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LANGUAGES OF CULTURES

V. Lynn Tyler

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## LANGUAGES OF CULTURES

V. Lynn Tyler

How well can you recognize what constitutes cultural "language"? Examples:

- A. In "X-1" society, smooth human relationships are emphasized so much, and open disagreement and overt opposition are suppressed so much that there has been developed a way of saying one thing while meaning something quite different. One crucial thing about learning to best communicate in "X-1-ese" is knowing what people mean without saying it in so many words, with or without using certain gestures, or even through configurations of silence. In "Z-2" society, on the other hand, the norm is saying exactly what is meant, without mincing words or using confusing code systems. Remember that in "X-1" it is the other way around. Individuals who in any way speak out violate the social norm and tend to be ostracized. [100.C:6. See Bibliography/References.]
- B. The stranger listened carefully, trying to distinguish the whistling sound that came from a long distance. All of a sudden, as if in concert, the people in the nearby group began doing apparently purposeful but, to the observer, somewhat strange things. They then left him, amazed and alone, as they strode off in the direction from which the sounds of whistling had come. [73:15] Language?
- C. Syllables needed to translate the Gospel of Mark are, approximately: ENGLISH: 29,000; SLAVIC: 36,500; INDO-IRANIAN: 43,000. [33:314] Language?
- D. "No. No! NO!" he returned. Each word was punctuated by a stamping foot and a faster rate of speech and figure-eight head-shaking. [78] Language?
- E. For at least an hour, the deaf children sat enthralled, enjoying "sounds" of silent signing which wove picturesque thought models in Ameslan. Language?
- F. The disparity of meaning in the domain of the term FAMILY is for the tested Korean families only .15 that of the Americans. Students and workers, however, are high with .22 and .25 respectively. [93; pers. notes.] Language?
- G. ...some seven hundred thousand distinct elementary gestures can be produced by facial or postural expressions, by movements of the arms, wrists, fingers, etc., and their combinations. Such a blank of silent language structures is drawn upon in the linguistic science of pasimology. [73:19] Language?

According to Peter Farb, in his intriguingly readable treatise on what happens when people talk [and write and read -- or otherwise communicate]:

Every speech community has definite ideas about the situations in which various topics can be broached, particular words employed, or even pronounced, and certain tones of voice used.

Every [communication] situation is made up of a series of briefer...events which are clearly separated from one another by the employment of different strategies, by the change in social interactions, or by a switch to a different topic of conversation. [33:38]

In reference to the complexity this implies, though from another context, Paul cautioned the Corinthians,

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

So, likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. (I Cor. 14:8-10 Emphasis added.)

Seen, sound, or silent "voices" can be described significantly. There can be better communication with every people. Everyone can experience, study, or in some way profit from the multitudinous forms and functions of what we call, oftentimes limitedly, "language." [53:80, 82:33]

A versification of this idea appears with this treatise. (See CulturalLanguages.)

The Brigham Young University Language Research Center joins many people and institutions [12, 30, 49, 52, 60, 62, 86, 88, 92, 95] in an attempt to adequately identify significant language differences that make a real difference, and the unique similarities that can contribute to more effectually understanding and using the languages of cultures in our world today and tomorrow.

We are cautiously aware of the immensity of the challenge of such an undertaking. Please note that we are not seeking to describe all impossibly complex linguistic properties, nor each and every miniscule cultural detail. We are only (!) researching communicational "differences that make a difference" and "significant similarities," -- particularly in situations of high affect: what consistently "turns people on or off" in intercultural encounters. [97-99]

Possibilities: A. "manner of language"  
 B. whistle language C. syllabic codes  
 D. gestures + negative non-verbals E. affective signing F. statistics and psychocultural concepts G. silent languages of gestures

All of us should recognize that the peoples of every speech community have what to them is an acceptable and--we anticipate--identifiable system for communicating certain culture-bound ideas or feelings. Such result from the use of conventionalized marks, signs, gestures, or other codes. Situations, objects, actions, or conditions also "speak or tell" discernible and associated ideas for other people--and, hopefully, for us. They also can convey comprehensible feelings.

Systems and means, conventions and situations, modes of behavior and of expression, and acceptable levels of meaning vary from each other and, most extensively, between differing peoples. Thus we have "LANGUAGES OF CULTURES." [10, 26, 29, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40, 42, 44:90-93, 45, 50, 52, 53, 59, 63, 88, 90, 91, 96, 106. Note concerning bibliographic references follows.]

