking nations on the borrowing of foreign words. He (1968) says:

> Throughout its history the English language has always been hospitable to words from other tongues and while it is doubtless true to say that all forms of human speech have to some extent borrowed from outside models there are grounds for thinking that English is more than usually open to foreign influence as compared with other great languages. The French, indeed, have set up an organization whereby they hope to stem or at all events regulate the influx of foreign words into their vocabulary, but this would probably seem a strange idea to most English speakers, who seem to believe in a species of linguistic free trade and argue that if a term of foreign origin is useful it should be put to work forthwith regardless of its parentage. (p.72)

As one conspicuous consequence of such extensive word borrowing English is surprisingly rich in synonyms, antonyms and expressions. This huge vocabulary of the English language adds to the learners' difficulty. Not a few participants of this research commented on the difficulty of looking through the surface meaning of a word and realizing the right connotations. Connotation is "the implication of a word, apart from its primary meaning" (*The Longman Modern English Dictionary*), and it is "the suggesting of a meaning by a word apart from the thing it explicitly names or describes" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*). These definitions show that the connotation of a word is different from denotation — its explicit meaning. Connotation is usually culturally determined and therefore is not easy to get from the ordinary dictionaries.

One participant of Chinese origin told the author about the process of his realizing the connotation of the word "peasant." When he first said to people that he came from a peasant's family, he did not feel anything unusual. Sometime later he found that his classmates whose homes were in rural areas did not use the word "peasant" for their family

background and did not like to be referred to in this way. The discovery aroused his curiosity and led him to find that the English word "peasant" is not a complete equivalent to the same word in Chinese. If the word is examined from the cultural perspective, it will be found that it is now used especially for developing countries or former times. What is more, it has some derogatory coloration. Besides its primary meaning it can be used to refer to "a usually uneducated person of low social status" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, G. & C. Merriam Co., Springfield, Massachusetts, 1981), "a countryman; rustic; an ill-bred person" (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, paperback edition, Dell Publishing Co., N. Y., 1976). The connotative coloring of the word cannot be expected to be perceived by a non-native speaker of English. No wonder the participant felt puzzled about why people disliked using the word to describe family and origin. Its Chinese equivalent "nongmin", means "a member of the agricultural class, including farmers, laborers, etc." (*American Heritage Dictionary*). We have good reason to imagine what reaction a native English speaker would make when he/she hears such a sentence "The poor peasants talked about their happy life." The sentence can be readily understood by people who know about the situation in China's countryside. However, it is hard for English-speaking people to realize that *poor* peasant is differentiated politically from *rich* peasant. The two adjectives signify two class status before 1949. To them, *poor* means having little money, few goods and no luxuries. So how could peasants who are poor have a happy life? Most probably, they would be puzzled. Only cultural knowledge can help people both of the East and the West gain a correct understanding of the connotation of the word when it is used in that context.

A further word about the connotation in different languages: poor peasant is a word with positive connotation in China, but often carries somewhat negative meaning to some people in Western countries. Conversely, such words as "*landlord* (*landlady*)", "*capitalist*" and "*boss*" are often pejorative in mainland China, but are not so to people in capitalist systems. Such connotations, in a way, reflect different attitudes toward different social classes. Whether or not one approves of such cultural connotation, the facts must be recognized in order to have proper understanding.

Some Japanese participants felt confused when they found the different terms in English for legislative institutions. The same institutions as the Japanese *Diet* are called "*Parliament*" in Britain and Canada, but "*Congress*" in the United States. They even connect the word with its homograph "*diet*", which means "limiting intake of food", and produce various illusions and wide guesses about this usage. It is noteworthy that most of

these illusions and guesses are harmful to developing positive cross-cultural understanding, though there are no grounds for them.

The terms in English to show positions just below the highest rank are confusing to Asian ESL/EFL people. It makes non-native English speakers hesitate about telling the difference between *vice* as in *vice-chairman*, *associate* as in *associate professor*, *assistant* as in *assistant manager*, *deputy* as in *deputy director*, and *under* as in *undersecretary*. There may be some slight rhetoric and stylistic distinctions between them; but to ESL/EFL people who do not have a chance to listen to elaborate explanation on the difference these words have the same meaning: the rank next to the top one.

One participant provided a funny story which can be regarded as an illustrative example to show the importance of connotation which is produced and determined by culture. The story is about a shoe store somewhere in Rome. There was an English advertising sign in front which was designed to attract English-speaking customers. It read: "Shoes for street walkers. Come in and have a fit." The sign caught the attention of many English-speaking tourists. They gathered in front of the shop — not to look at the shoes displayed in the windows, but to read the sign and then break out into laughter. The Italian shop owner did not realize that *a street walker* may have negative meaning, while *to have a fit* does not mean "to try on a shoe", but "to become suddenly and violently angry or upset!" In this context a native English speaker might understand the message of the sign; however, the shop owner's unawareness of the connotation of these phrases becomes a standing joke.

Even the same words in different languages signify different referents. "*Weekend*" is understood differently by Western people and Eastern people, because in most oriental countries people work for six or five and a half days while in occidental countries, there are five working days in a week. The different working systems make weekends start at different times: in the East it means Saturday afternoon or evening and Sunday; in the West it starts on Friday evening and lasts through Saturday and Sunday.

"*Intellectual*" is another exemplary word to show culturally different understandings between mainland China and the West. The term generally includes teachers of educational institutions, university/college students and professionals like doctors, engineers, interpreters, and lawyers. In the West, however, it is mainly used for people of high academic status such as university professors, but students are for sure excluded. The coverage of the word is much smaller in the West. In addition to it, the word is not always used in a respectful sense. Occasionally, it is used in a derogatory sense. It will suffice to

show the negative connotation by quoting two illustrative sentences from the *Webster's Third International Dictionary* (G. & C. Merriam Co., Springfield, Massachusetts):

1. "Don't go for the intellectual who knows nothing but $2 words". (Two-dollar words are long and big words not commonly known.)
2. "Intellectual is an ugly word..., it implies consummate snobbery."

Similar examples are abundant. For instance, "ambitious" and "egalitarian" are generally considered pejorative in Chinese but positive or neutral to most English-speaking people. On the other hand, "propaganda" might be pejorative to Western people but positive or neutral in Chinese.

All the foregoing examples show that connotation in the target languages is a source of difficulty in understanding. Ordinary s/f language learners normally fail to realize it until they suffer from miscommunication. This is so because people tend to use their familiar modes of thinking to understand all the messages. In psychological terms, people develop schema on the basis of the cultural relevance of the content, through which to perceive, organize and interpret audio messages, social events and people. Similarly, what people select to perceive from an array of stimuli, which parts are perceived first, and how they are organized are also related to previous experiences and expectations. Members of a group tend to share a network of experience. In this sense, people who are categorized as non-members for speaking different languages like ESL/EFL learners will not readily produce the same perception and cognition. Because they do not have any previous experiences, the new incoming messages which are not in keeping with their familiar modes of thinking and expressing will not be perceived at once. This is proven by psychological research that has shown that objects which are presented in a jumbled array, i.e., different from the anticipated arrangement, are initially not perceived. Even when pointed out, they take longer to perceive than objects which are placed in their anticipated position.

Some implications can be drawn for educational purposes. We cannot expect ESL/EFL learners to automatically perceive or interpret connotative messages as intended by native speakers, no matter how advanced they are in linguistic proficiency. Cultural connotation is a hidden area in s/f language education. It deserves instructors' attention and effort to make it clear. Usually, when it is presented to ESL/EFL learners, it will attract their attention and interest. Classroom instruction of this kind will serve as their previous experience when they meet with similar things in the future. Since connotation is related to culture, it can be an entrance to concrete knowledge of the target culture. To achieve this goal, instructors must not be confined to the texts they teach. If the learners are guided beyond the primary meanings of the vocabulary of the texts, they will perceive a lot more.

Below the surface meanings of words are usually culture-specific connotative meanings which offer opportunities to obtain insights into those aspects of the target culture which are relevant to learning and use of the target language.

**Summary**

It is evident by the participants' feelings that language performance is not only dependent on linguistic skills, but also is governed by users' awareness of the related culture. Effective practice of the target language partially depends on the learners' persistent desire; to a larger extent it depends on the cultural knowledge the learners have.

Mismatch between linguistic elements and actual meanings is a source of learning difficulty and cross-cultural misunderstanding. The examples in this chapter draw out ramifications to s/f language education: linguistic skills are no doubt the key to a successful communication; nevertheless, high proficiency is helpful to picking up linguistic meanings but does not guarantee a correct understanding of the cultural connotation which is carried by linguistic elements but buried in their literal meanings. Without appropriate and sufficient cultural knowledge, such implicit messages cannot be demonstrated, perceived and comprehended.

The grammar-translation method prevails in s/f language education in East Asia. It has a long history and is the pioneering one in the system of s/f language teaching methodology. Translation is an actual mental process at the initial stage and can hardly be avoided. Although vigorously attacked by subsequent research, the grammar method is felt by the participants to be a helpful teaching method in the context of s/f language education.

Not only does the lack of knowledge of the target culture stand in the way of understanding, but people tend to carry prejudice when in contact with others from different backgrounds. Prejudice is in most cases ready-made from one's social environment. It is passed from one to another. It is harmful in that its existence will easily incur psychological alertness and antagonism in learners' mind, thus yielding poor first impressions. In turn, poor impressions may reduce learners' motivation and interest to learn a new language. Prejudice is an unfavorable barricade to the success of s/f language learning as well as to the exchange and interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds.

Unfamiliarity with the culturally-determined style and information structure of the target language constitutes another difficulty for the East Asian s/f language learners in grasping the genuine meanings in language communication. Without knowledge in this

regard, s/f language learners' understanding may deviate from the intended direction of the native speakers of the target language, thus causing all kinds of misunderstandings and miscommunication.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss the implications of the research findings and put forward some remedial suggestions to improve s/f language education in East Asian areas.

# CHAPTER V

## EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study had three research purposes. The first, to identify ESL/EFL learners' awareness of the role culture plays in their learning and use of a target language, and the second, to describe the most common cultural and linguistic difficulties these learners encountered and their feelings toward these difficulties; the third, to propose a model to incorporate cultural elements into s/f language teaching in East Asia. This will be the focus of the final chapter.

With reference to the research purposes and questions in Chapter One, a brief summary will be help . The following are some main points of the findings and answers:

For the first research purpose and its relevant research questions, two things could be seen from the data and the analyses:

a. ESL/EFL learners' motivations are basically instrumental. Their attitudes can be positive toward the practice of linguistic skills. As a result of instrumental motivations and a skill-centered training focus, the learners can hardly see the active role of cultural knowledge in learning and using a target language. In real use of a target language in cross-cultural communication, the learners tend to view communicative difficulties from linguistic perspectives.

b. However, repeated failure to overcome the communicative difficulties will initiate their attention to cultural knowledge. At this stage, their desires and attitudes are two-fold: on one hand they prefer to keep their own cultural identities and on the other they are willing to learn about the target language.

For the second purpose and its related questions, the three findings below can be helpful:

c. Due to a lack of contact with Western culture, ESL/EFL learners could not understand and behave from the perspectives of native English speakers. Some of them have and apply very strong skills in English grammar and approach communicative settings from their own cultural perspectives.

d. The culturally-related difficulties are that learners are unable to assume the communicative settings correctly and therefore fail to keep their thinking and use of the language in the right direction; they are unfamiliar with the structure and style of information of their communicative partners so they often have inappropriate or

even wrong interpretations of the real intentions and messages of native English speakers; they are unaware of non-verbal expressions of the West and thus, very likely miss some delicate and emotional messages.

e. As visible minority people in North America, they often develop prejudices and stereotypes toward mainstream cultures. These affections plus the feeling of dislocation are detrimental to their motivations and desires to further learn about the target language and its culture. So, it is important to prevent or downsize such feelings through cultural comparison at the initial stages.

To make up for the deficiency of the current model of s/f language education, it was made clear that:

f. ESL/EFL programs in East Asia generally place the focus on the rational knowledge of the target language and on this basis emphasize the training of linguistic skills. Insufficient attention to the tacit and implicit factors of communication, i.e. integrating culture education, as well as the shortage of qualified teaching personnel and limited resources of teaching culture result in learners' lack of cultural knowledge of the target language. As a consequence, the learners have difficulties perceiving intended messages, are unable to make use of contexts to interpret implicit meanings, and are unfamiliar with non-verbal expressions.

