Chapter 42

Intercultural Nonverbal Communication Competence as Intercultural Responsiveness in the Second Language Learning Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the important role intercultural nonverbal communication competence plays as intercultural responsiveness in the second language learning classroom. The researcher reviewed relevant theory about intercultural nonverbal communication competence and focused on the research question. First, nonverbal communication styles are part of a culture, and the differences between low-context culture and high-context culture are represented in direct and indirect communication style in classroom communication activities. Second, speakers from different cultures use different nonverbal communication rules and behave differently and this can cause misunderstanding. Third, intercultural nonverbal communication differs between people from polychronic culture and those from monochronic culture. Different time concepts result in different behaviour patterns. Second language teachers should undertake training in intercultural nonverbal communication to facilitate students learning. The pedagogical implications for the second language teachers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

With more and more second language learners increasing across the cultural borders, intercultural communication competence issues troubling them have been identified and investigated. More relevant research outcomes have been published, for example, on problem-solving in overseas exchange program (Almarza, Martínez, & Llavador, 2015), student perceptions and attitudes towards intercultural differ-

ences and cultural diversity (Candel-Mora, 2015), and relationships between language proficiency, target culture experience, formal education and intercultural communicative competence learning (Hismanoglu, 2011). However, there is little research on how the second language teachers' intercultural nonverbal communication competence plays the role of intercultural responsiveness in the second language learning classroom.

BACKGROUND

In this micro-social setting intercultural nonverbal communication has not received sufficient attention from the second language teachers as they usually focus on verbal communication. The role intercultural nonverbal communication is no less important than its intercultural verbal communication counterpart even though the former is most often voiceless with hidden messages and the latter is voiced with explicit meaning. Although most people are less aware of the important role of nonverbal communication than that of verbal communication, research shows that more than 90% human communication is related to nonverbal behaviour and less than 10% is relevant to words according to Mehrabian (1981). This is simply because of the amount of time when we do not talk is much longer than that when we do talk. Additionally, nonverbal communication is multi-dimensional and simultaneous (Hall et al., 1968; McNeill, 2005), covering paralinguistics, proxemics, and kinesics etc. Finally, nonverbal communication in an intercultural setting becomes more complicated and challenging, competent communicators are required to have good knowledge, skills and attitude to achieve successful nonverbal communication and understanding (le Roux, 2002). Apparently intercultural nonverbal communication competence needs more attention of second language teachers as it will sharpen their intercultural sensitivity and help them to respond to the learning needs of the second language learners from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Intercultural nonverbal communication competence matters to the second language classroom teachers because they play a key role in facilitating the second language learners (Crookes, 2003). More than one billion English language learners have formed a high-profile massive population ranging from young students to senior retirees across languages and cultures (The British Council, 2013). Furthermore, many second language teachers take on great challenges, seeking new employment opportunities, and teaching the second/foreign language across cultural borders (Stanley, 2013; Tsung & Cruickshank, 2010). To focus on intercultural nonverbal communication as intercultural responsiveness in the second language learning classroom, the researcher first reviewed relevant literature concerning intercultural nonverbal competence, raised one research question, dwelt upon three key themes, and concluded with the implications of intercultural nonverbal communication as intercultural responsiveness in the second language learning classroom.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Intercultural Nonverbal Communication Competence

Based on the theoretical framework of intercultural communication competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2009), the researcher defined intercultural nonverbal communication competence as capacity to use intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes to positively and successfully to exchange information

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