Those of us who attempt to investigate the scope, parameters, and researchable ramifications of the mysteries and riddles of the languages of cultures continually are jarred with come-up-ance in awe at the communicative processes that can and continually do take place. [4, 6, 56]

As the renowned cultural-linguistic analyst, Eugene Nida, expresses it,

The most intriguing aspect of language is meaning, but we have only begun to explore the intricacies of its structures and its relations to [intercultural] communication.

In some respects we are like the scuba diver who, when he first visits a coral reef, is amazed, bewildered, and intrigued by the abundance of life forms and their intricate interrelations.

At first we are almost overwhelmed by what we discover in the semantic structures of languages, but once our explorations have begun, there is no turning back. Each discovery is only a prelude to more varied and greater discoveries. [75:9; see also pp. 68, 78.]

Challenges in categorizing each such discovery, and making each translatable [76] for use by other investigators and reporters, were proposed some twenty years ago by Dr. Nida. He suggests at least these language fields to be studied: (1) ecology, (2) material culture, (3) social culture, (4) religious culture, and (5) linguistic culture. [75:68-78; see also 68, 69, 73, 74, 97-99.] He views languages as basically a part of culture, indicating:

...words cannot be understood correctly apart from the local cultural phenomena for which they are symbols.

This being the case, the most fruitful approach to the semantic problems of any language is an ethnological one. This involves investi-

gating the significant of various cultural items and the words [and/or other language codes] used to designate them. [75:78. Emphasis added.]

The vast new research frontier comprehending the languages of cultures boggles the mind. [7, 28, 53, 60, 97, 98] Which "languages" will you learn to use, as they relate to your own or other languages? Of the probably 6,000 spoken [1600+ written] languages of the world today, English, French, Chinese, Russian, and other so-called "so-phisticated" languages each have millions of ideolects, or potential ideas and their communicators. [39,53]

To learn to adequately use an effectual second language level of any given communication system usually requires several years of study and in-culture experience. [90] In order to be able to express thoughts in well formed syntactic (word order) patterns between 600 (for the most simple) and 10,000 words are to be at one's command. Some gifted linguists could handle as many as another 20,000 ideolects. [83] This would provide for most common intellectual encounters in intercultural settings. Most of the time this is enough facility to "get along." But, how well? In which situations?

What of the other hundreds of thousands of terms and phrases that through misuse could be, if not offensive, downright disastrous? Each of them represents another "language within a language"--a constantly developing and somewhat new language of culture. Each language is very important to some people, of course. Each must be learned to fit the applicable situation. [33, 81, 82]

Farb says:

The existence of speech situations and speech events demonstrates why no one can adequately [meaning: completely?] learn a foreign language by instruction [alone]. A course of study teaches merely the vocabulary and grammar, not the [full complexity of] appropriate situations in which to use the alternative ways of saying something that every language offers. [33:39]

I shall not attempt to defend this thesis here. Farb uses his whole book to develop it in a broad range of concerns considered to be valid. He suggests many fields of needed research, in order to enhance meaningful communication. And we recognize that there are many today who are making significant investigations; yet, there is so much yet unknown. [80, 98]

It would be fascinating to make various applications of the 15 million plus comparative findings of Charles Osgood and others, on the basis of only about 600 terms dimensionally weighted, from 30 or so representative cultures. They call their work a WORLD ATLAS OF AFFECTIVE MEANING. [79; see also 68, 69, 71, 72] Consider what it would entail to comprehend all ideolects for all cultures!

Or, we might like to probe the depths of subjective and linguistic culture with Harry Triandis

and associates, seeking out roles, attributions, habits, and like dimensions. [52:17-23]

Lorand Szalay's pioneering work on psycho-cultural dictionaries stretches the mind with great potential for avoiding uncertainties in human communication between far ranging patterns of thought and expression. [52:1-16; 93; personal notes.]