From the foregoing description, it can be asserted that it would be beneficial for ESL/EFL learners to have more contact with the target culture. However, it is not an easy matter to break with home cultures and language influences once a person is fully grown-up and has firmly established cultural notions and mother tongue proficiency. Cassirer (1962) comments on this issue:

> In a later and more advanced state of our conscious life we can never repeat the process which led to our first entrance into the world of human speech....Paradoxically enough the real difficulty consists much less in the learning of the new language than in the forgetting of a former one.... To the adult the objective world already has a definite shape as a result of speech activity, which has in a sense molded all our other activities. Our perceptions, intuitions, and concepts have coalesced with the terms and speech forms of our mother tongue. Great efforts are required to release the bond between words and things. And yet, when we set about to learn a new language, we have to make such efforts and to separate the two elements. Overcoming this difficulty always marks a new important step in the learning of a new language. (p. 133)

In order to integrating cultural knowledge into s/f language teaching I will propose a new model of s/f language education in the hope that it will help fill the gap of cultural knowledge for the learners. It must be clarified that not all problems are cultural. In light of

the feedback from the participants, sometimes low proficiency in the target language results from communication barriers such as narrow vocabulary or poor listening ability.

In the new model I take communicative competence as a superordinate, which can be regarded as the ultimate goal of s/f language education. As mentioned in the discussion of communicative competence in Chapter One, s/f language education is aimed at developing the learners' competence to communicate with others, particularly with native speakers of the target language. This communicative competence should not merely cover what is possible, it must include both tacit knowledge and ability to judge what is feasible, what is appropriate and what is in fact done or actually performed. It is in this sense that the new model is similar to the functional-notional approach in that communicative competence remains the objective of s/f language learning. However, the functional-notional approach lays emphasis on people's communicative purposes in all its process and therefore "uses a communicative grammar, one which takes cognizance of authentic real world speech as recorded from live, spontaneous speech acts" (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, p. 124) while the model proposed in this dissertation takes into consideration what the traditional model stresses — learner's conscious learning and using the knowledge of the structure of the target language. In other words, the functional-notional approach proposes that a start of grammar teaching depends on the communicative (social, academic, or vocational) needs of the learners, their age and their knowledge of English, if any. The model out of this research stresses a contrastive introduction of grammar.

Below the superordinate there are two subordinates. Linguistic proficiency includes the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The training of these skills is based on the knowledge of grammar, lexicon and phonology. This is precisely the focus of the traditional model of language education. The other is cultural knowledge, which consists of the knowledge about the rules of appropriateness of both meaning and forms in different socio-linguistic contexts, the ability to combine forms and meanings to achieve unified spoken and written texts, and the knowledge and application of non-verbal communication. Cultural knowledge leads to cultural competence which enables s/f language learners/users to know when and how it is appropriate to converse with native speakers of the target language, what topics are appropriate to particular speech events, which linguistic forms are to be used with whom and in which situations, and how speech acts such as greetings, compliments, apologies, invitations and complaints are to be given, interpreted and responded to.

It is obvious that cultural competence occupies a position of great significance in this model of s/f language education. It is something like software in a computerized

machine, the function of which is to govern and regulate people's use of the target language. Figure 6 offers a pictorial presentation of the new model for s/f language education, which expresses the above re-arrangement. In the author's opinion, it will make some changes in the currently prevalent skill-oriented model in East Asia's s/f language education.

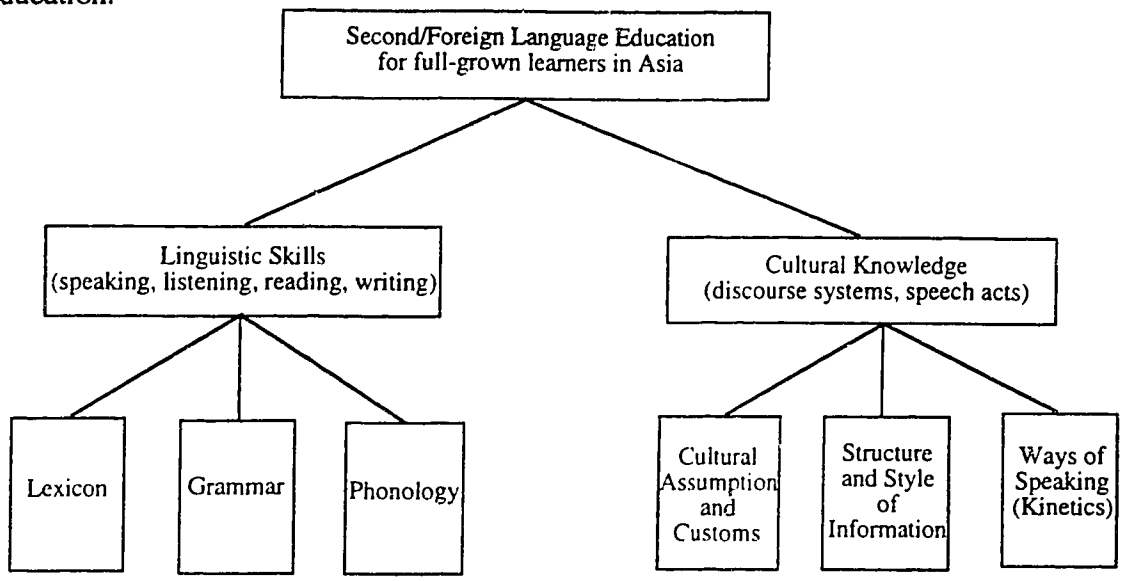


Figure 6 A New Model of Second/Foreign Language Education

The left wing of Figure 6 is the traditional skill-centered model of s/f language teaching. As previously described, proficiency, i.e., the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, is based on the learners' rational knowledge about grammar, lexicon and phonology. However, it does not mean that this part remains exactly intact as it appears in Figure 5. As revealed through the discussion of Question 8 in Chapter Three, the contrastive study of the target and native languages is very weak. Three fourths of the participants had no idea of the similarities and dissimilarities between English and their native languages, and therefore, they were unaware of what should attract attention in the target language.

In view of this fact, the new model pays attention to the contrastive analysis of the similarities and differences when lexical, grammatical and phonological items are taught. Under this principle, focus will be placed on those items in the target language which are similar in form to learners' native language but contain hidden cultural meanings. Likewise, learners will be taught those items which look different in form but are identical in communicative functions.

It is clear from the proposed model that grammar is an unneglectable part. A language can be used in an enormous number of different situations. This does not

normally cause any special comprehension problems — a conversation, a newspaper report, a news broadcast and a letter may be very different in style, but the grammatical structures used will be almost the same in each case. In the past, grammar was taken for granted. However, until recently, many teachers were encouraged to feel negative about grammar, "to adopt an emotional anti-grammarian stance, and to regard grammar as inherently 'dull' or 'old-fashioned'." (Stern, 1992, p. 143) In fact, attitudes toward grammar are influenced and determined by different views on language learning. The demarcation is whether s/f language learners should learn a new language through conscious and deliberate study and formal practice or through use to get a subconscious absorption of the language. Those like Krashen who propose natural acquisition tend to downplay the value of grammar while those like Paulston and Bruder (1975), who advocate formal practice, contend that grammatical explanation is absolutely essential to induce learning through formal practice. In this research, the role of grammar is clear from the previous discussions of learning ages and the responses to the role of grammar in the questionnaire and interviews. For adult learners, grammar is a conscious guidance to organize the sentence structures. Unlike child learners who can acquire a new language subconsciously, adult learners have acquired their native languages. The structures of learners' first languages cannot be exactly identical to the target language and the differences will inevitably interfere with learning the target language. Such being the case, learning grammar can positively contribute to learners' conscious practice and use of the target language. It can also help correct, reduce, eliminate and finally avoid linguistic errors, even for learners who live in a target-language milieu. In reality grammar should be one of the keys to success in all s/f language teaching models. Even if learners are encouraged to learn through natural use of the target language, it is ideal that they have the ability to monitor their own performance and to correct themselves. It is to this objective of teaching that grammar can contribute much, particularly for those adult learners who have acquired the first languages.

The right wing of the figure is what should be emphasized in today's s/f language education in order to meet the increasing needs for practical use of the target language in direct cross-cultural language communication. As was mentioned in Chapter One when the definition of culture was discussed, the term "cultural knowledge" in this research is used to refer to the cultural aspects which are related to language learning and use. It refers to the ways people make assumptions in communicative settings, the ways of organizing information and expressing ideas, and the ways of presenting emphatic and emotional messages. The knowledge about these ways is cultural and intimately related to the learning and use of a new language.

One thing is worth noticing. In some aspects the model seems similar to what is generally termed "sociolinguistic competence." In comparison with Bachman's (1990) statements, we may find that the model covers both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness whereas Bachman's sociolinguistic competence refers to learners' "sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety," "sensitivity to differences in register," "sensitivity to naturalness" and "ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech." (pp. 94-98) In other words, Bachman's sociolinguistic competence is the ability to distinguish and deal with different geographic dialects, variation in language use within a single dialect or variety, as well as to make native-like sentences and to interpret cultural figurative meanings. Canale (1983) discusses sociolinguistic competence. His addresses "the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depends upon contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms or convention of interaction." (p. 7) To put it simply, his "sociolinguistic competence" requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used, the roles of the participants, the information they share and so on. Thus, his sociolinguistic competence is different from the model in that his does not include non-verbal communication strategies. He listed the knowledge of non-verbal communication strategies under the title of strategic competence, a parallel part as sociolinguistic competence. Savignon (1983) deals with sociolinguistic competence in the same way as Canale. The above comparison shows that the cultural knowledge in the model covers more breadth than the general sense of sociolinguistic competence.

In comparison with the multidisciplinary approach which Stern (1992, 1983) and Hébert (1990) mentioned when they discuss the general language education syllabus (Stern calls it "a general model for second language teaching in his 1983 book), some common points are found between the syllabus and the model: both aim to encourage learners' reflection on the nature of language and culture and to promote openness towards other language groups. Stern maintains that language teaching should not be "founded entirely on the study of belle letters or on linguistics alone." (Stern, 1983, p. 47) In the descriptive figure (Stern, 1983, p. 44), we may see that language teaching in his scheme is related with other disciplines such as psychology and psycholinguistics, educational theory, sociology, sociolinguistics and anthropology, and linguistics. It is true that language teaching research should not be a confined one, for it is not an isolated discipline and is often influenced by other disciplines. A multidisciplinary approach may contribute to formation of new theories, which in turn will result in effective and appropriate pedagogy. However, for practical classroom teaching dealt with in the model in this chapter, the most directly relevant component of the general language education syllabus is the role of culture. Just as

Stern (1992) says: "Culture teaching, according to this conception, is less skill-oriented than it is problem-oriented, fact-finding, and evaluative" (p. 215), the model in this research proposes some concrete methods to teach/learn culture in mainly skill-oriented s/f language programs so as to provide learners with basic knowledge of the target culture.

The cultural part of the model is complementary to the linguistic part. Cultural knowledge is not only an indispensable component of s/f language education, but also deserves more attention and effort to carry out at present. Furthermore, grammar, lexicon and phonology are to linguistic skills what structure and style of information, cultural assumption and customs, and ways of speaking are to cultural knowledge.

As was discussed at full length in Chapters Three and Four, according to the participants' recollections of the s/f language programs they attended, culture teaching is an almost unopened field in ESL/EFL learning in Asia. Two Japanese people mentioned that they had taken a course entitled "English Civilization", which they found very helpful and useful to both language learning and language performance. Using some leading English-speaking countries as objects it introduced basic social structures, political systems, people's ways of life, the nation's cultural taboos and common practices of language use. By taking this course, the learners got a bird's-eye view of the target culture. This helped reading and listening comprehension in language courses when they met with some content problems. In their opinions, a refined course similar to this one would be more than welcome in ESL/EFL classes.

Regrettably, current s/f language education does not include much instruction on cultural knowledge. The neglect of this aspect results in the problematic performance of the target language, failure or difficulty to catch the real meaning of some linguistic and non-linguistic communicative messages as well as misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. Insufficient practice of language skills outside the classroom is also responsible for the unsatisfactory results of s/f language education. The essence of such training is that learners associate the meaning of the first language with the words of the s/f language, use the words of the s/f language to refer to a cultural phenomenon of the first language, deal with the target language on the basis of the beliefs and customs of their home culture, and miss or fail to understand the communicative messages whose expression forms do not exist in their first language or are utterly strange to them. In short, they are confined to Bain's (1991) first or second stages of s/f language learning.

