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Interactional Impact via Synergic Analogues
[Significant COmmunication Starting Points]

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The statistical starkness of the U.S. decline of language learning is concluded by this quote (and it applies to all levels of language use):

> Language is a key to opening minds and attitudes. To speak, read, write, and understand another language is the beginning of understanding other people....[Yet] while it continues to be relatively easy to get appropriations for bombers and submarines and nuclear weapons, we move much less swiftly, if at all, on measures that contribute to real security—a world of adequate communications and cultural understanding which together could eliminate, or drastically reduce, the need for those...weapons. (Emphasis mine.)

A majority of US citizens are cited as believing a foreign language should be offered in elementary through secondary schools. The editor concludes, in Simon's words, "The question is not one of national resources. The question is one of national will."

Few seem to disagree with such a philosophy, but it continues to remain a philosophy for the most part. Why? Since the tragic language and cultural breakdown that catalyzed the holocaust of Hiroshima there have been ups and downs in language-learning emphasis. The "Cold War" focus of the 1960's did some good. The Carter (President's) Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies seems to have done, so far, even less. What does the future hold, given the necessary security of which Rep. Simon writes? That security applies to personal as well as national levels.

It seems that, as ever, our theories far outdistance our capability to use them wisely. Language acquisition studies, methodologies, and new frontier explorations in human understanding have exceeded our ability to keep up. (A 1/4 million $ study done by this author and colleagues found that the entire amount of the contract could have been spent on xeroxing available articles on language indicators of meaning! And that was in 1976 -- five years ago when we had so much less accessible to us! Remember, that was the copying, not the analyzing or use of the data.)

Rep. Simon wrote of language being only a key for opening minds and attitudes...as the beginning of understanding of other people. He gave more emphasis to adequate communications and cultural understanding. Could it be that our keys have been ineffectual, comparatively, for opening minds and attitudes because we have done less than we should in attaining or acquiring adequate communication and cultural understanding abilities -- as outcomes of our language learning designs, and thus have inhibited what we in reality should be enhancing?
Challenges of translators are also cited by Rep. Simon as integral to the dilemmas facing us in the U.S.A. We have translations and we have TRANSLATIONS. Adequate communications and cultural understanding seem to be the difference. Simon's examples are somewhat exotic but do give focus to his statements about our "learning languages" but sometimes not being able to communicate in critical situations.

Dr. James Bostain, Senior Scientific Linguist at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute wrote not long ago that,

Language is always accompanied by other signal systems, but the other signal systems are not always accompanied by language. In fact, most communication is non-linguistic. We need to be more conscious of the non-verbal signals we use among ourselves and of the fact that not all people use the same signals to indicate the same message. Because our education system is so language oriented, many people believe that language is the primary signal system; but, in fact, it is not.

If there is the combining of other signal systems with language to make communication more complete, what are these? What is their impact?

In last year's Deseret Language and Linguistic Society conference, this author presented a brief condensation of work being done on an "Intercultural Grammar" system to determine answers to questions posed above. It was found, by literature search, interviews, and some empirical explorations, that there are literally hundreds of "languages" or communicational signal systems. It is not our purpose here to review these. They are available for study. The point is that the impact of language learning for use, that is, for interaction with other people, may be more than we have felt it to be, and this is possibly one concern which "powers that be" might seek about language acquisition as being of significance. Disturbing? Possibly; but, in a challenging way. Questions can be useful if useful answers are sought.

Research activities during the past year have led some of us through a maze of theories as to why our "communication" may be less than it has been thought to be. People do communicate and do it well; they use language and do it well. Then why the disparities in what we seem to need and what we obtain support to achieve? Obviously there are many possible responses to such a query, particularly for "language."

One we have found to be of sufficient impact on studies of human interaction — which spirals out of language skill — is that of the rapidly developing science of "synergy" (or, "synergetics," "synergic power," etc.): sufficient in the degree that it gives new insights as to why human understanding and interaction have not received the attention they deserve in support of language acquisition and use.