Para-normal (PSI-) languages also confront us on new extremities of attractive research challenges. [70:96-104] Reaching those who are in many ways communicationally unreached is another frontier that for some has become almost obsessing. [84] To mention these horizons is, for many of us who feel thin in thick things, [28] an intellectual exercise in deep frustration that we cannot yet perceive at all.\*

We hope to entice or persuade many able people to join us and our colleagues, to delve deeply into new discoveries of how people "make sense" to each other. [28, 36, 66, 67, 78, 83, 104, 105] Any who will can aid in considering, for example, the multifaceted and myriad motions and intriguing insights of "micro-momentary expressions," [64, 102] the cues of "cautions with cultural contrasts," [99, 106], or even the limits of "languishing languages." [53:91-95] Such possibly intriguing topics can be as contributory as those of socio- and psycho-linguists who determine languages of character and other forms of micro-, meta-, and para-communication. [50, 54, 75, 90]

In the intercultural arenas of business, government, and even in education, there is a challenge to aid with conditioning languages and disturbing non-senses, or: how and why some communications do or do not succeed in given circumstances. [1, 5, 11, 12, 16, 86, 89, 101]

Time, the vehicle and task-master of language, has hardly been touched, investigationaly speaking. [Some beginnings: 37, 40, 41, 44:154-7; 59, 97.]

Those of us who are Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a scriptural injunction to do something about what as yet few of us do all that well:

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\* The expanded bibliographic references for this treatise give an almost [new resources reach regularly] up-dated sample of examples of creative thinking for communications principles only sporadically touched in this review of some of the languages of cultures.

Research suggested by the questions and challenges presented here can be enhanced by using findings from the broad range of intercultural, linguistic, and language specialists cited herein--as well as from textual references and sources quoted in each of the texts themselves. [See also 21, 52, 53.F, 78, 85, 92, and current LRC bibliographies.]

[See "Bibliography and References" following.]

Study and learn and become acquainted with languages, tongues, and peoples. (See Doctrine and Covenants 90:15.)

That is our challenge, and we for our part are trepidatiously willing to accept as much of it as we can. We welcome co-workers from any discipline, for there are few if any in our world today who are not or will not be using increasingly diverse languages of cultures. [6, 17, 21, 45, 49, 80, 90, 98, 105]

As a brief vista of one of the kinds of languages of cultures, I will conclude with a few samples from a hurried consideration of:

#### WAYS TO AVOID "SAYING NO!"

(Intentionally of UN-intentionally)

With At Least 48% Less Intelligibility

Herbert H. Clark, and others, [22, 23, 95] have found that a negative statement--depending on its dimensions and scope, of course--on the average takes about 48% longer to understand than a positive statement. At least this seems to be so for the participants tested in one cultural sampling.

We might conclude that when a simply stated "NO!" is unacceptable in a given cultural circumstance, it might take even longer to understand if other factors are added to the refusal, denial, or contrariness. Cultural examples abound; we can take time for but a few. [See 11, 23, 19, 27, 40, 41, 42, 46, 51, 52, 65, 90, 94, 95.]

#### SPEECH-LESS

1. SILENCE, as NO! (This may be different for children, youth, adults; by sex.) With or without anticipating a reaction, this negative response may mean: "I do not care!" "I do not know." or "I choose not to respond." Or, it may be intended as an angry insult, or as a sign that saying NO! verbally isn't worth all that much effort.

Then, there are South Indian Paliyans, Quakers, and New Englanders and others, of course, who often use silence as a cultural way of limited response, indicating a variety of intended meanings, many of which are NO! [33]

2. Stylistic GESTURES as NO! (The speed of each also has a range of meaning.) To express a negative response, a head may be moved up and down. (In our culture this may mean no or "I am sleepy." or "I am listening.") In other cultures, a nod back and forth, right and left, or in a sort of figure eight motion can mean NO! or NO WAY! Or, even more confusingly, it may say "I am not certain either you or I understand."

Then there is the switching finger--which can be a sign of shame, or--in some cultures--a call to a pet, or worse. We are familiar with the uncommittal shoulder shrug for "maybe not" or "I am not sure." In other places in

the world a tilt of the head must accompany this motion to encode a non-verbal negative. Caution is wise in use of gestures which can appear to be defiance when affection is intended, or where finger codes (o.k.) of the English world are interpreted obscenely.