To change the current situations, the key point is to make it known to ESL/EFL learners that language is an integral component of a culture; in essence, language learning includes culture learning and language teaching inevitably involves culture teaching. In this

sense, to teach culture is to teach the systems of meanings and both the linguistic and non-linguistic symbols which carry meanings.

Throughout the foregoing chapters it is clear that miscommunication and misunderstanding are detrimental to having people have positive visions of each other. As stated in Chapter Four, it is easy for s/f language learners from East Asia to develop prejudices and stereotypes. One reason is that they do not perceive things from the cultural perspectives of native English speakers. When people perceive similarity, they are likely to have a positive evaluation. The perceived similarity will contribute to correct understanding of the things in a new environment as well as the communicative intentions of communicative partners. If similarity cannot be found, but people have sufficient knowledge of others' cultural traits which are different from one's own culture, the same communicative success is possible. The point here is that knowing something is better than knowing nothing. At least, knowing what is possible in certain situations helps one to perceive other people's real attempts, to reduce or eliminate prejudices or stereotypes and to understand the communicative messages between oneself and others.

This leads to a tentatively theoretical assumption that similarities in cultural beliefs, ways of life, educational background, organization and expression of information help people perceive and understand each other in an accurate way while communicating. For those s/f language learners who have fully acquired their first language and established the corresponding cultural notions, it is particularly beneficial for them to obtain some awareness of cultural similarities, especially at the beginning stages. This familiarity will prevent, or at least reduce, prejudices and stereotypes. Besides, it will substantiate the belief discussed in Chapter One that thoughts and speeches of different peoples can be mutually understood through linguistic and non-linguistic expressions.

To be specific, there are three components of this cultural knowledge. Cultural assumptions and customs guide people to perceive their communicative partners' intention of interaction from the contexts in which the target language is used. The knowledge of cultural assumptions and customs makes people's thinking get into the same direction to avoid misunderstandings. This is helpful in (1) understanding from the perspective of the target culture; (2) developing positive impressions of communicative partners.

The knowledge of the structure and style of information helps to interpret the intended messages, implicit meanings and behavior patterns from the perspective of the native speakers of the target language. It helps people realize the genuine meanings in various circumstances of language communication. The knowledge of these aspects is good for (1) perceiving the humorous and double meanings of phrases; (2) interpreting

connotative and euphemistic meanings from the contexts; (3) getting the gist of various styles of speech and writing, such as class lectures, persuasive writings, polite routine greetings and conversations and indirect expressions.

The knowledge of ways of speaking or kinetics provides access to some delicate, emotional and insinuative messages which are expressed not through words but through non-verbal devices as well as body movements. Familiarity with the target language's ways of speaking will help catch some subtle meanings and emotional feelings through (1) facial expressions; (2) eye contact; (3) gestures; (4) body movement, and (5) phonological devices like speed, pitch and tones of voice. Meanings through these non-verbal devices cannot be perceived from the meanings of individual words. So, familiarity with non-verbal ways of expressing constitutes an important part of cultural knowledge.

The three component parts are all governed by culture. By learning the non-linguistic but language-related knowledge, s/f language learners have some notions about the target culture. Therefore, integrating this part into s/f language teaching is virtually teaching/learning of the target culture. In view of its usefulness and importance, it should be merged into the traditional skill-oriented teaching model to improve on the teaching effectiveness and eventually to enhance the learners' communicative competence, which is made up of the knowledge about these elements and linguistic skills.

Now, let us go into the detailed statements of this culturally-specific and language-related knowledge so that we can have a further understanding of what is meant by the terms and how culture could be integrated into s/f language classrooms.

### Cultural Assumptions and Customs

People engage in cross-cultural language communication with certain assumptions about situations and about appropriate behaviors and intentions within it. Since their assumptions are usually based on the cultural notions of one's own ethnic group, people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds might bring with them different assumptions. If they have no common assumptions to share with each other, it is unlikely they can perceive the other party's intention of interaction. The lack of common assumption or positive awareness of others' assumption is one of the major causes of communication breakdown and misunderstanding. Those inappropriate choices of answers to the simulated Questions 1 through 6 are an illustration of this viewpoint.

Let us look back at the example at the beginning of the thesis. In oriental cultures, people pay high respect to hospitality and modesty. Self-depreciation is a common

etiquette. When a dinner party is ready, the host or hostess often expresses his or her "feeling sorry" for not making delicious food, no matter how adequately and carefully the dinner party is prepared. In such a situation, an English speaker without a sense of the traditional cultural trait of the Eastern culture might feel ill at ease. They might misinterpret the host/hostess's attitude as insincere and disrespectful. On the other hand, the host/hostess might not have an understanding of what causes the discomfort on the part of his/her dinner guests. In the end, the guests might hold a poor impression of oriental hospitality, and the host/hostess might develop a negative perception of the Western customs of being a guest.

Similarly, assumptions that all languages can say the same thing in the same way can also lead to misunderstandings. In his contrastive study of Chinese and native English speakers, Alfred Bloom (1981) cites a number of investigation results to prove that Chinese are not accustomed to counterfactual thinking and the Chinese language (at least in most of its varieties) has no formal lexical or syntactical means to signal distinct hypothetical or counterfactual premises. To put it simply, the Chinese language uses a single structure, for example, "If you stay outdoors too long at this temperature, you will catch a cold," whereas English uses linguistic marking — the subjunctive mood, for example "If you stayed outdoors too long at this temperature, you would catch a cold," "If you had stayed outdoors too long at this temperature, you would have caught a cold." He ascribes the difficulty Chinese have in understanding some counterfactual statements to the absence of explicit counterfactual markings in the Chinese language.

Bloom (1981) presents an array of evidence to affirm that cognitive difference is causally related to linguistic difference. Implied in this assertion is that if there is no equivalent or corresponding linguistic forms of expression, it will be difficult to perceive and understand the intended meanings which are expressed through some unique linguistic devices of the target language. Among all the examples he cites, a law case is illustrative here. In that case, a Chinese person overstays his visa in the United States and is ordered to leave the country before a set date. At the end of the court trial, the judge says: " if you did not leave by the date, you would be deported." The Chinese looks puzzled at this word, mistaking it for a threat, not for a counterfactual statement. Furthermore, the Chinese person has different assumptions about the court trial. In Chinese culture, the law court is a place where only facts speak. Since the fact is that the visa over-stayer pleads guilty and the judge decides not to levy punishment as long as he leaves before the established date, according to what is usually assumed in the Chinese culture, it should be the end of the trial. Any additional words on the matter will be superfluous. No wonder that the Chinese

person does not perceive the real intent of the judge; instead he understands the counterfactual statement as an unnecessary threat by a judge to a law offender who has already pleaded guilty. On the part of the judge, this counterfactual sentence serves only as advice which is to inform the person of the possible unfavorable consequence.

Obviously, Bloom's assertion is questionable for this case. The cognitive difference between the judge and the law offender cannot be attributed to the linguistic differences between English and Chinese. The misunderstanding is not due to a lack of lexical and syntactical formal expression in Chinese, but to the different cultural assumptions which give rise to different interpretations of the same sentence in the subjunctive mood. In other words, it is not linguistic differences but different cultural assumptions of the same communicative setting that creates the described misunderstanding. It is the result of their different assumptions from different cultural perspectives.

In reality, the Chinese language uses lexical devices to express counterfactual thinking. Any hypothetical or counterfactual statements can be perceived by its native speakers in light of cultural assumptions and contexts. In the above case which Bloom cites as illustration, a native Chinese speaker will in all probability take the word as a legal warning or threat, even if he/she notices the subjunctive mood. The cultural assumptions of the law court trial make Chinese speakers subconsciously perceive in that direction. This can best explain why the Chinese person thinks that way.

Through contrastive cultural studies s/f language learners can learn how to make cultural assumptions from the perspective of the target language. In becoming aware of the differences in cultural assumptions and customs, they are likely both to diminish their prejudices and to reduce miscommunications and misinterpretations.

**Structures and Styles of Information**

Different ways of structuring information were discussed in Chapter Four. If we are familiar with these ways, we can tell when a person is going to continue or quit speaking, what the main point of a statement or a question is, and what parts of a speech are emphasized by its speaker and what parts the speaker is excited about. Summarized concisely, structure and style of information are the ways through which information is organized, the ways ideas are put together into an argument and the ways some ideas are selected for special emphasis, akin to how grammar governs the organization of lexicon. These structures vary from language to language. They are culturally specific.

Unfamiliarity with structures in the s/f language and culture may result in a person's confusion about what is heard, although the person may catch every word of the speaker.

Responses to yes-or-no questions are another illustrative example. In answer to the questions "You don't have any class today, do you?" or "Don't you have any class today?", an East Asian interlocutor, who has limited knowledge of the structure of the English disjunctive and negative questions might in all probability choose "yes" when he/she does not have any class. By this "yes" he/she indicates that he/she is in agreement with the speaker's statement. It is equivalent to "Yes, it is true. I don't have any class today," etc. The "yes" in this situation is not a semantic "yes" which is supposed to lead to an affirmative statement, but a cultural "yes," the exact meaning of which cannot be understood if not from the perspective of the culturally-based information structure.

It is obvious that different structures and styles of information are one cause for people's failure to catch precise meanings in communication. This can best explain why some participants had trouble understanding the writings and lectures of Western native-English-speaking scholars and why they failed to perceive the euphemistic and connotative meanings of the target language in spite of their knowing every word they read or hear.

Since learners will remain in the structure and style of information of their home culture, in s/f language education programs they must be explicitly taught that there are different cultural perspectives on structure and what they are. Just as cultural assumptions and customs guide s/f language learners in the right direction of understanding, so the knowledge of the structure and style of information will provide easier access to select linguistic forms which are not understood with the help of grammar and lexicon alone.

### Ways of Speaking

Ways of speaking are a third component part of cultural knowledge in the proposed model. Generally, a basic message is produced through word meaning and structure of the language — verbal devices. But communication is definitely not confined to verbal messages. In some cases, exact subtle meanings show up in non-verbal ways as well. Here, I am referring to emphatic, emotional and insinuative meaning. These types of meaning are expressed by ways of speaking. Included in these ways of speaking are the manners of speech, tone of voice, speed, stress, pause, pitch, turn-taking, gestures and body movements. Duquette (1991) says: "We know that a non-verbal period of language development precedes verbal communication." (p. 122) This tenet was originated from

Luria and is true for children. For adult learners in s/f language programs, the non-verbal expression in the target language can only be learned in the process of using the language.

Just like the previous two factors, ways of speaking is an important cause of communication breakdown. As described in Chapter Four, non-verbal cues transmit meaning which is difficult, troublesome or inconvenient in some circumstances to be expressed explicitly by verbal means.

In contrast to verbal means, i.e. syntax, phonology and lexicon, ways of speaking are seldom a part of classroom instruction in s/f language programs, for the rules of this category cannot be explained clearly and comprehensively. Besides, the carriers are usually common to people of all nations. The universality of the carriers adds to the complexity of understanding. Again, deductive inference from one's own cultural perspective does not always work. People of different cultural groups may use apparently identical ways of speaking to express different cultural meanings. The same gesture may leave different impressions on speakers of different languages, causing different attitudes across cultures. For example, the same volume of speech may be interpreted as abruptness in one culture, but as timidity in another. Slowness in speed may be an indicator of incompetence to some people, but may be a symbol of formal education or consideration to others. Some research (Bain, 1991) shows that native English speakers feel uncomfortable with certain uses of high or low pitched voices and loudness by non-native English speakers, e.g., raising voice in "no" to contradict. They may also be irritated by the incorrect use of turn-taking, e.g., persistently interrupting in the middle of an utterance or unclear pronoun references. On the other hand, East Asian people may get fed up with native English speakers' tone of voice, e.g., high pitch or stress on particular words when an English speaker wants to explain or emphasize a certain point because this can sound emotional and impolite.

As the analysis of the participants' difficulties with body language in Chapter Four showed, some forms of implicit or indirect statements and questions are necessary and euphemistic to Westerners, but unclear and ambiguous to Easterners.