Synergy as a concept — working together for mutually beneficial purposes in which the whole is more than the sum of the parts — has been around as long as language learning has. The result is, of course, mutually satisfactory language use. But, there are less than satisfactory circumstances, as when people are unnecessarily confused or offended because of inadequate or inappropriate "language," whether it is verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal, or combinations of these signal systems.
Meaningful research which explores combinations of signal systems is still uncorrelated. Where are the studies that give us some clues to situational language use that combines the verbal, non-verbal, and para-verbal signals as composites? Excellent work being done on language acquisition, translation skill development, non-verbal and para-verbal nuances, and even on sociolinguistic and psycholinguist aids still is isolated. Is that a major factor in determining why former Senator Fulbright would write, less than two years ago, that "Our linguistic and cultural myopia are losing us business, friends, and respect in the world"?

This too-long prologue may have raised more questions than it has probingly sought to answer. It portrays some of the frustrations of molding research into solid systems that provide broad-based support to the development of useful cultural communication signal systems which include but are not exclusively "language."

Rep. Simon wrote of opening minds and attitudes. The recently developing scientific explorations into synergy and its overlapping disciplines (deontology, public relations, exchange of sense comprehension, etc.—numbering into the hundreds!) suggest considerations which have yet to have major application in language studies and use. Four must suffice here:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Language Challenge</th>
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<td>1. People we strive to communicate with are fellow creatures who experience feelings similar to ours. We can empathize and to some extent deal with their own predispositions and expectations in our language use.</td>
<td>1. How determine when our conveyed feelings actually &quot;fit&quot; with theirs, or when what we express is appropriately perceived -- and vice-versa? Is it not essential to understanding to know this?</td>
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<td>2. Beliefs, attitudes, and values differ for all those we seek to communicate with. What we say or do as being rational to us may seem very irrational to others. However, there are &quot;tools&quot; -- such as language probes, which can help us achieve an empathic or synergetic acceptability, as least as a starting point to understanding.</td>
<td>2. To achieve understanding, through empathy, there is a definite need to deal ably with the differing beliefs, attitudes, and values. How identify those that are most critical, in order to bring about a synergy via acceptable language use? What are the significant &quot;starting points&quot;?</td>
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<td>3. Reality is rarely if ever identical for different people (especially when their language uses diverge). Each colors even shared reality with his/her own point of view.</td>
<td>3. When can we be able to &quot;mix&quot; our realities, so as to be understood? (Cp. such quotients are &quot;us&quot; vs. &quot;them,&quot; &quot;acceptance,&quot; &quot;good.&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Normally, most of us are seriously threatened when our emotions are not satisfied or when we cannot deal with our interactions with others. Language often catalyzes such concerns.</td>
<td>4. If we want to convey certain meanings and anti-pathy occurs, what &quot;language&quot; must be used to assuage apprehensions, etc.?</td>
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These are but samples of philosophical propositions which need to be considered to build synergic relationships. Put in other ways:

1. When I think I am understood, am I misunderstood? How do I know?

2. When what I think is valued (by my or someone else's expression) is discounted, what do I next say -- particularly in a distinct cultural environment which requires appropriateness (as in greetings, apologies, etiquette, business rapport, etc.)?

3. If I accept what another says as my being accepted when in reality I am being judged, in what ways can I understand how to convey my apprehension when I find out the disparity?

4. If what I think is culturally acceptable is not so to others, and ignorance or politeness does not allow for full understanding of the dilemma possibly posed, how can I rectify the situation with essential "language"? (If, of course, change is desirable or needed.)

5. When I seem to be freely communicating with others and they feel I am somehow exploiting them, in what manner can I tailor my next expression to get "back on tract" -- if I can even determine this?

This can be shown graphically: (Craig, p. 54.)

Full Model of Power Transaction.

The same model is applicable to both competitive and cooperative situations.

A study of this process, where synergic power is not intended to be either domination or permissiveness, demonstrates that "language" can be used "with" people, not "against or over" them. This also is seen in a WIN-WIN model, which conveys the idea that the communication process deals adequately with attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of all concerned in a way that understanding, in its fullest sense, can be achieved and applied. (Craig's model is on p. 126.)
A practical example in acquiring "language" skill may help us investigate the synergic experience (or dysergic experience, if counterproductive).

Suppose I am taught to say "I do not understand" in the Tongan language. "'Oku 'ikai ke mahino kiate au." Adding the para-verbal, am I also taught how to say this without seeming overly frustrated (as if I am to respond politely to say, my teacher)? Or sarcastic? Or offended? Adding the non-verbal, do I shake my head for emphasis, or raise my eyebrows to give the necessary signal for quandry? Can I use this phrase when asked a question by a chief, or the king himself?