3. Expeditious EXITING can be more than subtle NO-ing! This is especially so with moods of disgust, with vocal "harruummmps" accompanying. This might convey less than 48% in its quick intelligibility. In fact, such motion is often quite plain in its negative connotations.
4. STARING as a negative may be much more effective than a simple NO! Or, a turn to the right when a request for left is made says, possibly, "I am not about to buy your directions" (which may be less than a subtle way of indicating a negative rather than positive response). Stopping or speeding up sometimes gets a negative message across, like a stuck out tongue does in some cultures. (Watch out, that could mean "I am thinking!")
5. Almost speaking is the MOUTHED (but voiceless) NO! This can be subtle or direct. It works, too, from a little distance. (That may be best in threatening circumstances.)

SPOKEN (Often in company with gestures, para-language, etc.)

6. TONAL: The "Un'-uh!" or "uuuummmmm." (Usually with a shake of the head, motion of a finger or hand, or shoulders). Sometimes only a grunt will do.
7. REVERSE-QUESTION says NO! "Why ask some odd-ball thing like that?" (Or more politely:) "Do you want I should believe that?" Or, "Must I, really?"
8. Some peoples make an art (?) of the SARCASTIC or CRITICAL negative statement. "Oh, come off it!" "You're nuts!" "Go jump in a lake." Or some APOLOGIZE: "I don't think I can accept that." "I'm sorry; I did not get it." = NO!
9. TANGENTIAL STATEMENTS as NO! This is performed by politely or rudely changing the subject, repeating an objectionable question in a different tone or manner, or by putting someone off. (The latter often happens in many cultures as parents somehow say to children: "I will think about it later." Or, "Let's talk about that the second Tuesday of Febuember.")
10. HIDDEN NEGATIVES appear in most speech patterns. In English, for example: Stop = Do NOT go (on)! Try a positive translation for UNimportant, DISallow, absent, hardly, exclude, scarcely, doubt, few-if-any, etc. All of these potentially-negatives can be more confusing than their positive counterparts. It may depend on a context--particularly so when used in conjunction with any of the previously discussed modes of NO!

Rather than double this ten to twenty forms of NO!, I will add a couple more, take a quick look at two or three other similar "languages"-- then conclude.

Consider the negative (or positive) cultural connotations of such antimonyms as : ALL SENTENCES USING THESE EXACT WORDS ARE FALSE; or ALL MEN ARE LIARS; AS A MAN I AM ONE OF THE BEST. [33:129-133]

Open PREVARICATION can be NO! Outright lying can be just "funnin'" or "white lying" (perhaps to save face or to avoid embarrassment for somebody), or can be bold-faced lying--either as offensive or defensive NO! Too, an oblique truth or half-truth can be prevarication as well, and often appears as part of a cultural code which tells when or when not to be acceptable. When someone asks how are YOU feeling, what do YOU say? [Farb devotes almost a whole chapter to this form of negative response: 33:129-133. See also: 5, 7, 18,23, etc.]

We could have as easily used the language of YES! Possibly that would have been at least 48% more understandable. Or we could have reviewed languages to console, or to show care--as these vary from culture to culture. (Do YOU console your employer the same way as you do your spouse, or the truck driver whose fender you just bashed, or that child whose favorite toy is broken?)

By now it should be more than obvious that, in the languages of cultures, we are dealing in far more than vocal ideolects or printed terminology. Think of American political language. Who understands all the implications? We are certainly obligated to try to understand. It seems to me that the more metatalk we hear, the more we have new challenges to try to solve the riddles of intercultural communication: the languages of cultures.

If we are to decipher these riddles, and we can do so, I am sure we must be more precise and incisive than we now are. We do, with many others-- hopefully including YOU--accept the challenge.

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- E. Brazil J. Mexico
- F. Germany K. Philippines
- G. Hong Kong L. Samoa
- H. Korea M. Thailand
- I. Japan
- Themes:
- N. American (included in "A" above)
- O. Korean (included in "H" above)
- P. Navajo
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# CULTURAL LANGUAGES

V. Lynn Tyler

Different PEOPLES have  
discernably distinct ways to  
THINK in, WRITE in,  
SING in, and otherwise USE  
(or even to abuse)  
L A N G U A G E S -- as  
BRIDGES to  
Understanding,  
Feeling,  
Believing, and  
Doing.

While no temporal languages  
always are consistent  
within themselves, nor  
None wholly uniform with others;  
Though all languages are complex,  
and each is some ways unique;  
Yet all are of inestimable value  
to those who employ and enjoy  
them consistently or uniquely.