In short, lack of awareness of other people's ways of speaking may result in an incorrect interpretation of the expressed messages. Inappropriate use of ways of speaking may become a source of confusion, displeasure and even irritation. Without adequate familiarity with these aspects of the target culture, without knowledge of the communication partners' ways of speaking or without trying to perceive from the speakers' cultural perspective, different ways of speaking may be incomprehensible or misinterpreted. Seeing that ways of speaking cannot be separated from the use of the target

language, the author contends that the inclusion of this knowledge in s/f language programs can no longer be delayed.

Up to this point it is made clear why the teaching of cultural knowledge must be included in the proposed new model of s/f language education and what is meant by the cultural knowledge in this model. Since this part is the weak ring in the traditional framework and there is not a ready-made approach to introduce it into s/f language programs, it requires further research efforts to substantiate it. In the following statements, I will suggest how we might attain the goal of teaching and learning cultural knowledge at the present time in Asia.

**How Is Culture Learned?**

To work out some effective approaches, we must first of all get some notions of how people acquire culture. In understanding an s/f language, if the grammar or phonology are not worthy of learning, it is doubtful that effective understanding will take place. In understanding a new culture, if that culture's method of organizing and transmitting information is not worthy of learning, effective understanding of the culture is likewise questionable. Culture is a holistic abstract concept. It is composed of countless messages. These messages are transmitted through verbal and non-verbal language.

As a whole, culture is transmitted and acquired through all the perceptual modes, verbally as well as non-verbally. Secondly, culture is acquired gradually, through repeated exposure to similar stimuli or events (Seelye, 1984).

The crucial point of acquiring culture is personal experience. Since there is no magic in culture teaching and learning, teachers should encourage learners to get first-hand experience to understand the target language from a native speaker's perspective, and at the same time to relate the problems which they encounter with their past experience instead of avoiding the home culture so as to elicit a synthesis between the learners' past experiences and the new. It should be clear to the learners that the synthesis is by no means a threat to individual cultural identity. In fact, individual biculturalism could be expansive rather than subtractive. Awareness of the target culture means expanding one's repertoire of experiences and behaviors, not subtracting anything. As a result, it will facilitate one's use of the target language in communication.

Here, it should be noted that it might be an illusion that cultural immersion is the best way to get rid of the influence of one's home culture and acquire the knowledge of the target culture. The investigations of this research demonstrated that the participants had

strong desires of maintaining native cultural beliefs and customs even though they had lived in the English-speaking world for some time. Aoki (1991) presents a relevant comment on this issue when he says:

> When we leave a place for a new place (by leaping or by bridging), we fool ourselves by thinking we leave the old home behind. That historic view is untenable. No matter where we roam in our journey's turnings and re-turnings, our tourings and de-tourings, historic beings that we are, we carry along with us places we've been.
>
> So in "leaping forward," the world from which you leaped inevitably tags along in the leap. (p. 133)

Therefore, in acquiring the knowledge of the target culture either in home or in host cultural contexts, the s/f language learners do not subtract their native cultural beliefs and customs. Their learning of the target culture adds to their body of cultural knowledge, providing mental and psychological contrast when they meet with familiar or completely new cultural phenomena. Such contrast leads to their conscious determination of appropriate speech and behavior, thus facilitating their use of the target language.

In brief, personal experience is vital for learning about the target culture. However, it does not necessarily mean that cultural knowledge can only be acquired through personal cultural immersion. Instead, personal experience can be achieved through various ways. For example, when s/f language learners learn the target language in their home countries, "aspects of culture (customs, mores, taboos, rituals, art forms) are taught incidentally as they arise in a dialogue or reading passage and, more explicitly, through films, broadcasts, lectures, newspaper study, or student group projects." (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983, p. 128) In this way, although the learners cannot get a whole picture of the target language, they are at least aware of some aspects, thus laying a foundation for the future direct contact with native speakers of the target language.

Basing himself partly on Seelye, Hammerly (1982) describes the goals of culture learning as ten skills in an approximate order of difficulty for s/f language learners:

> 1. Knowledge of the cultural connotations of words and phrases. 2. Knowledge of how to behave in common situations. 3. The development of interest and understanding toward the second culture. 4. Understanding of cross-cultural differences. 5. Understanding of intracultural institutions and differences. 6. Research-like projects. 7. Development of an integrated view of the second culture. 8. Ability to evaluate statements about the second culture. 9. Development of empathy toward a second culture and its people. 10. Academic research on second culture. (pp. 522-524)

On this basis it is understood that s/f language learners are learning about the target culture as long as they are in any form or process of acquiring these skills.

In the space below, I will suggest some principles and concrete measures and activities for classroom use.

**Intensifying the drill of language skills**

For people to acquire culture, language skills are the prerequisite. Without language proficiency it is not possible to learn culture and there is no way to get access to or to understand the target culture. It is particularly true of s/f language learners. In the process of getting skilled in the target language, s/f language learners may acquire much cultural knowledge on the condition that they are keenly conscious of the significance of culture to the improvement of language skills and sensitive to any received cultural message and phenomenon which are peculiar to the target language.

To upgrade language skills there are a number of proven methods. From the grammar method to the communicative approach, learners may keep their choices open to find out which specific method is effective for them. Although there are commonalties among people, the concrete condition varies from person to person. A unified and fixed learning mode may bring about positive effects to some people, but may result in nothing for others. In view of this possibility, learners must not be restricted to a certain method so that they can try all available methods and approaches to determine which is most suitable to them.

**Integrating culture learning early**

Integration of culture learning need not be delayed or postponed until learners have achieved a certain degree of proficiency in the target language. It is impractical and unwise to wait and expect that learners with a high proficiency will automatically perceive or interpret cultural messages. Therefore, it is a good idea to learn cultural knowledge from the very beginning, rather than leave it to be acquired later. As was discussed in the results of the questionnaire investigation in Chapter Three, ESL/EFL learners of all ages and levels were willing to learn about cultural knowledge which was related to language learning and use. All types of language learning activities for learners at all levels of s/f language proficiency can be oriented to culture. For more advanced learners, contact activities in the community, which form a part of s/f language curricula, offer great opportunities for cultural learning. For learners of limited proficiency, a variety of methods can be useful for both the teachers and the learners. However, it is necessary to constantly remind these learners that cultural knowledge is as important and useful as linguistic knowledge, for

these learners are characterized as being eager to acquire pure linguistic skills to the neglect of all other related things.

### Exposure to target cultural contexts

The basic principle of teaching cultural knowledge is creating as much and as direct exposure as possible to the target cultural contexts. But an effectual methodology should not be based exclusively on the new cultural contexts. According to the foregoing discussion, a practical methodology would build a bridge between the learners' home culture and the target one by providing culturally familiar content as a departure point for introducing culturally unfamiliar content at every level of instruction. Pushing the learners into a context which is strange to them would be hasty, and could hinder the speed of learning and incur a strange feeling or fear of the target culture. In the final analysis, culturally familiar content is a good ingredient in introducing the learners to new concepts, linguistic and otherwise, in s/f language programs. Routine activities in everyday life such as greetings, invitations and declines of invitation are good starting points for introducing the characteristics of the target culture.

### Integration

Cultural knowledge can be integrated with language instruction in several ways. For example, when vocabulary is taught, due attention may be directed to placing words in various meaningful language contexts to ensure that its cultural connotation within each context will not be missed. When teaching grammar, for example word order, the teachers may introduce flexible positions of some words in a sentence and explain subtle differences of the different positions. When and if it is possible, the teachers may compare the structures of the target language and the learners' native language so as to clarify the possible similarities and differences between them. For a reading comprehension class, the teachers may identify some different cultural concepts before materials are selected with suitable cultural content. Then, the learners can be assigned materials to read, after which they must match the relevant episodes to the pertinent concepts.

All cultural teaching should follow two instructional principles. Firstly, culture learning activities must receive as careful planning as language learning activities. This prevents an erratic attitude and enables the teachers to allocate the desired importance to culture teaching. Secondly, cultural content should be tested as rigorously as language

content lest the learners assume that cultural knowledge has little or no impact on grades and consequently is not worthy of attention in or out of class.

**Techniques and classroom activities of culture teaching**

Since it is impractical to require most s/f language learners in East Asia to have much direct contact with native speakers of the target language, the techniques and classroom activities discussed in this section are not applicable in s/f language courses where the learners are geographically far away from the reality of life in the target speech community. Here, culture teaching provides background and context which brings the target language speakers to life and helps the learners to see and get vicarious experience of the reality. The techniques and activities are for developing learners' abilities to find cultural problems and facts and to evaluate the target cultural characteristics.

Video-tape and/or film watching

By showing select video-tapes and/or films the teacher can create an authentic communicative settings to use the target language. The learners may have opportunities to watch native speakers' use the language which they are learning. In the course of watching they may also see what usual gestures, facial expressions and body movements go with the language. If different tones, pitches and other phonological features are presented in the video materials, they may realize the subtle differences in various uses of these features. The teacher should encourage the learners to find differences by asking them relevant questions, asking them to explain some plots which are loaded with cultural characteristics, or guiding them through some typical sections with explanatory notes.

This activity can be combined with listening comprehension exercises, which are now common in s/f language programs. After the video materials are presented, the teacher may assign culturally based listening comprehension tasks for the learners to practice. The usual format of question and multiple-choice answers can be adopted. One advantage of doing so is that the teacher can not only check the learners' listening comprehension but also help them gain cultural knowledge.

Role-play and simulation

Activities of this kind are aimed at preparing the learners for culturally appropriate behavior. Some simulative settings of language communication are described first and the learners are required to participate in the communication in certain roles. In doing so the learners may be given all kinds of roles to play such as job seekers and employers in job

interviews, two employers exchanging impressions of a job applicant after an interview, a person wanting to jump in a ticket line for some urgent task, a customer making a complaint to a service representative. After the conclusion of each activity, the teacher may allow for class discussion of what took place, the misunderstandings that occur, and the feelings of the participants. The behavior or language of the people playing the roles may or may not be culturally convincing. Therefore the comments and evaluations of the simulation is as useful a learning experience as the simulation itself.

Since the activities involve the learners in simulative actions and verbal exchanges between the simulated role players, they presuppose a certain level of language proficiency and may be suitable for advanced learners.

Solving cultural problems

This activity is done through a device called "culture assimilator", which was originally designed by some American cultural anthropologists and developed systematically for use by Fiedler, Mitchell and Triandis (1971). In one sense, this is the opposite of role-play. In role-play, speaker-actors start with some subjective conception or meaning which they try to act out or display appropriately and the hearer-viewers are presented with some display or performance which they try to understand or explain. Thus, where role-play tends to be production-oriented, the method of culture assimilator emphasizes receptive skills.

The teaching process begins with some initial cultural input in either oral or written versions called culture assimilators. The learners then apply the general cultural input to a number of specific situations, seeking to make culturally accurate attributions as to subjective meaning. In use, this method may appear indistinguishable from ordinary elicitation of language using visual or written stimuli. The significant difference lies in the fact that the questions asked to the learners are not focused on the content of input, but are intended to instill cultural awareness. It has the goal of encouraging learners to analyze situations involving face-to-face cross-cultural contact.

In actual use this technique presents short incidents of cross-cultural conflict interaction and asks learners to select a most appropriate response from four plausible explanations of the behavior described in the incidents. The response is presented in a multiple-choice format. Each choice is accompanied by appropriate feedback to explain why the choice is or is not appropriate. It creates simulated situations for people to test and learn knowledge of the target culture.

The key to successful use of the technique is designing a proper set of culture assimilators. Besides making use of some typical cross-cultural misunderstandings and misexpression, the design work can be based on conspicuous, easily seen differences and over extension of what is already familiar to the learners.

This technique can be applied for the purposes of reading comprehension or listening comprehension, too. Although the detailed content of the incidents is not the major focus for this activity, the learners can practice their listening skills if the incidents are presented through audio/visual devices, and their skills of speed reading if the incidents are described in writing.

Native speakers' visits to the language class

The use of this method depends on the availability of native speakers of the target language. If native speakers are arranged to visit s/f language classrooms, they can provide a sense of authenticity and therefore the learners may have chances to practice their language skills and cultural knowledge in direct contact with native speakers. Through this real-life exposure to the target language and culture the learners may strengthen their understanding of the thoughts and feelings of members of the target language community as well as enhance their linguistic skills.