Without a helpful "map" to follow, my simple language expression can turn into diplomatic fiasco in some instances (albeit the Tongans are quite forgiving!) or an awkward embarrassment in others, (neither desired).

A synergic language experience would be WIN-WIN, where all of us in the process would have accurate thoughts and feelings transferred, building, in effect, a "bridge of understanding." That is one of the usual goals of language acquisition and use. It is not always achieved as we would like. Some of the "reasons" are lack of synergy; or, in other words confusion or offense. How then do we deal with this concern? The expansive number of situations, variations, nuances, circumstances, and dyseregies (when a lose-lose situation is in effect) are overwhelming.

Our study, in preparation of our Intercultural Ready Reference, yielded over 1200 potential "miscommunicators" in content, context, communication modes and codes, and cultural distinctions of possible messages. Yes... somewhat overwhelming. We asked, as far as we know, many of the "right questions" but often obtained ineffective answers. Citing from more than 200 current "best sellers" in education, research, and popular use, we found over a thousand examples, from more than 100 countries or cultures, demonstrating what has been only sporatically treated above.
These challenges can be accepted as "straw-persons" or as real and solvable problems. In response to Rep. Simon, Sen. Fulbright, and others' statements, there is likely good purpose is seeking solutions rather than being overly myopic culturally and linguistically.

What then is to be done? Continuing with standard language acquisition and communication and interaction skills (such as interpersonal public relations or media development) is essential. Going beyond this, we recommend searching out new language-based, communication-oriented, and human-understanding focused studies of all essential related disciplines.

At our research center, we are now processing responses to an INTERACTION DIRECTORY which has as a goal the consolidation of as many as possible of the "best ideas" of others who are in the "international and inter-cultural" fields — all of which in some ways require excellence in language use. We have selected about 2500 from more than 30,000 current associations, societies, interest groups, and other institutions which interact with distinct peoples of our world. These are a "starter" for studying, learning, and becoming acquainted with "all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people." (D&C 90:15.) We look for synergic developments to occur. None of the disciplines has a corner on "language."

Recent conferences, such as of the International Communication Association; the Society for Intercultural Education, Training, and Research; the Society for Cross-Cultural Research; the Linguistic Society of America; the American Translators Association — have yielded some helpful insights as to how language and culture, people and people, systems and approaches, disciplines and practice can work together to solve miscommunications. A review of current data banks (DIALOG, SRI, BRS, etc.) indicates a very broad new look at language, communication, understanding, and other synergic interactions. These are "bench-marks" only, as so much yet needs to be searched and researched for practical use throughout the world, to achieve the cultural understanding cited by Rep. Simon.

Another encouraging field of investigation is growing out of missionary and related religious research. It is the basis for the author's personal development of what is now called "SYNERGIC ANALOG" solutions to many of the quandries raised in this paper. There is not necessarily anything new being discovered, only potentially more focused applications.

A survey of missiological literature shows considerable work being done on solving others' problems while solving "ours." That is, there is more being investigated as to predispositions, expectations, environmental and contextual life-styles, circumstances, and attitude-sets today than ever before, in relation to communicability of messages.

A synthesis of these approaches are what I call "SYNERGIC ANALOGUES." Simply stated, they are realistic, yet-to-experience (rather than only an anthropological or linguistic review) oriented keys to understanding. An illustration:

Suppose we want to communicate the idea of "peace" in the sense of not only the absence of war but the ideal working together of peoples. How can this be understood in Ireland (English!), or Korea (Korean) or El Salvador (Spanish) by varying factions? Synergic analogues are "starting points" common to both (or all involved) parties in the conflict. Rather than speaking of differences, similarities are used as the base for understanding.
In any dysergic (non-productive or negative) interaction, there is someone in a no-win situation. Synergic analogues seek out, present, and give a communication or interaction process-base for overcoming the dysergies, in a full win-win situation. It may seem unlikely that language or communication can do much in war situations, national or interpersonal. One of the basic problems, studied in synergy approaches to missionary work, better business, peace attempts, and the like is that, as Roger Fisher has so aptly stated, "We do not attempt to solve their problems while solving ours." His illustrations of the Iranian crises point out the normal reluctance to strive to use language which is non-confrontive or communication which is more than one-sided (which I call "unication"). Again, attitudes may be getting in the way.

