



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### NUANCES OF FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION

**\*Dr. Jeyashree G. Iyer**

Vice Principal/HOD of English, Dr. Ambedkar College, Mumbai

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#### ABSTRACT

Face to face communication is the primary means of communication. It is older than language itself. Verbal and non verbal communication, the two major ingredients of face to face communication. Messages are interpreted through verbal and non verbal cues. Generally, people focus more on verbal expressions than non verbal communication. But non verbal communication plays a major role in sending and receiving messages. Face to face communication is not simple as it appears to be, it evokes cultural and individual consciousness while exchanging messages and views. The paper attempts to evince the role of cultural relativity, linguistic relativity and impact of technology in face to face to communication. The paper further highlights the need and importance of face to face communication today. Suitable references from select authors are illuminated in the paper to project nuances of face to face communication.

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#### INTRODUCTION

When two individuals exchange their ideas and views personally, it is called face to face communication. Apparently face to face communication is a simple common process in the society. But interpreting face to face communication is a challenge as this communication is a complex, homologous process as the messages encoded and decoded are conditioned by social and cultural environment. Vocalization and body movement is the platform of human interaction and Non verbal cues are more important in interpreting a message. The dynamics of Face to face has been changed massively owing to technological progress.

**Interpersonal communication:** When there is an interaction between a two individuals, interpersonal communication takes place. The interpersonal communication can be formal or informal. Conversation and dialogues are the forms of Interpersonal communication. The conversations are molded by language and actions. The smooth flow of communication between two individuals depends on their mindset. When two people with common interest exchange their views and ideas, communication becomes easier but when people with contradictory ideas meet, communication barrier may arise resulting in miscommunication and misunderstanding.

**Influence of language** in interpersonal communication focuses on the following factors:

- Cultural relativity.
- Linguistic relativity.
- Environmental components.

**Cultural relativity:** Messages are encoded and decoded pertaining to the Cultural background of the sender and the receiver of the message. Messages are encoded and decoded based on beliefs, values and Practices that exist in a particular culture. India is a multicultural society and communication between two individuals belonging to different cultural background is a challenge for smooth communication. For example, Erin Meyer in her book, *The Culture Map*, distinguishes high context and low context culture groups of different countries in the world. India is categorized as high context where messages are encoded implicitly. She affirms that in high context culture, *Good communication is sophisticated, nuanced and layered. Messages are spoken and read between the lines. Messages are often implied but not plainly expressed.* Although she places India in high context culture, the multilingual and multicultural background of Indian society represents heterogeneous group where one cannot give a clear picture on culture and practice of Indian society. Erin Meyer observes that during one of her visits to New Delhi, the capital of India, the young friendly concierge behind the concierge desk of the *Oberoi* hotel recommends *Swagat* Restaurant and gives directions *that it is just to the left*

of the hotel. Following the directions she tries to locate the restaurant but in vain. For a second she feels like a dumb to go and ask again to the concierge for clear directions. However, she goes again and asks the young man in the hotel. Understanding her problem, the concierge volunteers himself to show the way to the restaurant personally. She thus pens her experience, So we left the hotel, crossed the street, turned to the left and then walked for nearly ten minutes weaving our way through traffic on the bustling sidewalk and passing several side streets and countless heads of cattle on the way. At last..... I spotted the sign that read Swagat. (Meyer, 30)

The communication between Erin Meyer and the Concierge vividly reveals the cultural interference in encoding and decoding the message. Indian communication is high context where messages are nuanced and layered. When the concierge informed that Swagat restaurant was just to the left of the hotel, the receiver of the message who was a foreigner decoded the message literally and was trying to locate exactly left to the hotel and could not find the same. The concierge communication was encoded in high context culture where the decoder was expected to read between the lines. But the decoder who was from low context culture was unable to comprehend the message. Messages are encoded and interpreted by each individual in terms of his/her own enculturation. When interpersonal communication takes place between boisterous and reticent individuals, there erects communication barriers. The cultural tension that exists between North Indians and South Indians is more pronounced in face to face communication. For instance, South Indians are considered to be more reserved than north Indians. Hence, when there is communication between north Indian and south Indian the exchange of messages is conditioned by the cultural climate of the participants. The Prejudice and biased attitudes between a North Indian and South Indian creates a barrier to communication. The interaction between a North Indian boss and the South staff many a time becomes strained due cultural distance between the two as North Indians are considered to be superficial, fashionable and trivial and South Indians are considered to be traditional, conservative and narrow minded.

**Conversation in the office:** Erin Meyer refers to the conversation between Mr. Pablo Diaz, a Spanish executive who works in China for a Chinese textile Company and his Chinese staff Mr. Chen and evinces communication barriers between the superior and the staff belonging to different cultures.

- Mr. Diaz: Can you join us on Sunday?
- Mr. Chen: Yes, I think so.
- Mr. Diaz: That would be great help.
- Mr. Chen: Yes, Sunday is an important day.
- Mr. Diaz: In what way?
- Mr. Chen: It's my daughter's birthday.
- Mr. Diaz: How nice. I hope you all enjoy it.
- Mr. Chen: Thank you, I appreciate your understanding. (Meyer, 49)

Mr. Diaz assumes that Mr. Chen would certainly come on Sunday but on the other hand Mr. Chen remains absent thinking that permission has been granted by his superior to celebrate his daughter's birthday at home. Mr. Chen hints indirectly that he is unable to come on Sunday as he is going to celebrate his daughter's birthday but Mr. Diaz decoded the

message that Mr. Chen has accepted to come on Sunday. China is placed in high context culture where messages have to be read between the lines and the Spanish manager belonging to low context culture where messages are encoded explicitly; fails to understand the message given by Mr. Chen. Linguistic relativity: Face to face communication is influenced by multi lingual components. Language influences thought and action of an individual. The cognitive systems of different speakers propel them perceive the world pertaining to their linguistic background. India is multilingual where English is extolled as Queen of Languages and linguistic tensions prevail between English and non- English speakers in India. For example, English speakers in India are proud of their skill of mastering English and they have the attitude of considering non English speakers as substandard with no knowledge. Post colonial influence is one of the reasons for this attitude. Conversation in vernacular language is seldom used in elite circle.