It should be noted that the above principles, measures, techniques and activities are covered by the model which has been discussed thus far in the chapter. They do not necessarily require learners to be immersed personally in the target culture. The major aim is to provide learners with some basic and general ideas about the target culture so that they can be mentally prepared for further learning and avoid as much fear and negative impressions as possible. Because of these characteristics the model should work effectively in non-native language environments, say, English teaching in China and other East Asian areas. Some of the previously mentioned activities are just improvement on activities currently being used in China. What is new is that the cultural knowledge of the English-speaking world is being incorporated to replace a proficiency-dominant orientation. With materials and facilities available the application of these principles and activities should not be a difficult task.

## Existing Problems in the Teaching of Culture

Limited awareness of the target culture prevents s/f language learners from communicating with native speakers in an effective way. Recurrent misunderstanding and miscommunication leave people frustrated. Although the call for incorporation of cultural

knowledge into s/f language education programs has been made repeatedly, the desired results are still out of sight. Then, a question emerges: why so?

The following are my opinions about the reasons. First, specific cultural goals are difficult to select. Because culture has an array of definitions as shown in Chapter One, it is a tough task for s/f language instructors to determine which aspects should be included in the curriculum at various levels of instruction. To put it simply, where does one begin? In reality, some teachers intend to include the teaching of culture in s/f language education programs, but without a definition of what is to be taught and what is to be selected from the seemingly endless and complex phenomena of culture, many become frustrated and return to the priority of skill training.

Next, most instructors are not well-trained in teaching culture. There is hardly a teacher training course or program which covers this area. Lack of proper training intensifies the shortage of competent and qualified teaching personnel in this field. In most courses for future language teachers the emphasis is placed on the study of language teaching methodology, the philosophy of language, or "classical literature," which occupies a large portion of class time. The result is that future teachers receive a good deal of training on how to cultivate s/f language learners' pure linguistic competence, but are less aware of the techniques and skills on how to organically combine culture training with learners' practice of linguistic skills.

Lastly, the importance of culture education stays only in the circle of theoretical research. It is not widely spread to every language classroom. In consequence of little recognition of the immediate and potential effects which culture may produce on language learning and use, good teaching material, appropriate teaching methodology and efforts "to mend up the hole" are far from enough. Although a few decades of research efforts have engendered an extensive and well-developed culture teaching theory as language teaching theory, much of the work has concentrated on definition of concepts, discussion of aims and purposes and delimitation of fields of interest. Since teaching practice needs theoretical guidelines, more theoretical work should be done to explore effective applicable approaches to carry out culture teaching in s/f language courses.

In light of the discussion in the previous two chapters, some specific questions can be put forward for s/f language instructors to consider when bringing culture into their s/f language teaching:

1. What are the characteristics of your students? What can be done to eliminate or downsize their prejudices and stereotypes about the target culture, if there are any?

2. How can you interest students in cultural knowledge and convince them that it is helpful to their learning and use of the target language?
3. Can you find similarities and differences between your students' home culture and their target culture?
4. How can you integrate cultural teaching into language teaching from the beginning of s/f language programs? What teaching materials or human resources can you use? Can you adapt the materials for classroom use?
5. What are the possible measures of evaluation and testing?

**Summary**

The lack of cultural knowledge is a source of learning difficulties in s/f language education. It is inappropriate to say that linguistic competence is different from communicative competence. The former should be a part of the latter. Linguistic competence includes the specific skills of using a language. For today's s/f language learners, acquisition of linguistic competence alone cannot meet their needs. Communicative competence should be the goal of learning a new language. Communicative competence does not only refer to language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. It should include another major part — cultural knowledge, or alternatively termed as discourse systems and speech acts. This knowledge enables s/f language learners to know how to appropriately use the target language in various real communicative settings. To improve the learners' communicative competence, it is necessary to break away from the traditional model of s/f language education and introduce culture teaching into the curriculum and instruction.

This can be done by integrating cultural knowledge into s/f language teaching. Cultural knowledge consists of (1) cultural assumptions and customs, which help s/f language learners interpret communicative setting; (2) structure and style of information, which are the ways of organizing, expressing and understanding information from the cultural perspectives; and (3) ways of speaking, or termed kinetics, by which speakers of a language demonstrate emphatic, emotional and insinuative meanings. A person's manner of speech, tone of voice, speed, stress, pause, pitch, turn-taking, gesture and body movement are concrete components of ways of speaking.

To achieve this goal, efforts must be made to delineate the cultural aspects which are to be taught in s/f language classrooms. The training of qualified teaching personnel

should also be intensified. In addition, educators should make the importance of cultural knowledge known to general learners and put the related theoretical research results to practical use.

Culture is transmitted and acquired through all the perceptual modes. Personal experience is the key to a new culture. Teachers should encourage learners to find differences between home and target cultures and understand the target language from a native speaker's perspective. Cultural knowledge should be tested as rigorously as linguistic knowledge so as to send a message of its importance to learners. Since a culture is diversified in itself, the teaching of culture can be conducted in various ways. A basic principle of teaching culture is to create as much exposure as possible to the target cultural contexts. In s/f language classroom settings, video materials, role-play, culture assimilator and native speakers' visits are potentially effective methods and techniques to instill cultural knowledge into the learners' minds.

**Concluding Remarks**

This research project is intended neither to overstate the functions of culture nor to over-stress the magic effect of cultural knowledge or to speak of making its application mandatory in s/f language education. Rather, it has discussed the situations which East Asian ESL/EFL learners/users encountered in their s/f language learning and cross-cultural communication in English, analyzed possible causes of cross-cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication from what the subjects experienced, and eventually, on the basis of these discussions and analyses, introduced and proposed some practical methodologies of integrating culture teaching into s/f language education.

Through the research investigation the author felt that culturally-related misunderstandings, miscommunication and difficulties in learning and using the target language occurred repeatedly and existed extensively among the East Asian language learners/users. Lack of cultural learning, while learning the related language, was experienced by all participants of this research project. All this added to the necessity of a call for integrating cultural knowledge with the training of linguistic skills in s/f language education.

Readers might have noticed the author's attempt to establish a culturally-oriented model of s/f language education. It is believed that such a model is of reference value and significant to the practice and research of s/f language education and it is good for learners' future real use of a target language. It will be a complement to the linguistic-skill-oriented

teaching and learning approach prevalent in most s/f language programs. By following this model, s/f language learners will have a mastery of not only linguistic knowledge of a target language, but also some rudimentary notions about the cultural traits of the target language community that are intimately related with the use of the target language. In other words, learners will acquire culturally-applicable communicative notions as well as linguistic skills. With the acquisition of these two types of competence, learners will be able to verbally interact with native speakers of the target language in a more natural way. The smooth and proper use of the target language may in turn pave the way for proper cross-cultural understanding.

It should be noted that problems do not only exist in ESL/EFL education. Although this research took ESL/EFL learners/users as participants and investigated language learning and communication problems among them, the comments and conclusions are in most circumstances true of learners of other s/f languages. Much of the investigation and analysis in this research applies to teaching and learning any s/f language. However, the author's own experience is in the TESL area. In view of this, reference was made only to English for exemplification purposes.

It must be pointed out that most of the examples cited as culturally inappropriate speech and behavior are the participants' real experiences. The discussion of the examples provide us with some insights into the long-existing problems in the s/f language teaching and learning field. However, thorough solutions cannot be worked out before more research is done on the specific topics in this regard. It is hoped that this research will become an initial step which will hopefully go some way toward revealing the mystery of the teaching of culture in s/f language education and toward penetrating the mist of cultural difference that has proved to be a major obstacle to the smooth exchange of information and messages between people from the Eastern and Western culture.

The author cherishes a hope that the statements, viewpoints and suggestions presented throughout the thesis will not only give rise to people's interest in the role of culture in learning a new language, but also facilitate the task of introducing culture education into the s/f language classrooms.

Finally, it is sincerely hoped that the present research will provide a platform for other scholars to work out details of this model, contribute to the body of knowledge about communication, and help develop a more effective approach to s/f language education. It is also hoped that the research will attract more attention to these research topics — linguistic competence, communicative competence, knowledge of self culture and target culture, and the role of this knowledge in cross-cultural communication. In addition, the author hopes

that this research has provided some notions and information about cultural and linguistic characteristics of the East Asian s/f language learners/users and suggested strategies for those who work with the people from these regions.

For myself, to incorporate cultural elements into s/f language classroom instruction is just like a long journey. This work is nothing but a spark which will start a fire in a prairie.

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# APPENDIX A

## Relationship of Language and Thought: Whorfian Hypothesis

The well-known Whorfian hypothesis, which is also referred to as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism, believes that language is determined by culture. Benjamin Lee Whorf was a linguist of the anthropological tradition. He followed the track of Franz Boas and Edward Sapir, both of whom were among the most influential figures in American anthropology at the beginning of this century. Whorf, on the basis of summarizing his predecessors' theories and positions, put forward and popularized a notion that different languages divide up reality in different ways and language determines the shape of thought. He says in his Language, Thought and Reality (1956):

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significance as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way --- an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, But its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees. (pp. 213-214)

This most famous passage of his is a controversial hypothesis of linguistic determinism which claims that language guides the direction of thought and speakers of different languages have different patterns of thought. From his perspective, the structure of a language strongly influences or fully determines the way its native speakers perceive the world. People share a world view by virtue of the language which they use in communicating with each other. Each language offers a particular way for its users to form their own thoughts. Language determines the shape of thought. In return, specific modes of thinking and perception determine the ways people use language. For instance, a native Chinese speaker, by virtue of speaking Chinese, has a different mode of thinking and perceives the world differently from an English speaker. In support of this principle, Whorf cites the different uses of grammatical categories across cultures. Tense marker is one typical example. The existence or lack of a particular tense marker is considered to determine and influence people's mental concept of time. If a certain language has no grammatical marker to distinguish between the past tense and the past continuous tense, then the speakers of that language do not perceive or conceptualize these temporal distinctions. Different color terms in various languages are used as evidence that members of different cultures perceive and divide the spectrum of colors in different ways. If a certain language does not have a term for a color, then according to this hypothesis, the speakers of that language cannot perceive the color. One of the most popular examples is that the Eskimos have many different words for snow, depending on such features as crustiness and when it falls, while traditional English has only one. Such a list of facts can go on and on.

## A Critical Analysis of Whorf's Theory

Although controversial, the Whorfian hypothesis was prevalent for some time after it came into being. Nevertheless, much subsequent research posed opinions that in most part oppose the hypothesis itself. Among all critics Brent Berlin and Paul Kay (1969), Jerome Bruner et al (1966) revealed through their respective field research that users of a particular language are able to distinguish between different hues of color even when their

language does not have a word to label the distinction. Berlin and Kay's study is an anthropological cross-cultural one of color terms and their referents. They claim that certain color terms have a stable focus cross-culturally and that the scientist ought to correlate the "focal color referents" with the labels. Berlin and Kay made a study of the lexical coding of color to determine the degree of arbitrariness in the coding. They write the following in their 1967 joint work:

> The prevailing doctrine of American linguists and anthropologists has, in this century, been that of extreme linguistic relativity. Proponents of this view frequently offer as a paradigm example the alleged total semantic arbitrariness of the lexical coding of color. We suspect that this allegation of "total arbitrariness" in the way languages segment the color space is a gross overstatement. (pp. 2-3)

In terms of color they challenge the assumption of dissimilar color distinction quite convincingly:

> Although different languages encode in the lexicon different numbers of basic color categories, there exists a total inventory of about eleven basic color categories from which the eleven or fewer basic color categories of any given language are always drawn. (p. 2)

Jerome Bruner, Patricia Greenfield and R. Oliver are psychologists. They carried out an experiment involving French and Wolof-speaking children presented with pictures in sets of three. In each set, two pictures were alike in color, two in form, and two in function of the object pictured. The children were asked to choose the two pictures out of each set that were most alike and to state why they made their choice.

Wolof is a dialectal language in Senegal. There is no single word for the color *blue*, and the people who speak Wolof describe the colors *orange* and *red* by one and the same word. The color *yellow* is labeled by a word, but Wolof-speakers are in disagreement as to the referents of the word. In other words, the term for the color *yellow* has a low degree of coding ability. Bruner et al regarded both languages, French and Wolof, as being able to code the aspects of function represented in the pictures; this means that speakers of either language could express the functions of the objects in their own language.

It was expected that Wolof-speaking child participants would classify pictures according to functions of the object rather than color. Bilingual children would rely upon color, but the extent of their reliance is less than unilingual French-speaking children. The French-speaking children would mostly show groupings based on colors. However, the result was against the original expectation. It was the unilingual Wolof-speaking children who used color as a classifying principle to form their groupings of pictures. The bilingual participants and the French speakers, on the contrary, rely more on function and shape than on color. Besides, it is noteworthy that this tendency increased with age. This experiment result went directly against what Whorf claimed. It proved that non-existence of color terms in the Wolof language does not affect and inhibit its speakers' perception of the categories of color.

The second phase of the experiment was aimed at determining whether the lack of color terms in Wolof affects color discrimination. All subjects were asked to group the two most similar pictures in sets of three on the basis of color. This time each set consisted of two pictures of one predominant color such as orange. Perception errors were counted --- instances of grouping orange and red rather than orange and orange. The result was that the Wolof speakers made the most discrimination errors, the bilingual subjects' errors were somewhat fewer in number, and the unilingual French-speaking children committed the fewest errors in performing the pre-designed experimental task. But it must be stressed that in all cases, errors were relatively infrequent and of less significance. This fact led the

researchers to draw a conclusion that presence or absence of color words, which is technically termed as lexical coding, does indeed have an effect on color discrimination to some extent. Another point to be noted is that age could not be overlooked in this matter: the older the children, the fewer errors found in color perception, no matter what language was dominant.

Thus, it is difficult to conclude from Whorfian linguistic evidence that users of different languages perceive the world differently. Less grounds can be cited as support to their seemingly right claim that different language use is the "cause" of difference in perception. Perhaps the more critical question for our purposes is not "Does language determine perception?", but rather, "Why do languages differ from each other?" For example, why do Eskimos have twelve different words for snow? Why do color terms differ across languages?

It is shown in more recent research that people's perception of the objective world and their corresponding language development are affected by ecological conditions, levels of technology and related socio-cultural institutions rather than the reverse. A good convincing example is a Papua New Guinean dialect. The people there had no exposure to the dye used in magenta. The result of this unexposure is certainly that the dialect did not have a term for *magenta*. It is perhaps likely that people there do not distinguish the color itself readily on first sight. However, when the dye began being introduced into the local region, the color became easily perceived and a corresponding color term developed to meet the need of description. This shows that both color perception and language development seem to depend on the sensory experience.

However, the Whorfian theory found support in some other experiments. In order to examine and compare nonlinguistic behaviors of speakers of unrelated languages to see if they share any conceptual categories underlying different labels and differing numbers of labels for the categories, two psycholinguists, Roger Brown and Eric H. Lenneberg, who were perhaps among the first to explore in this field after Whorfian theory came into being, conducted an investigation. They first investigated English speakers only and tried to link memory to codeability of items in the color lexicon. Subjects were first shown twenty-four color chips, one at a time and asked to name the color as quickly as possible. It was found that the longer the color word was, the longer it took the subject to say the name and the less agreement there was among subjects with regard to the name of that color. Such a term was considered to be low in codability. Agreement among subjects on a color word was interpreted as indicating high codability for that name.

The next step was to test another group of subjects with the intent of studying the relationship between codability and memory availability. A subject was shown four color chips from the previous set of twenty-four for five seconds. After the chips had been taken away, the subject was asked to pick out the four from a set of a hundred and twenty chips. Correct identification was regarded as recognition. Brown and Lenneberg found a small correlation between codability (agreement on a color word) and recognition. Later a larger correlation was found when the delay period was increased from five seconds. When the delay was reduced from five seconds, the correlation found earlier were almost gone. This indicated that language (here it is embodied by labels) has an influence on thought (here it is embodied by memory).

The above presentations reveal that different research can result in different or even opposite conclusions. The author contends that it is because different people view the same thing from different angles; they have different starting points and focus of attention and with different objectives in mind. More research findings show that language has some effects on thought and thought in turn throws influence on language expression. On this basis it is held by the author that no matter how different languages might be, thoughts of people of different nations are communicable through linguistic expressions. Otherwise, it

is theoretically impossible for different nations to establish bilateral relations and promote various exchanges such as business trade, cultural exchanges and scientific research. Different languages are likely to give rise to different modes of thinking, but the case does not universally apply. In return, different modes of thinking make their mediums --- languages --- bear unique ways of structuring, organizing and expressing messages. The uniqueness of each language is a component part of the culture. It plays its role in the speech community of the language and is inherited within the culture. To learn a new language one must pay adequate attention to the uniqueness which often constitutes trouble spots in the course of study and use.

# APPENDIX B

## Questionnaire and Interview Topics

### The Sample Cover Letter of Questionnaire

Date:

Dear .....:

I am undertaking a study on the importance of cultural knowledge in the learning and use of second/foreign language. The principal aim of this research project is to probe for a new model to contribute to second/foreign language education.

Enclosed is a questionnaire. It is designed to gather necessary information and data for the purpose of this research. You may answer the questions either in English or in Chinese. The findings of this questionnaire will be incorporated in my degree thesis and used to make suggestions and recommendations concerning improving ESL/EFL teaching and learning.

Please rest assured that your name will not be used. Participants will not be identified in preliminary or final reports. Only the information and data you provide will be analyzed and synthesized. When the project is completed, this questionnaire will be destroyed.

Your input is so important for this research that I hope you can take some time to participate. After completing the questionnaire, please use the attached envelope to return it at your earliest convenience. If you need to talk with me, please phone me at (home) 439-9943 or (Office) 492-0113.

Sincere thanks in anticipation of your reply.

Sincerely,

Dan Huai Lu

10025-84 Ave. Apt. 4
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2E6

**Questionnaire on Language Learning and Cross-Cultural Communication**

**Part One: Background Information**

***Instructions:*** Below are some questions about yourself, educational history, and related areas. Please be as thorough as you can in your remarks. If the question is not clear, please contact me for clarification. If you don't feel comfortable in answering some questions, please skip over them. All I want to do here is to obtain as much background information as possible.

1. Name: _____
   Family Given
2. Sex: Male _____ Female _____
3. Age: _____
4. Place of Birth: _____
5. Ethnicity: _____

6. What language(s) or dialect(s) were used in classroom instruction when you received education in elementary and secondary schools?

   _____

7. What language(s) or dialect(s) is spoken at home?
   With your parents _____
   With your spouse and siblings _____
   With your children _____

8. Did you learn any English before you came to Canada?
   Yes _____ No _____

9. If your answer is yes to Question 8, how long had you learned it?
   _____ years _____ months

10. How old were you when you began learning English?

    _____

11. Was your language instructor a native-English speaker? If not, what was the nationality of your language instructor?

    _____

12. What was the teaching method of your language instructor?

    By grammar-translation method _____

    By communicative method _____

    By other methods (please specify) _____

13. What was the language of instruction when you learned English?

    English _____ Other languages _____

14. How would you rate your English proficiency before coming to Canada?

| | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Speaking | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Writing | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Comprehension | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

15. How long have you been in Canada?

    _____ year(s) _____ month(s)

16. Did you take English classes after you came to Canada?

    Yes _____ No _____

17. If your answer is yes to Question 16, how long did you take English classes?

    _____ year(s) _____ month(s)

18. How much English do you require for everyday activities?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

19. Do you think your English competence has increased since you have been in Canada?

20. Do you speak your native language, English or a mixture of English and your native language when in communication with your countrymen?

    English _____ Mixture _____ Other _____

**Part Two: Assessment of Second/Foreign Language Use and Learning and Behavior in Cross-Cultural Communication**

***Instructions:*** In this part of the questionnaire there are some questions concerning learning and using a second/foreign language in cross-cultural communication. Some of them are simulated communicative settings in your daily study, work and life in Canada. When answering these questions, please think of all probable responses you may give in each of the simulated circumstances first and, then, select the one that is most likely to occur as your answer.

1. What will you say and do to a Canadian friend who invites you to a dinner party which is in time conflict with you schedule?

   (A) Accept the invitation on the spot and at a later date tell your friend that you could not make it for some reason.

   (B) Decline your friend's invitation immediately.

   (C) Tell your friend about the time conflict and discuss another possible date with him.

   (D) Accept the invitation and adapt your own schedule to the time of the party.

2. What would you likely do when your own opinions are different from or even opposite your professor's?

   (A) Put forth your own opinions immediately and asking for comments on the difference.

   (B) Write down the difference and try to consult more materials to judge by yourself which is correct or reasonable.

   (C) Take note of your teacher's or professor's viewpoints and discus them with him/her after class.

   (D) Talk with your fellow students about the difference between your and the teacher's or professor's viewpoints

3. What will you do when you are in the face of a direct and sharp criticism from your partners? Will you take a different attitude on a public occasion and on a private occasion?

   (A) Listen to the criticism attentively to see if there is some reason in it.

   (B) Leave the criticism maker at once without saying anything more.

   (C) Defend yourself by strongly arguing with your partner in public.

   (D) Remain quiet on the spot and exchange opinions with your partner privately afterwards.

4. What would you do to express your appreciation if a Canadian friend did you a service, say, fixing your car in his spare time?

   (A) Say thanks to the friend and promise to recommend his service to other acquaintances of yours.

   (B) Invite the friend to a dinner in a restaurant at a convenient time.

   (C) Buy a gift for him with a note of thanks.

(D) Offer to pay for the service for the time which the friend spent on the car.

5. You are now talking about a comedy with some friends who are native English speakers. They laugh over some plots joyfully from time to time, but you cannot get the funny things which cause their happy laughter. What prevents you from feeling the same way as they do?

   (A) Because I am not familiar with the culture of the English-speaking people.

   (B) They are fussy with trifles which are actually not funny.

   (C) There are too many informal expressions which I have never heard.

   (D) Comedy actors and actresses usually speak too fast for me to follow.

6. Suppose you are going to write a term paper and hesitate at some topics. You ask a Canadian teacher for advice. But he/she insists that you decide on it by yourself. How would you interpret this behavior?

   (A) The teacher does not take responsibility for the students' academic progress.

   (B) The teacher is impatient with you because you take up too much of his/her time.

   (C) It is not his/her business, so he/she is not obliged to advise you.

   (D) The teacher wants you to be more independent and to take initiative in your own educational process.

7. Do you have any problems or difficulties in face-to-face communication? If yes, please specify some of the most serious instances.

8. How well do you know the difference between native and non-native English and the characteristics of how native English speakers organize their sentences? Please give a few examples.

9. What is most helpful to your organization and expression of ideas?

10. Are you interested in learning some cultural knowledge which is related to using and understanding a second/foreign language?

11. Which of the statements below most accurately describes your feeling about Canadian culture now that you have stayed in it for some time?

   (A) It makes me conservative in being assimilated into an alien culture.

   (B) It enables me to see the strong and weak points of my home culture and urges me to learn more English but not the Canadian culture.

   (C) It encourages me to merge into the culture which I live in and to break away from my home culture.

   (D) It helps me make up my mind to learn English well, to learn about the Canadian culture and to preserve my own cultural identity.

12. What are the most frustrating things in your use of English in communication with Canadians?

    (A) It is difficult to choose words and phrases to organize and to express ideas in the proper way.

    (B) I can understand Canadian people but they cannot understand me.

    (C) Language is not a major barrier. It is difficult to find topics of common interest.

    (D) Others (please specify)

13. What do you think of the culture of the English-speaking world?

    (A) It has more strengths than East cultures.

    (B) Basically it is just about the same as other cultures.

    (C) I am not as comfortable with it as with my home culture; however, it is worthwhile to obtain some knowledge about it.

    (D) It is so strange to me that it is absolutely impossible to arouse my initiative to get accustomed to it.

14. According to your experience what is your major weakness in using English?

    (A) My trouble lies in English grammar.

    (B) English pronunciation and intonation are the most difficult parts for me to handle.

    (C) I need further training in using words.

    (D) My linguistic skills are well trained, however, I must learn to use the language from cultural perspective.

15. What is an effective way to learn or upgrade English in your opinion?

    (A) Create as many opportunities as possible to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing.

    (B) All-round increase of linguistic skills together with knowledge of the cultural traits related to language use.

    (C) Keep the learners' native language away to the maximum degree and concentrate on the target language only.

    (D) Compare English and the learners' native languages to find differences and similarities.

16. Which of the following statements can best describe your purpose for learning English as a second/foreign language?

    (A) A new language like English can help me know more about the advances of science and technology.

    (B) English is the most powerful language compared to other languages.

    (C) With a good command of English one can merge into the mainstream culture of the English-speaking world.

(D) Promotion in salary, rank, and social status becomes possible and easier if one is capable of using English as a second/foreign language fluently in either English- or non-English dominant societies.

**The Sample Invitation Letter to the Interviewees**

Date:

Dear .....:

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to you for your participation in the first stage of my research project. I am happy to report that I have completed the initial data collection as planned, with the help of so many warm-hearted people including you.

Seeing that you are one of the most active informants who provided insightful data during the questionnaire investigation, I would like to request an interview with you. For your preparation for it, I keep you informed of the topics which we will cover in the talk. You are encouraged to provide as many illustrative examples as possible. In brief, it is my aim to propose a new model to improve on current second/foreign language education. In order to reach this goal, I would like to discuss with you about the following:

(1) second/foreign language education in your home country;

(2) your thoughts on the role of cultural knowledge in second/foreign language education;

(3) the resources for learning about the target culture in second/foreign language teaching contexts;

(4) the culture-related difficulties in second/foreign learning and use, such as word meaning (e.g. euphemistic expressions, connotation), structure of styles and information, ways of expressing ideas, assumptions about the same events from different cultural perspectives;

(5) the teaching and learning methods used in your English programs;

(6) some potentially effective approaches to introduce cultural knowledge into second/foreign language programs;

(7) any other relevant topics you might bring up.

Please rest assured that your real name will not be used in any case. Only the information and data you provide will be analyzed and used as part of my thesis. At the moment, one thing must be made known to you and that is that a tape-recorder will be used to help me record the interview details. However, it should be noted that none of the interview information will be used without your authorization. For this purpose, I will present you the transcript of our talk after I personally prepare it.

Parenthetically, you may avoid replying to my questions at any time of the interview when you feel it inconvenient or uncomfortable to answer.

Although you showed a willingness to continue your involvement in this project, I ask you to confirm your interest at this time. Because of your busy schedule, I would be happy to make an appointment at your convenience. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have changed your mind.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Dan Huai Lu

10025-84 Ave. Apt. 4
Edmonton, Alberta
T6E 2G6
(H) 439-9943 (O) 492-0113

**The Sample Post-Interview Letter to the Interviewees**

Date:

Dear .....:

Thank you again for your participation in the interview dated .....

Now that I have personally transcribed the taped interview, errors may have occurred in my transcription, or your ideas may be recorded unclearly or out of context. For the sake of accuracy, please read over the material and feel free to make any corrections necessary to your ideas, comments and expressions. Besides, please do not hesitate to add or delete anything if you feel it necessary to do so. When I use the material in writing my thesis, I will incorporate your recommended changes, not the original record.

Attached please find a consent form. If you agree to let me use the transcribed material, please be kind enough to indicate your authorization by signing the form and returning it in the enclosed envelope with your approved transcript.

Should you need to talk with me for some reason, please call me at the numbers listed below.

In anticipation of a reply at your earliest convenience.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

Dan Huai Lu
10025-84 Ave. Apt. 4
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# APPENDIX C

## A Brief Account of the Grammar-Translation Method

In the Middle Ages, Latin was the official language in church and government administration throughout many European countries. It was also the language in school education and academic research. Later, Latin ceased to be a live language and was learned for the purpose of reading the literature written in Latin and assimilating the ancient culture. The grammar approach was the only language teaching and learning method at that time. By this method the learners obtained the knowledge about the rules of the language so that they were able to put the literature in Latin into their respective languages. The brief overview suggests that the method is for developing the learners' ability to translate with the help of the knowledge about language rules. It is not for acquiring the ability to use the language for life, study and work. When the 18th and the 19th centuries came, Latin began to decline and concurrently English and French began to take its place. Only from then on did people get access to courses in modern languages such as English and French. Handicapped by unavailability of other teaching methodology, people of that time resorted to the grammar approach, particularly at the initial stages of learning.

The grammar approach has many different names. Some people call it "the translation method" because it lays much emphasis on translation; others term it "the grammar method" or "the grammar-translation method" because grammar is the main focus in classroom instruction; still others name it after the initiators such as Heinrich Ollendorff Jacotot, who summarized the historical experience of the translation method and provided theoretical exposition under the influence of psychology and turned this traditional method of language teaching into a scientific system or methodology; some people call it the "traditional method", because it inherits the tradition of Latin language teaching. To distinguish it from other language teaching methods which were developed much later and paid attention to the training of oral and aural proficiencies, it is also called "the classical method or old method".

Notwithstanding the multitude of names by which it is known, this approach remains essentially the same and does not deviate from its original aim or stand. It boils down to a simple definition, that is, a method of teaching a foreign language via explaining its grammatical rules in the learner's mother tongue. It is characterized by the equal use of a mother tongue and a foreign language in the process of teaching and learning with an emphasis on the development of written language. A typical example is that following the speaking of a foreign word, it is translated into its equivalent in the learners' mother tongue. As soon as a sentence is made in the target language, it is put into the home language. A text will be segmented into several pieces for grammatical analysis. When the analysis is completed, the whole text will be translated into the home language word for word and sentence by sentence. In this way, the two languages, home language and target language, are involved at all times throughout the process of learning. The learners' mother tongue is a key point in the grammar approach. The modern version of the grammar approach significantly reduces the function and importance of translation skills, making itself sharply different from the classical version. Instead of absolutely excluding the practice of pronunciation and listening comprehension and underestimating the oral competence, the modern grammar approach gives consideration to oral and aural exercises, though reading competence still takes the first priority. It is theorized that grammar provides a solid foundation for understanding and is the prerequisite for the learner's oral proficiency. In the course of classroom instruction, grammar must go before understanding the text even if this sequence and arrangement isolates the grammatical lecture from the organic relationship between the contexts. Translation is both one of the purposes for learners to learn a new language and an effective way to check the learner's comprehension. It has a dual function: a teaching medium and a teaching goal. Since the learner has acquired his/her first language, this is the basis on which to learn a second language. Only when the learner is able to translate the text in a foreign language into

accurate mother tongue, can it be made certain that the text is thoroughly understood. The weight of translation goes down, but the mother tongue remains the language of instruction through the whole process of explaining grammatical rules, word usage and text analysis. When grammatical analysis of the text is completed, translation is used to test the learner's comprehension and ability of using the mother tongue to express the original text.

# Appendix D

## A Historical View of Second/Foreign Language Education

A retrospective look at the history of s/f language education will provide insights into the weakness of the traditional model of s/f language education. Such a perspective will bring to light what is on the right track and what pitfalls are to be avoided in the future.

There was a period of time when people tended to think that all communicative problems grew out of language. It was believed that structural differences between languages created all kinds of barriers to native speakers of two languages in their inter-ethnic cross-cultural communication. To pave the way for smooth expression and easy understanding of one's interlocutors, one must concentrate on language structure, have a clear notion of what the target language is composed of, and try to upgrade the proficiency of one's target language through much mechanical practice. It would seem that with mastery of the linguistic structure of a target language, one has the potential to go successfully through inter-ethnic cross cultural communication.

Under the heavy influence and direction of this common notion, language education has for some time been placing its focus on the linguistic structure of target languages. Efforts have been taken to inculcate the linguistic structure of a target language into its learners at the expense of all other things which are relevant to a successful formation of communicative competence. A glimpse at the history of s/f language teaching reveals without obscurity that emphasis has been put on training linguistic competence only up till the 1960s. Until this time, all attention was directed to language structure per se. It can be found that this situation was kept intact for hundreds of years in s/f language teaching. As French linguist and methodologist of language teaching Louis Marchand comments, proficiency-oriented methodology uses one's native language to teach a s/f language. His metaphorical description of such a methodology best summarizes its nature. In this methodology, the capital character "I" stands for the ideology of one's native language; "M" refers to the words of one's native language while the small character "m" represents the words of a s/f language. The essence of the proficiency-oriented methodology is to place "m" side by side with "M", the unfortunate result being that the ideology of a s/f language is buried in the course of keeping words of the two languages involved parallel with each other. The typical form of manifestation is translation practice. The equations below expresses his ideas concisely:

m (words of a s/f language) = M (words of a native language)

? = I (ideology of a native language)

Although Louis Marchand's metaphor does not apply to all the cases, it gives a vivid picture of what this methodology looks like in the mind of people.

The direct method goes against the translation method. It requires that learners of a s/f language should not gain access into that language through the use of the learner's mother tongue. Instead, the learner must develop a gradual command of that language through conversation and reading in the target language itself. In this way, the direct method excludes grammar and translation from language education.

After World War Two, a variety of schools of s/f language teaching methodology emerged. Among them, the audio-lingual approach was an eye-catching one. By the word "approach", C. C. Fries (1945) explains the difference it has from all methods which had been prevalent prior to the rise of the audio-lingual approach. According to his viewpoint, method refers to specific types and techniques of teaching whereas approach is a path or a road or a theory which leads to attainment of certain teaching aims. Therefore, the audio-lingual approach is a system of teaching methodology aimed at providing learners with access to mastery of oral competence of a target language. It criticizes the translation method for its reliance upon explanation of grammatical rules through native language and memorization of individual words to develop a learner's reading ability. It also attacks the

direct method for its absolute exclusion of native language from s/f language learning. On the basis of its unfavorable criticism of both the translation method and the direct method, the audio-lingual approach establishes a system of teaching which takes sentence pattern drill as core and calls for repetitive mechanical imitation in the hope of automatically cultivating a set of language habits.

N. Chomsky (1957) proposed the transformational-generative linguistics as his systematic theory on linguistic competence and linguistic performance. This theory critically comments on structural linguistics and behavioral psychology --- the theoretical basis of the audio-lingual approach. Chomsky contends that man is congenitally competent to learn languages through an internal ability. The human brain has an innate mechanism to master language. Language is a potential structure that exists in the human mind. Once the innate mechanism is exploited and fully developed, it yields an infinite number of linguistic sentences to express thoughts which its users have never heard of or met with before. All linguistic sentences are created in accordance with a set of finite rules. Learning a language is by no account a simple process of imitation and memorization. It is a process of learning to create sentences with the help of rules, especially grammatical rules. There are two steps to completing a command of rules. The first is termed as the procedure of discovery; and the second as the procedure of creativity. With the procedure of discovery as the basis, it is essential to develop learners' ability to creatively apply linguistic rules they acquire, for speech is a rule-governed creativity. The cognitive-code method is just a derivative from Chomsky's theory.

It can be seen easily and clearly from the historical development of s/f language education that all the existing approaches in the field of language education are linguistically focused. They are either deductive or inductive. Briefly speaking, the grammar-translation method lays stress on learning grammar deductively by means of memorizing rules and exceptions to rules. It requires that learners use their knowledge of rules and long vocabulary lists to translate literature from their s/f language into their first language. The audio-lingual approach was developed as a reaction to the traditional grammar-translation method. It comes out of the behaviorist theory that all learning is habit formation, a mechanical, not a mental skill. Learners make conditioned responses by means of dialogue memorization and pattern practices in the target language and are reinforced by hearing the correct response. All drills are presented inductively. The direct method tries to mirror first language acquisition by total immersion. The cognitive-code method is based on cognitive theory, which stresses people's innate ability to learn language using their mental powers to deduce rules and create novel utterances. Rules are presented deductively to facilitate meaningful, contextualized learning, thereby moving learners from competence to performance, practicing all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) from the beginning of instruction.

It is also clear from the recall of the past of s/f language education that skill training centers the stage of classroom instruction. An underlying principle of this practice is that language is basically a skill. Proficiency is in direct proportion to the extent of drill and exercise.

As far as the skills of a language is concerned, nothing wrong can be found with this principle. It is true that practice makes perfect. However, when it applies alone to s/f language education, its incompleteness shows up. Language is a tool to reflect one's mind and emotion. Thought is related with language at all times. In majority circumstances thought cannot come into being and be expressed without a language involved. Normally, human thought is governed by the culture in which one lives and grows up. It is in this sense that thought is a part of culture and the relationship between language and thought is essential for understanding the crucial role culture plays in language learning and performance.

# Appendix E

## Sample Interview Transcripts

Interview with Dalton, a graduate student, on June 20, 1991. The numbered questions are the interviewer's questions asked during the talk. The letter "A:" stands for the interviewee's answer.

(1) First of all, I'd like to ask you if you feel the current EFL curriculum advocates the introduction of the culture of the English-speaking world to learners?

A: In comparison with those students learning science and technology, students of English major have some contact with the culture of the English-speaking world.

(2) Could you please cite a few examples to show that students of English major have some opportunities to learn something about the culture of the English-speaking world?

A: I have heard a lot about other institutions of education. But now I could only confine my talk to my own experience. In my case, I learned a bit of the culture of the English-speaking world mainly through the reading of novels. In classroom our teachers touched on this aspect only when they felt it necessary to say something about the background of a certain plot, a certain character and a certain situation so that students could have a better understanding of what they were reading, what was being discussed in class at that time. Other information and knowledge in this regard came from casual chats with people who used to stay in English-speaking countries for some time, from feature reports in Chinese newspapers and magazines which were occasionally printed out for some political purposes, or from the contacts with English-speaking people; many of them served as language teachers and technical people. One thing that cannot be overlooked is that on majority occasions this kind of information and knowledge is acquired through the medium of Chinese. In addition to this, there has been no single course in colleges, institutes and universities throughout mainland China to introduce the culture of the English-speaking world. This phenomenon is sufficient to prove that this area is basically prohibited, or at least neglected.

(3) Do you mean to say that culture becomes a part of the content of classroom instruction only when students have problems in understanding background when they are reading literary works?

A: That's right. Besides, I feel that one of our weaknesses is that cultural information on contemporary English-speaking world is particularly lacking in China's EFL education. Most teachers and students are familiar with only the social conditions in the 17th and 18th centuries. This is because most of our class texts are about that period and what we see in textbooks are classic literature. Even the language in texts is a bit archaic. I believe that people will agree with me on this point. Take myself for example, I didn't know much about the situations of contemporary West before I came to study here in Canada.

(4) Let's talk about language use. Do you think that the difficulties are related to the lack of cultural knowledge?

A: Not all but some.

(5) Can you further explain your points?

A: I tell you my own feelings about the difficulties in using English. When the word order in an English sentence is similar to Chinese, it causes less difficulties. I find that my reading speed is higher when the sentences in the original texts are not very different from the sentence structures of Chinese. But if too many idiomatic expressions appear or there are less similar structures, I often feel that understanding costs more time and therefore the speed is reduced. This feeling can be easily understood. For example, such a sentence "we shall hold a board meeting on the third floor this evening" won't be a difficult point for any learner of English, because the word order is exactly equivalent to Chinese. However, if

the same meaning is expressed in a different structure like "there will be a board meeting on the third floor this evening", you must explain the structure "there be" to help learners understand. Such difficulties are more linguistic than cultural, I suppose. Right? Some other cases are different. Idiomatic usage, set phrases, slang and conventional ways of expression are another source of learners' difficulty. On this point, if a learner knows more about the cultural background and historical context, then the extent of difficulty will be much less. Such language phenomena cannot be adequately explained from the pure linguistic perspectives. They have certain cultural or historical reasons behind them. Maybe no one is the authoritative in explaining or retrieving these reasons. As general learners we are only concerned about the current exact meanings and the contemporary usage. We do not intend to retrieve in what historical or cultural contexts or backgrounds these phenomena came into being. We only face the reality, that is, we cannot find or determine their meanings in dictionaries. Grammatical or lexical analyses do not help much in these cases. Most of time what we can do as learners is merely guessing.

(6) It is interesting. What do you think is the causes of such differences?

A: I think that different people think and express their ideas in different ways. Every language has its unique ways of expression though most concepts are communicable and some basic language structures are identical or similar. Let's compare English and Chinese for example. Although both the languages have the sentence structure "subject" plus "verb" plus "object", there are some other structures unique in English or in Chinese. Say, we Chinese can put a word of place after some verbs as objects, like "eat dining room", "eat mountain when you live there". But this is not understandable in English. The information expressed in these unique structures could be source of difficulty for non-native speakers of the language unless people know these special structures through learning. This is why s/f language learners often have confusions in cross-cultural language communication. Such differences should be the focus of teaching so that learners can have less troubles in real use of the target language.

(7) Now that you have lived in the English-speaking world for some time, do you have the desire to merge into the culture of the society?

A: My answer only pertains to my own case. Although I feel that it is good for non-native-English speakers like me to acquire some knowledge about the culture of the North American English-speaking world, I do not intend to give up my own cultural beliefs and habits. It is not because I am preservative. Canada is a mullet-nation country. The government advocates multiculturalism. For minority people, this policy is protective in that it encourages them to keep their own cultures and languages. In fact it is also beneficial for the main stream society and the whole country. In today's world all countries must be connected for mutual benefits. Multiculturalism helps people of all cultural backgrounds to know each other well. When they deal with other countries for trading business, cultural and educational exchanges and political affairs, the knowledge about other nations will reduce communication barriers and facilitate early solutions of any problems.

There is some other factors to prevent people like me to merge into the mainstream culture. When our friends meet, we sometimes talk about our feelings of staying away from our native country. Not a few people are disappointed after they try hard to merge into the Canadian social and cultural circles. They say the cultural separation can hardly be eliminated. That is one of the reasons why the conversations with native English speakers are often around the topics of some daily concerns. I do not want to deny that s/f language learners' limited proficiency also prevents them from having deep talks. But you cannot deny either that this is also a reason. Some people even say it is enough to be able to talk about some common issues, for it is unnecessary to further upgrade the level of linguistic proficiency. I feel that s/f language learners will not be easily accepted into the target culture.

(8) Do you mean to say that native speakers of a target language do not want to accept non-native language learners into their social circles?

A: Yes. What do you think of it?

(9) Do you agree it is kind of prejudice?

A: Prejudice is not an appropriate term for the feeling. In terms of prejudice, it exist everywhere.

(10) How do you explain this?

A: I think we feel disappointed in communicating with native English speakers because they have some prejudices. When s/f language learners cannot follow and ask for repeating or clarification, some native speakers just say what they said in higher voice. In my opinion, it is evidence of the prejudice. Since it is the case, it is no wonder some people of us want to keep our own culture.

(11) Do you think it is possible to keep one's own culture in the main stream culture?

A: You can if you consciously wish to. At least it is possible for adults who have firmly established their own cultural beliefs and habits before they are immigrated to the main stream culture. As for young people, things are different. They are more flexible than adults. I remember a German saying: young people believe many false things while old people doubt many real things. This German proverb reveals some truth. It indicates that young people are easy to change. That is because their lifestyle has not yet been formed. They are open to everything new and fresh and are easy to be influenced. Maybe this can explain why I don't want to abandon my own cultural beliefs and habits. But it does not mean that no change has occurred in myself. Say for example, I noticed that our family now follows the Western ways of treating our guests. I do not feel so strange to Western gestures. These are changes, aren't they?

(12) Have you ever read the curriculum when you studied and later taught in your school?

A: Yes, I did.

(13) Can you recall if there was something in it which pertained to the culture teaching/learning?

A: There are no formal, definite and specific stipulations concerning this topic in so far as I can remember. Roughly speaking, courses on culture are scarce. The source of cultural knowledge our students gained is, by and large, the guest lectures offered by visiting scholars, some of whom are purely Caucasians and others are of Chinese origin. Another source is the Chinese scholars and students who used to work and study overseas with native English speakers. Their personal experience provides EFL learners with some information about general aspects of lifestyle and customs. I regard this kind of source as indirect.

With reference to formal textbooks and other reading materials, they hardly exist although they are essential to a comprehensive culture course at any college and university. If materials of this kind were available, students could have access by reading to detailed treatments of issues related to culture and to information about specific cultures that they can analyze individually and with other members.

(14) I share with you the feelings about the whole situation of culture teaching/learning.

A: First as a language student and later as a language teacher, I deeply feel that language is closely interwoven with culture. As a matter of fact, language is an integral part of a culture that can reflect the characteristics of the culture best. Based on my personal experience, I 'd like to say that without some knowledge of culture one can never learn a language well. Why are languages so different? It is because cultures are different. Take Chinese and

English for instance. Why are the two different? Because the cultural histories, life styles and developmental experiences are not identical to each other. Due to the cultural differences we can frequently find some English words which have no linguistic and conceptual counterparts in Chinese. Usually these are problems and difficult points for Chinese learners of English. However, they are by no means linguistic problems and difficulties; on the contrary, they are cultural problems and difficulties. To solve these problems, the only way is to provide learners with the conceptions and cultural notions which are lacking in the Chinese nation, so that they can acquire what those linguistic forms mean while dealing with them.

(15) You told me that your students were for the greater part scholars who were engaged in scientific and technological research and were selected for academic activities in English-speaking countries. I wonder whether they are eager to know something about culture of native English speakers and whether they have access to this aspect.

A: Of course, they want to hear more about this topic, as they have clear motivation. They are fully aware of the importance of studying in my institution. It is very clear to them that the 6-month study will help them pave the way for their longer stay overseas. What they acquire during this span of time will help them overcome part of the difficulties which they will likely encounter. Therefore, they are curious about every detail concerning life styles, customs, manners of behavior, etc.

(16) If this is the case, the teaching/learning there must be very effective, isn't it?

A: Yes and no. It is true that students can learn a lot of which they have no idea before during this short period of time. But the question is how much they can get within such a short time. A little is better than nothing. However, it is not sufficient in the long run. Besides, training courses for this type of students is test focused. One must pass a proficiency test of English before the end of the training. If they fail, then they would lose the quota of advanced study. Driven by this pre-set goal students place most part of their energy and attention on linguistic forms. Even if they are eager to learn about culture and realize the usefulness of such knowledge, they can't afford time spent on those aspects which are not included in proficiency tests. They have to put limited time on what they will be tested for. That is indeed a vicious circle: on the one hand, students have limited time and restricted access to learning about target culture; on the other, the curriculum goals press them so hard and reduce their desire, interest to the minimum and imperceptibly direct their attention to linguistic forms only. So can we draw a conclusion that the training goals of the current curriculum of English language education limit or reduce students' possibility of learning more about the cultural things of their target language. This is also true of other foreign language education.

In my observation, those who are selected for overseas study are far more interested in foreign culture than any other kind of students. Had they given extra time after they pass the proficiency test, they would be only too glad to concentrate on culture learning.

(17) Have you ever thought about such a question: can a non-native-English speaker teach the cultural knowledge about the English-speaking world?

A: In my opinion, it is possible. As you see, many teachers of English like me are not native English speakers. But we can teach English. A native speaker has his advantages, such as fluent speaking, idiomatic use of words, pure accent and so on. A non-native-English-speaking teacher also has his advantages, for he knows more about what are noteworthy in teaching. To get back to cultural knowledge, the problem is that most non-native-speaking ESL/EFL teachers do not know much about the target culture themselves because they do not have adequate personal experiences and do not receive any training in this field. To make a metaphor, they are empty pails themselves; how can you expect them to pour out water to students?

(18) I need your opinion on another question. What is the best age of learning a s/f language? Could you please relate this topic to your personal experience and feeling?

A: I know it is a controversial topic in s/f language education. All I want to say is the earlier, the better. I started to learn English at the age of 18. I feel I could have learned better if I had started earlier. Definitely, eighteen is too late. I experienced a lot of difficulties when I started. Memory is the first block. Generally, young people have good memories. I think this is a universal human experience. Besides, adult learners cannot imitate native pronunciation and intonation satisfactorily. What's more, it is hard for an adult learner to avoid translation at the beginning stages of learning a new language. I think you will agree with me on this point, for you began to learn English at about the same age, didn't you? You have the same feeling, I suppose. This is because you have mastered your first language already and therefore cannot get rid of the influence from your first language. When you want to say something, you simply don't know how it is expressed by native speakers. What you can do in this case is naturally to organize your ideas according to the grammatical rules you have learned. In this way you are actually doing translation.

(19) Thank you for the time you spent with me and for the information you provided. I hope that we will get together again in future to share our thoughts.

A: I am glad to have had a talk like this, as it also gave me a chance to reflect on my past experience. If you need to contact me, please feel free to make an appointment.