As Robert T. Oliver long ago suggested,

If we would communicate across cultural barriers, we must learn what to say and how to say it in terms of the expectations and predispositions of those with whom we want to communicate.

When we get a "match" of expectations and predispositions, we get a synergic analogue. Such statements as, "Oh, now I see, and agree," "Why didn't you say that in the first place," "I can buy that," and "I'm sure we can work it out," exemplify the possible occurrence of "things or ideas that can work together" -- or, synergic analogues.

Without attempting to go into more detail for the present, it should suffice to say that there are not found to be many problems which cannot be overcome where there are mutually beneficial rewards acceptable to those involved. This is substantially so in conversations, negotiations, interpersonal experiences, or even in other-language literature which is appreciated. Such are synergic analogues, and attitudes.

The proposal is that further investigation into what "really works best" may be far more productive than what myriad dilemmas cannot be breeched because of complexities. Synergic analogues are potentially quite helpful "maps" from which we can start our intercultural grammar explorations -- where we learn to say and do and feel as we and they can best understand and interact in new language/culture situations.

Those who might want a religious look into such possibilities are referred to Don Richardson's new text (due out in May) "Eternity in Their Hearts." His demonstration of synergic analogues is of great importance, from my vantage point, in seeking to resolve some of the "language" problems which now face us. It is a catalytic text. Others like it have been cited above -- and appear in bibliographies of the authors referred to.

There are increasing numbers of frontier thinkers who deal with some form of synergic analogues in most of the disciplines we are now investigating. Each has something to contribute, to provoke or evoke.

Models appearing now in print (such as the two cited before) are beginning to give meaning to some of the forces which "languages" have not yet adequately inculcated into their learning-processes. Why? Time will tell. It could be that we have been too narrowly focused in our own disciplines to bring about synergy with others to whom we can offer much in return. Our "maps" or "keys" for understanding can be significantly contributory to theirs. Synergic principles can count.
As a classic example of how language, culture, communication, context, and content merge, and for your broad-based literary appetite, I can recommend Don Richardson's PEACE CHILD. A more academic but inclusive necessary-reading is Edward T. Hall's BEYOND CULTURE -- which I feel is "must reading" for anyone serious about appropriate language and culture education, training, research, and day-to-day use.

And I commend any who would like, to explore with us new applications of synergic analogues, in our contacts, resource texts, and newly developing theories. As the song says, "We've only just begun."

This has been but a cursory glance at a potentially highly impactful interaction process which involves language in the most basic and profound manners. It presupposes that the "foreign" can become "familiar" and that people can synergetically bring about what they mutually desire. Is not that, after all, one of the significant purposes for language, linguistics, and related people-oriented work and living and play in which we are all engaged? Then.....? (A series of working hypotheses upon which this brief paper is based is available from the author.)

References


3 Deseret Language and Linguistics Proceedings, 1980. (See also 1978 and 1979 proceedings for related references.)


7 See 4 above.

8 See references in 4 above, and models in the appendix.

9 TODAY'S MISSION. Premiere Issue. P.O. Box 675, Carpinteria, Calif. 93013. See articles by and about Don and Carol Richardson; books.


12 Cited from Intercultural Ready Reference. See 4 above. Refer to section on Significant Quotes for contextual aids. This is from his text, Culture and Communication, which proposes many rhetorics.


15 Two books being reviewed at the time of preparation of this paper give significant impetus to ideas presented herein. The first is Mary Ritchie Key's The Relationship of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication. Mouton Pub., 1980. (In the Contributions to the Sociology of Language series ed. by Joshua A. Vishman. No. 25.) The other, by Ashley Montagu and Floyd Matson, is The Human Connection. New York. McGraw-Hill, 1979. Both of these are academic yet in the popular reading genre. They deserve critical scrutiny. As samples of a number of excellent texts now appearing, they will be added to the Resources section of our Intercultural Ready Reference. This will be edited for public sharing within a year.

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The greatest ally of understanding is the reality of understanding.

The greatest enemy of successful language use is its own illusion.

Synergy is most often serendipitous.

If for every complex challenge there are many simple solutions -- and they are invariably somehow wrong, then it may be wise to seek complex simplicities.