Pearl Buck in her novel Come, My Beloved vividly portrays the influence of English in India. The novel depicts colonial and post colonial environment in India. MacArd, an affluent business man from US visits India along with his son David. He starts educational Institutions in Poona both for men and women. According to MacArd, India needs practical religion for further development and Christian Missionary is the only solution. MacArd's only son David attempts to learn Marathi so that he may understand the cultural environment of the place he lives. Hence he invites a Marathi teacher to learn Marathi language and literature. This illumines the fact language and literature is one of the major components that provide knowledge of culture and tradition of a society. Ramsay, (an Anglo Indian, son of an English father and Indian mother), makes futile attempts to project himself as English, dismisses Indian culture as something insignificant. The conversation between Ramsay and Olivia, wife of David illumines the impact of English in colonial and post colonial India which conditions the thought actions of people in India. The below cited description of a young Anglo Indian who wants to be recognized as English, desperately attempts to hide his Indian mother's origin,

"Good Morning, Mrs. MacArd," he exclaimed with his slight exaggeration a little extravagance of manner which revealed his Indian blood. He criticizes Indian culture, "it's all nonsense about Indians being spiritual, of course", Ramsay went on with a bravado, the pitiful contempt of the man who fears that in his ancestry there is concealed shame. (Buck, 142-143)

There are some sections of people in India whose psyche is conditioned by the English language and perceive the world through borrowed eyes of the west. Both formal and informal communication with such people becomes strenuous. Their body language and facial expressions will carry English tint contradicting their Indian origin. The fascination for English language influences their thoughts and actions. There are people like Ramsay who perceive the world through an English eye and ultimately search for their cultural identity.

**Dialectics:** Dialectics can refer to an argument where a final position is achieved through dialogue, in other words; two or more people with different points of view come together and attempt to establish the truth through logical arguments. This method is neither synonymous to debates, a method that aims to win the audience especially the judge and prove that the opponent is incorrect nor rhetoric, a method of oral

communication that seeks to persuade, appeal, or motivate the audience. The major part of Pearl Buck's novel, *Come, My Beloved*, is dialectic as it produces the conflict between dominant and oppressive cultures. The conversation between David and his friend Darya is more dialectic in presentation. Both David and Darya pursue their higher education in United States and their conversations are more dialectic with pluralistic ideologies of culture. Darya accepts his friend David's invitation and visits his home where he gets an opportunity to meet David's father MacArd. Darya's conversation with MacArd illumines religious confrontation. MacArd blatantly asserts, *Your temples are full of superstitious litter.....I believe that your poverty proves the validity of our religion. God has been with us. Darya asks quietly, can it be because your people are free and mine are not?* (Buck, 84) This conversation implicitly reveals the religious environment in colonial India.

Conversations with the tone of cultural and religious ideologies produce uncomfortable atmosphere for the participants. When people with polarized and parochial attitude happen to meet, the communication will be encompassed with dialectical mechanisms eroding the comfort zone. Hence face to face is seasoned by environmental components. Facial expressions, body language and situation where the messages are exchanged play a major role in face to face communication. Impact of technology in face to face communication: Digital communication is the predominant medium in the arena of communication today. Globalization and the subsequent progress of technology have created enormous changes in the techniques of communication. To face the challenges of technology, it is imperative for the professionals to be conversant with digital communication. Skype is one of the applications provided through internet. Skype provides online text message and video chatting services. When two communicants stay far away from each other, they can communicate face to face through Skype. But digital intervention in communication is gradually waning face to face communication. The term chat is originally meant for oral communication but has been evolved and widely used to indicate messages which are exchanged through what's app, twitter or face book. Chatting through social media is in written form as people type messages and converse with each other. More and more people use this method of communication and when they are questioned if they can communicate face to face as fluently as they chat in social media, they are wary of meeting people. Modern researchers claim that people resort to sending messages to avoid confrontation. For example if the superior has to inform about the termination of an employee, he/she may prefer to send email instead of facing the employee. But some executives believe that people need actual interactions, digital contact is a poor substitute and sometimes may result in miscommunication.

Jerry S. Wilson, a board-elected senior Vice President of CoCa-Cola Company and also the author of the book *Managing Brand You* accentuates that face to face communication is very much needed in the workplace to discuss important issues thoroughly as it would provide a conducive environment to convince, persuade people and to find suitable solution as well as discovering alternative approaches. He observes, *In the Johnson & Johnson example, the company leaders chose to face the issue straight ahead, take the necessary actions, spend whatever necessary to eradicate the issue and communicated aggressively.* (Wilson, 62)

## Conclusion

Despite technological advancement, face to face communication is inevitable as it plays a vital role in human interactions. This communication brings people together for better understanding. Though this communication appears to be common and simple, it is multifaceted and layered which poses a great challenge for the communicators to encode and decode messages. Literary texts illuminate culture and tradition of a society thereby enabling foreign professionals to understand the local culture. Globalization converge professionals from varied nations with multicultural and multi linguistic background creating a challenging environment for the communicators. Confidence, knowledge, ability to study the situation and the participants of communication are the major factors to be focused in face to face communication. Assimilation of pluralistic ideals in the culture and society will eliminate misunderstanding and create a harmonious communication.

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