Peoples' LANGUAGES are  
systematic means of/for  
communicating ideas and  
feelings -- using  
Conventionalized signs,  
marks or gestures; or  
The suggestion by objects,  
actions or conditions of  
Associated  
ideas or feelings.

There are languages of PRAYER, and to SHARE,  
And some are used to reveal CARE.  
Languages of EMPATHY and TRUST,  
Languages of SYMPATHY and MUST.  
Languages by AGE, and varied SITUATION,  
Languages SAGE, of MULTI-COMPUTATION;  
Of FORESIGHT, HINDSIGHT, and DELIBERATION;  
Of INSIGHT, FORTHRIGHT, and of MEDITATION.  
Languages of TOUCH and SMELL;  
Of MUCH, of DWELL;  
Languages of SPACE and TIME, of RACE and RHYME,  
Of range from GRACE to CRIME.  
Languages of PLACE, and FACE, and CHASE,  
And HASTE; of TASTE, and WASTE;  
Of PRIME, and GRIME, and PANTOMIME.  
Language Patterns are of THOUGHT -- or NOT!  
Most can be TAUGHT but rarely BOUGHT.  
Some are HOT, or of choice by LOT.  
Languages of SWEARING, DARING, and of BEARING;  
Of COPING, MOPING, and of HOPING;  
Of MATH, and WRATH, and for a BATH.  
Languages of DRAMA, TRAUMA, and of ART;  
Of MAN, and CLAN, and of the HEART;  
Of BAIT, and RATE, and to TRANSLATE;  
And some INNATE, that do RELATE.

TRADE languages, STAID languages,  
And some POLITICAL;  
Some to EVADE, to make AFRAID,  
To UPBRAID, to PERSUADE, or be CRITICAL.

There are languages UNIQUE, others OBLIQUE;  
Some TABU, while others ESCHEW;  
Some play GAMES, and another that SHAMES;  
Some to ACCLAIM, yet others DEFAME.  
Some CONTROL, or CAJOLE;  
Some seem to BORE, or to CEASE NEVERMORE.

There are languages to SPURN, DISCERN, ADJURN;  
Some of VERSE -- or, like this, worse;  
Some can CURSE, DISBURSE, or  
Try to DESCRIBE the UNIVERSE.

Some languages are BRIGHT, and INVITE;  
Others UNITE, DELIGHT, IGNITE, INDICT;  
Some MAKE LIGHT, or SLIGHT; yet  
Others seem "RIGHT."  
Some CONSOLE, some are DROLL;  
Some TAKE a TOLL, some HEAL the SOUL.

There are languages of MUSIC,  
And of FUN things CHIC  
From every kind of BAILIWICK;  
Of PEDIGREE, and LAW DECREE;  
Of what is FREE; of HE; of SHE!  
There is language to INHIBIT, or to EXHIBIT,  
And frequently some used to PROHIBIT.  
Language of SONG, of WRONG, of what may be STRONG;  
Of CHEER, and SMEAR, and what seems DEAR;  
To SEE, to HEAR, to FEEL, to FEAR.  
Languages THEORETICAL by some seem HERETICAL, or  
SLICK, or THICK, or lean too hard on RHETORIC.  
Languages that are PLAIN may be for DISDAIN, or  
To RESTRAIN, or to ORDAIN, or declare INSANE.  
There are languages of WORK, or SHIRK; of SMIRK;  
Of LOVE, and HATE; of JOY, of FATE.  
Some languages are BOLD, and others are COLD;  
Some are for DANCE, or CHANCE;  
Some come from GLANCE, or TRANCE;  
Some do ENHANCE, or aid ROMANCE.  
There are MISTALK, MIXTALK, METATALK, and "NO!"  
And SQUAWK, and BALK, and SHOCK, and SHOW;  
And DRESS, and "YES!" and MAYBE, and "GO!"

This cultural look at language, hardly started,  
With little insight yet imparted,  
To keep the mind ahead, on top,  
Now must stop!

(...You know this could go on all year!  
But, if it did, we might cause fear  
That language bridges could not get built;  
Instead there'd only be a sense of guilt.  
So, let's get on back to doing work --  
To find for languages each quirk!)

This 'poetry' at first may seem less grand,  
Until YOU, too, write: try your hand: