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**Intercultural Miscommunication between
East and West
The Awareness, the Barriers and Possible Solutions**

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Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. DEFINING INTERCULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION AND RELATED METHODOLOGIES.....	7
2.1. CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION.....	11
2.2. INTERCULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION.....	13
2.3. CULTURAL LEGACY.....	13
2.4. PRAGMATICS.....	17
3. FROM LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE.....	18
3.1. MISPRONUNCIATION.....	19
3.2. SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS.....	20
3.3. INCORRECT TRANSLATION.....	23
3.4. INAPPROPRIATE USE OF FOREIGN EXPRESSIONS.....	25
3.5. MISINTERPRETATION.....	26
3.6. DIFFERENT STRATEGIES IN SPEAKING.....	26
3.7. INAPPROPRIATE PRAGMATIC STRATEGY.....	27
3.8. LIMITATION OF VOCABULARY.....	28
3.9. THE SIMPLICITY OF CHINESE GRAMMAR.....	29
4. FROM SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE.....	30
4.1. GREETINGS AND FAREWELLS.....	32
4.2. APPELLATIONS AND HONORIFICS.....	32
4.3. POLITENESS.....	35
4.4. MODESTY.....	38
4.5. “SAVING FACE”.....	40
4.6. “BAD LANGUAGE”.....	41
4.7. APOLOGY.....	42
4.8. PRIVACY.....	45
4.9. LEADERSHIP.....	46
4.10. PROVERBS.....	47

5. NONVERBAL MISCOMMUNICATION.....	48
5.1. PROXEMICS.....	50
5.2. KINESICS.....	50
5.2.1. <i>Eye contact</i>	51
5.2.2. <i>Facial expressions</i>	51
5.2.3. <i>Gestures and postures</i>	52
5.3. PARALANGUAGE.....	53
5.4. “SILENCE IS GOLDEN” RULE.....	53
5.5. HAPTICS.....	54
5.6. GUSTATORY AND OLFACTORY PERCEPTIONS.....	55
5.7. COLOR, CLOTHING AND PERSONAL APPEARANCE.....	56
5.8. TERRITORIALITY.....	57
5.9. CHRONEMICS.....	58
5.10. SIGNS AND SYMBOLS.....	59
5.11. OBJECTS.....	60
5.12. CASE STUDY: CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS.....	61
5.13. BILLS AND TIPS.....	62
5.14. CUSTOMS AND SUPERSTITIONS.....	63
 6. OTHER BARRIERS TO INTERCULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION.....	 65
6.1. ANXIETY.....	66
6.2. ETHNOCENTRISM.....	67
6.3. MENTAL MODELS.....	68
6.3.1. <i>Stereotypes and generalizations</i>	68
6.3.2. <i>Prejudice</i>	70
6.3.3. <i>Racism</i>	71
6.4. CULTURAL REACTIONS.....	73
6.4.1. <i>Culture clash</i>	73
6.4.2. <i>Culture shock</i>	74
6.4.3. <i>Case study: the “Banana Man”</i>	76
6.5. MEDIA AS TRANSMITTER.....	76
 7. RECOMMENDATIONS ON SOLUTIONS TO INTERCULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION.....	 78
7.1. DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY.....	79

7.2.	REDUCING STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE.....	81
7.3.	HOW TO STOP INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS.....	84
7.4.	RAISING INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS IN EFL EDUCATION.....	85
7.5.	COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION INSTEAD OF LITERAL TRANSLATION.....	89
7.6.	CASE STUDY: “CHINGLISH” VS. CHINA ENGLISH.....	91
8.	EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OF INTERCULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION.....	93
8.1.	METHODS AND AIMS.....	94
8.2.	QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN.....	95
8.3.	QUESTIONNAIRE ASSESSMENT.....	96
9.	CONCLUSION.....	98
10.	REFERENCES.....	102
11.	APPENDIX.....	108
11.1.	PICTURES.....	108
11.2.	QUESTIONNAIRE.....	112
11.3.	ABSTRACT.....	116
11.4.	ZUSAMMENFASSUNG.....	118
11.5.	CURRICULUM VITAE.....	120

1. Introduction

Language provides us with the basic means of communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. Through the encoding and decoding of information, people establish a basis for their relationship with others under many different circumstances. A meaningful and effective conversation is therefore dependent on correct expressions. Miscommunication normally occurs due to speakers' lack of language skills and their insufficient intercultural competence. Language proficiency does not equal intercultural competence since both of them have distinctive characteristics. Barriers to intercultural miscommunication between Easterners¹ and Westerners can be traced back not only to linguistic factors, such as interlocutors do not share the same syntax and semantic system or dissimilarities in pronunciation and vocabulary, but also to cultural components, such as different perceptions of politeness, apology and "face".

Language is culturally defined and culture is expressed by linguistic codes. To better avoid the stereotypical impression of Easterners as being indirect, overly polite and extremely shy, far more complex cultural meanings behind the phenomena are worth analyzing. A Chinese immigrant in Britain, even one who speaks English fluently, might be considered bashful, too polite, introverted, or even two-faced due to the influence of Chinese culture on him or her. How does intercultural miscommunication occur? What are the influences of language and culture on the interaction between Easterners and Westerners? What are typical barriers to a successful intercultural communication? How can foreign language educators better assist second- and foreign-language students not only to develop their linguistic proficiency but also their intercultural competence? How to avoid stereotypes and prejudice towards people from other cultural backgrounds? The answers lie in the comparative study of language and culture, more specifically, the study of linguistic and sociocultural influence on intercultural communication.

People from one culture may not interpret fundamental values and assumptions the same way as those from another culture do. While English, as one of the most widely used international languages, is becoming more and more important for intercultural communication, Mandarin Chinese is also gradually gaining its international influence. Even though Chinese English speakers have little difficulty understanding the literal meaning of utterances when confronted with native English speakers, they may have problems interpreting some English expressions, or conveying their cultural meanings appropriately. The same situation affects Chinese speaking foreigners in China too.

¹ The term *Easterner* is used to represent people mainly from East Asian countries such as China, Japan and Korea.

This paper thus deals with typical intercultural miscommunication situations, which often occur when Easterners encounter Westerners, especially between English and Chinese speakers. The paper will analyze characteristics of both English and Chinese languages and cultures based on representative examples and empirical research. It can be used as a reference to observe problems and avoid making the same mistakes when encountering people from other cultural backgrounds.

The first part of the paper introduces the definition of intercultural miscommunication and its related methodologies, which are based on two fundamental theories, namely the theory of collectivism vs. individualism and the theory of high-context vs. low-context cultures.

The third chapter provides readers with representative situations of intercultural miscommunication due to linguistic factors. Then reasons for intercultural miscommunication will be analyzed from the perspective of sociocultural influence in chapter four. Chapter five deals with nonverbal miscommunication, which is a rather implicit manner of transmitting information. In chapter six, more barriers to intercultural communication such as stereotypes and prejudice towards a certain culture or culture clash and culture shock when confronted with a new cultural environment will be analyzed.

After the description of different phenomena of intercultural miscommunication caused by linguistic and cultural factors, the focus of chapter seven is to introduce useful methods to solve intercultural miscommunication, such as developing intercultural sensitivity, reducing stereotypes and prejudice, implementing intercultural experience in foreign language education and providing efficient translation between English and Mandarin Chinese. It is expected that the recommendations suggested will raise people's intercultural awareness in order to recognize and comprehend other cultures in an unbiased manner.

Chapter eight is accomplished by an empirical research of data collection and assessment, which intends to testify and support the hypotheses in the paper. Questionnaires were designed to investigate the influence of intercultural competence on individuals' attitudes towards people from other cultures and to observe their opinions about linguistic and cultural influence on foreign language studies.

The last chapter ends the thesis with a summary of major findings of the analyses and empirical research as well as aims to encourage foreign language learners to improve their intercultural competence in future studies.

The comprehensive analysis of this paper is expected to be inspirational and helpful to readers who are interested in intercultural communication between Easterners and Westerners

and it intends to provide English learners and educators with useful suggestions about how to improve non-native English speakers' linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence.

Before going into further analyses, some comments need to be made. Overlapping examples from both linguistic and sociocultural perspectives are possible since language and culture are interdependent and inseparable. This is described by Kramsch (1998: 14) as she points out that culture is “semantically encoded in the language itself” and it is also “expressed through the actual use of the language”. Examples chosen in this paper are selective and unbiased. Generalizations towards a certain culture are not intended or implied. For instance, the hypothesis that China is considered a collectivistic country is used to present nothing but a tendency based on this theory.

The Chinese language used in this thesis to compare to Standard English is Mandarin Chinese, which is also called *pu tong hua*, literally meaning ‘common language’. *Pu tong hua* is written by simplified Chinese characters (in comparison to traditional Chinese) and pronounced according to *pin yin*², the Chinese phonetic alphabet system.

In sum, only by improving one's linguistic proficiency and raising one's intercultural sensitivity can a foreign language learner achieve a successful communication with other people, both in a domestic and international environment. How people understand and tolerate phenomena from other cultures directly influences communication and relationships with others. Studies on intercultural miscommunication provide readers with an important insight to observe similarities and differences between Eastern and Western languages and cultures in order to overcome barriers to a mutually beneficial communication between people of the global village.

2. Defining intercultural miscommunication and related methodologies

The definition of miscommunication in intercultural encounters varies from study to study and from linguist to linguist. Experts in domains such as anthropology and sociolinguistics define intercultural miscommunication as a type of communication in which interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other but cannot understand each other if certain linguistic or cultural codes have not been mutually shared.

Milroy (1984: 8) defines miscommunication as an instance where there is “a mismatch between the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation, the communicative success is

² *Pin yin* is the official pronunciation system used in China, which is established referring to the Latin letter system. The use of *Pin yin* to represent Chinese characters in this paper is intended to provide readers with a more familiar writing system, which is similar to English and to avoid the use of tones in Chinese, since this is not related to the main topic of the paper.

threatened”. More specifically, Banks, Ge and Baker (1991: 104) describe miscommunication as “a retrospective recognition that one person’s intentions have not been ‘read’ accurately by another participant, and that future actions or opinions of the participant will be predicated on the inaccurate reading.” There are some synonyms for the term *miscommunication*, which are often used in varied linguists’ researches, including *communication breakdown* (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1990: 309), *misunderstanding* (Carroll, 1988) and so on.

Hofstede’s (1991) theory has been one of the most frequently quoted theories in intercultural studies. A central topic of his hypothesis is his differentiation between “individualism” and “collectivism”. According to Hofstede (1991: 260-261), “Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only”, whereas “collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty”. In the same vein, Kagitçibasi (1997: 10) notes that, “Individualism and collectivism are construed as broad tendencies or preferences spanning varied realms of human activity.”

Most Eastern countries such as China, Japan and Korea are generally defined as collectivistic countries. Some conventional characteristics of collectivistic culture are the close family relationship, the value of being homogenous as a member in a social group, respect for both hierarchy and balance within the social group, and so forth. The central value is the “we” identity. Typical features of social members of a collectivistic society are that they tend to be more modest, obedient, indirect, interdependent and concerned about saving “face”. This is considerably different from the individualistic life style, the “I” identity in many Western countries, which is presented in a more distant, independent and direct manner. However, the characteristics of both individualism and collectivism may overlap because they are not universal and exceptions are existent. For the comparative analysis in this thesis, some most representative characteristics will be highlighted in the following chapters.

Ting-Toomey and Gao (1998: 4) concentrate specifically on Chinese and American cultures:

The individualistic aspects of the U.S. culture – such as focusing on an ‘I’ identity, meeting one’s own needs and desires, and being an independent entity – and the collectivistic aspects of Chinese culture – such as focusing on a ‘we’ identity, meeting the needs and expectations of others, and being a part of the in-group – shape the distinctive communication processes present in those two cultures.

The authors (1998: 7-10) further exemplify a popular view about “self” in Chinese culture from the Buddhist perspective, namely “the little self” and “the great self”. “The little self” symbolizes an individual person whereas “the great self” stresses the existence of “self” in the society, which is believed to be more important than “the little self”.

Gao (1996: 96) clarifies as follows: “As King and Myers (1977) indicate, face is more a concern to the family than to the person and face-losing or face-gaining acts reflect both on persons themselves and on their families. To illustrate, one’s failure threatens the face of the family; one’s accomplishment, however, gains face for the family.” In his argument, family symbolizes not only one’s own immediate family but also a bigger society or the nation, in which the individual resides. In the same token, referring to Ting-Toomey and Gao’s (1998: 8) description, the Confucian ideology “suggests that the little self must succumb to the vision of the great self”. Jandt (2004: 35) also points out: “Confucianism emphasizes virtue, selflessness, duty, patriotism, hard work, and respect for hierarchy, both familial and societal.”

A particular case, which is related to the contrast between collectivistic ideology and individualistic ideology, could be observed during the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. In collectivist China, the value of winning a gold medal is regarded exceedingly important compared to winning a silver, bronze medal or other places of any competition. The cultural factor related to this is specifically relevant to a collectivistic belief that only the best is satisfactory and as an athlete representing the whole nation, one should have the spirit to sacrifice all. Such a belief could be considered unacceptable in Western societies, where athletes are mostly seen as individuals, who are not only competing for their nations but also for their own passion for sports. Winning a medal or even just participating in the games can already be seen as the fulfillment of one’s hard training. “The most important thing is not to win but to take part” is a well-known Olympic motto, which illustrates the actual aim of sport competition: achieving one’s best performance while competing for the honor of one’s own country.

It is important to recognize intercultural communication as a continuously changing process and to be aware of biased considerations or clichés of a certain culture. In line with this, Zhu (2011: 259) affirms that:

participants’ sociocultural identities are neither a priori (something knowable independent of experience; for example, the assumption that a Westerner tends to be direct in making a request, while an East Asian person tends to be indirect), nor static. Instead, participants’ sociocultural differences are constructed and negotiated through interaction. Therefore, they see the cultural differences as a process rather than an end-

product and emphasize the emergent, discursive and dynamic nature of cultural differences.

Meier (2010: 79) also confirms the concept by saying that, “[i]ndividualistic tendencies are characterized by a greater concern for autonomy and individual needs and rights,” whereas “collectivistic tendencies, in contrast, are characterized by giving priority to one’s identity as a member of a group, in-group concerns take priority over individual needs.”

Another cultural contrast, which was first proposed by the anthropologist Edward Hall in 1976, is between High Context (HC) and Low Context (LC). This is characterized in the following manner:

A High context communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicitly transmitted part of the message. A Low context communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of information is vested in the explicit code. (Hall, 1976: 91)

To simplify this abstract theory, descriptions will be given to exemplify the characteristics of high- and low-context cultures. The higher the context, the less information is expressed verbally in any speech or written text. In a relatively high-context culture such as Chinese culture, the use of fewer words would be more efficient than talking a lot. As Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2012: 201) describe: “In high-context cultures, most of the meaning exchanged during an encounter is often not communicated through words” and this is due to “there is normally a strong level of similitude among the people” from the same cultural backgrounds. According to the authors (2012: 201), such cultures are “usually quite traditional, they change little over time and produce consistent responses to social environment.” Thus, during an interaction with people from high-context cultures, changing the tone of voice or performing a gesture or even silence can be sometimes even more efficient than words. This will be analyzed in greater detail in later chapters. In a comparatively low-context culture such as German culture, information would be transmitted in a more direct and explicit way. Meaning is rather reliant on verbal expressions and silence does not have a salient value compared to high-context cultures.

In this paper, the Chinese culture is regarded as a collectivistic and high-context culture. This does not suggest that all Chinese people are collectivistic but rather represents the tendency that compared to Westerners, Chinese people communicate in a rather collectivistic manner and in a more high-context style. There is nothing like a definite boarder between high- and low-context cultures. For instance, French culture contains higher context compared to English culture but has then relatively lower context than Chinese culture.

Also, Western culture is not strictly individualistic and low-context but rather relatively more individualistic and lower-context compared to Eastern culture. Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012: 40) also tend to be opposed to a black and white conclusion by saying:

Such blanket distinctions rarely hold true. [...] It is more useful, we believe, to speak of high context and low context situations, and to say that for participants in particular discourse systems, some situations rely more on context for meaning than others.

The theories discussed above have provided a basic understanding of some fundamental issues of intercultural communication. We can now go into detailed analysis with representative examples. The examples given in the following sections demonstrate diverse arguments from different perspectives.

2.1. *Culture and communication*

Many linguists would agree that culture embodies an all-encompassing meaning and can be demonstrated in anything from hairstyle and tattoo to pop songs and literature. Kluckhohn and Kroeber (1952: 181) define culture as follows:

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

A rather recent description of culture, which is closely related to intercultural communication, is given by Scollon and Scollon (2001: 139), as they define culture as “any of the customs, worldview, language, kinship system, social organization, and other taken-for-granted day-to-day practices of a people which set that group apart as a distinctive group”.

To be more consistent to the central gist of this paper, Hofstede (1984: 21) highlights the distinctiveness between various cultures by defining culture as “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group of people from another”. This definition reminds readers of culture’s influence on individual’s perception of people from other cultural backgrounds and foreshadows the further recognition and analysis of characteristics of intercultural communication in the following chapters.

Cheng (2003: 1) explains: “intercultural communication compares the discourse of people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting either in a lingua franca or in one of the participants’ native language”. This interaction discourse is where the focus of the comparative study of intercultural communication between Easterners and Westerners lies

in this paper. Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2012: 12) point out: “intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event.” The writers (2012: 12-19) further list some most typical characteristics of communication: “communication is a dynamic process”; “communication is symbolic”; “communication is contextual” and “communication is self-reflective”.

Schirato and Yell (2000: 1) outline the relationship between culture and communication by explaining: “Communication can be understood as the practice of producing meanings, and the ways in which systems of meaning are negotiated by participants in a culture” whereas “culture can be understood as the totality of communication practices and systems of meanings.” The authors (2000: 2) state that communication and culture cannot be separated but they exist in a dynamic and interactive relationship with each other. Dupont and Faure (1991: 47) also observe the inseparable relationship between culture and communication: “Communication and culture represent two elements of the process that are particularly important in international negotiations.” Language and culture influence communication from different perspectives but also permanently interact with each other.

Noticing the importance of comprehending both language and culture, Haviland et al. (2007: 353) believe that if people are not capable of using and understanding complex language, their culture would not be able to exist. Sharma (2008: 98) states her view on the relationship between language and culture from two different perspectives:

On the one hand language may be seen as closely associated with a culture: language and culture are seen as inseparable phenomena. On the other hand language may be seen as an instrument of communication that may be used with any subject and anywhere in the world: language and culture are seen as separated phenomena.

Dupont and Faure (1991: 47) further point out: “Efficient communication is made more complex and risky by cultural and language difficulties. Poor handling of the communication process in these negotiations has often been noted as a possible cause of failure.”

There are multiple factors that can influence intercultural communication, which makes it impossible to include and analyze all of them within the scope of this paper. The necessity of studying the relationship between culture and language is described by Risager (2006: 1): “The investigation of the interface between language and culture is necessary both for the theoretical understanding of language and linguistic practice as parts of larger wholes and for the development of the various areas of practice where language plays a central role.” The aim of this paper is to provide the most representative categories and suggest possible

solutions to intercultural miscommunication. Therefore, the focus will be given to two most significant and influential factors, language and culture.

2.2. *Intercultural miscommunication*

The study of intercultural miscommunication is intended to present readers similarities and differences between Eastern and Western cultures and to provide representative examples of miscommunication due to linguistic and cultural factors. Concerning the cultural factors, Lim (2001: 74) states: “Lack of knowledge on the other’s culture (not on the other’s language), ethnocentric attributions, stereotypes, sociopolitical problems, and unwarranted beliefs of universality are proposed to be some of the major factors causing intercultural miscommunication.” To analyze problematic examples can provide readers with a better understanding of potential miscommunication caused by cultural and linguistic differences and keep them from making similar mistakes. As Fisher et al. (2000: 8) delineate: “Intercultural miscommunication theory assumes that conflict is caused by incompatibilities between different cultural communication styles.” The authors (2000: 8) further outline the aims of studying intercultural miscommunication are: “to increase the conflicting parties’ knowledge of each other’s culture; to weaken negative stereotypes they have of each other; ultimately, to enhance effective intercultural communication.”

This paper will explore various aspects of intercultural miscommunication in order to present a whole framework for readers to reflect and refer to. Ting-Toomey (1999: 111) explains: “Intercultural miscommunications often occur because individuals use cultural-laden habits and assumptions to interpret”. She draws attention to the specific case of communicating with Chinese together with her co-writer Gao (1998: vii): “Chinese culture, along with other cultures, has its specific rules and norms for everyday social interaction. Variations in cultural assumptions, perceptions, and expectations often are grounds for intercultural miscommunication”. In the following chapters, corresponding analyses and discussions of general situations as well as specific cases will be provided.

2.3. *Cultural legacy*

In order to better understand the influence of culture on language, it is necessary to mention the importance of cultural legacy in diverse societies. The following situation illustrates the topic more clearly. An American working for the United Nations had a Chinese employee at the UN offices in Vienna. He sent the Chinese employee to the USA for a mission in the mid-west area near St. Louis, Missouri. When the Chinese returned from his trip he asked his

American manager: “who is the Man?” The American was not sure what the term specifically means at the beginning. The Chinese employee explained that he arrived at the American airport and called for a taxi to take him to his hotel. The taxi driver, who was an African American, asked him about what it was like to live in China. Eventually, the taxi driver started to talk about himself and claimed that he would be better off and more successful if his people were not held down by “the Man”. He told the Chinese fellow that if he had a few minutes he would show him where he lives and how “the Man” keeps him and his fellow Americans down. He drove the Chinese man to his neighborhood which was in a quite run-down part of St. Louis, showed him his house, a small two story house, with an older model car in the driveway. He said to the Chinese fellow: “what do you think about how ‘the Man’ keeps us down?” The Chinese fellow said to him: “I do not know what ‘Man’ keeps you down but this is an amazing house and a car, I live in a fifty square meter apartment in China, I do not have a car and cannot imagine that a ‘Man’ would give it to me!” The driver gave up and took him to his hotel.

The American manager finally understood and explained to his Chinese employee that in the USA the term *the Man* is sometimes used by African Americans to describe white Americans who over the centuries had used African Americans as slaves, servants and home staff. He said that it is an American slang, probably mostly known in the USA. Obviously, such a term is culturally definitive. The Chinese employee actually misunderstood two points in that conversation. Firstly, the African American thought he did not live in conditions as good as richer people, whilst to the Chinese employee, it looked very nice and secondly, the term *the Man* could mean something more than the term usually reflects. As we can observe from the incident, when members of another society do not share a specific cultural meaning, miscommunication could emerge.

Just like the intercultural miscommunication experience could happen to the Chinese employee, some Westerners in Eastern countries could also encounter similar conditions. Some representative illustrations were found during the research for this thesis in a bestseller called *Outliers* (2011) written by Malcolm Gladwell, stressing the importance of understanding other cultural backgrounds. To name an example, at the beginning of the book, the author told an unusual story, nowadays commonly known as the “Roseto Effect”, about a small group of Rosetans from Rome who went to New York to look for better opportunities in 1882. Interestingly, their death rate from heart disease was much lower than the death rate of the local Americans. According to Egolf, Lasker, Wolf and Potvin (1992: 1089): “Beginning in 1962, Roseto became the object of detailed inquiries into its history and social traditions

and the attitudes, behavior, health habits and medical status of its residents.” After their investigation about this unique issue, they found that the reason why Rosetans lived longer was due to their culture-bound social activities. The authors (1992: 1089) state: “Data from these studies and many years of participant observation yielded evidence that discrepancy in the prevalence of and mortality from myocardial infarction might be attributed to important differences in culture and social cohesion”. Gladwell (2011: 10) is convinced that if scientists want to understand the mystery behind the amazingly healthy Rosetans, “they had to look beyond the individual. They had to understand the culture he or she was a part of [...] They had to appreciate the idea that the values of the world we inhabit and the people we surround ourselves with have a profound effect on who we are.”

Only by knowing the history and background of the Rosetans can one understand the reason behind the case. Gladwell (2011: 175) states:

Cultural legacies are powerful forces. They have deep roots and long lives. They persist, generation after generation, virtually intact, even as the economic and social and demographic conditions that spawned them have vanished, and they play such a role in directing attitudes and behavior that we cannot make sense of our world without them.

The racial and ethnical stereotypes and clichés will only lead us to dead ends. Only by taking cultural legacies seriously can people from any cultural background make intercultural communication work more efficiently.

An important historical event related to cultural legacy concerns air crashes of Korean Airline that were happening quite often about twenty years ago. Gladwell (2011: 182) conducted an investigation of one of those major crashes and in his analysis of the black box, flight records, the weather, the terrain and the airport conditions, the importance of cultural legacy's role in the communication between pilots and their assistants is significantly acknowledged. More specifically, a Korean plane from Kimpo International Airport to Guam crashed in 1997, which was actually just the beginning of a series of air crashes happening to Korean Airline (Korean Air Boeing 707 in Seoul, near Sakhalin Island in Russia, over the Andaman Sea in 1987, in Tripoli in 1989, in Cheju, South Korea in 1994, in Shanghai, and so on.) The loss rate of Korean Air was much higher than it was of other airlines during that time period. After continuous investigations of the captains' health conditions, flight experience, aircrafts, locations and weather, the investigators found out that the most critical problem lies in the communication between the captains and their first officers. The issue of power relation plays an extremely big role.

Gladwell (2011: 195) lists different levels of mitigation to describe how a first officer talks to the pilot, which are “command, crew obligation statement, crew suggestion, query, preference and hint”. The choice of the level of mitigation is dependent on the cultural background. This means, the talk between an American pilot and American aircraft staff will be different from the communication between an American pilot and a Korean officer or vice versa. Countries like the United States, which have lower power distance, belong to the category of individualism. On the contrary, there are so called collectivistic countries such as Korea, in which power distance is extraordinarily emphasized. This exactly explains the Korean Air crash cases, where the power distance between the pilot and first officers had a predominant influence. As Gladwell (2011: 214) puts it:

The Korean language has no fewer than six different levels of conversational address, depending on formal deference, informal deference, blunt, familiar, intimate, and plain. The first officer would not have dared to use one of the more intimate or familiar forms when he addressed the captain. This is a culture in which enormous attention is paid to the relative standing of any two people in a conversation.

Thus, the communication between the “powerful” pilot and the “obedient” cabin crews is much more sophisticated in Korean culture. However, in the emergent process of avoiding an air crash, such misunderstandings could easily lead to calamity and could be ineluctable. A realistic dialogue between the Korean employee Mr. Kim and his boss Kwachang, which can provide readers with a vivid illustration, is given in Gladwell’s book (2011: 217).

(1) KWACHANG: It’s cold and I’m kind of hungry.
(MEANING: Why don’t you buy a drink or something to eat?)
Mr. Kim: How about having a glass of liquor?
(MEANING: I will buy liquor for you.)
KWACHANG: It’s okay. Don’t bother.
(MEANING: I will accept your offer if you repeat it.)
MR. KIM: You must be hungry. How about going out?
(MEANING: I insist upon treating you.)
KWACHANG: Shall I do so?
(MEANING: I accept.)

In Western cultures, it is not uncommon that interlocutors clarify their feelings or intentions directly to each other regardless of social hierarchy. However, in Eastern cultures, the communication is comparatively more regulated and related to power distance. As Gladwell (2011: 217) concludes:

high-power distance communication works only when the listener is capable of paying close attention, and it works only if the two parties in a conversation have the luxury of time, in order to unwind each other’s meanings. It doesn’t work in an airplane cockpit on a stormy night with an exhausted pilot trying to land at an airport with a broken glide scope.

The situation started to change after Korean Air accepted a culture consultant David Greenberg from Delta Airlines. Greenberg tried to operate different programs to help the Korean aircraft crew. These programs can be divided into two categories, which are language skills and cultural adaptation. These are also the issues chosen to focus on in this thesis. For the language skills part, since English is the official language in the aviation world, there is no nonverbal communication during the flight between the pilot in the cockpit and the ground service at the air traffic control office. That means it is extremely essential for the participants of a tele-communication to understand each other's language. For the cultural adaptation part, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, the dealing with power distance in different cultures is varied in many ways. Gladwell (2011: 219) points out the problem of the Korean pilots as follows:

they were trapped in roles dictated by the heavy weight of their country's cultural legacy. They needed an opportunity to step outside those roles when they sat in the cockpit, and language was the key to that transformation [...] the pilots could participate in a culture and language with a very different legacy.

The story of Korean Air, developing from being known as a problematic and dangerous airline to fly, to an award-winning airline, underlines the crucial influence of cultural legacy.

In the multicultural global village today, though almost everything is translatable, what still remains is the cultural legacy of individual countries. Therefore, language is not only the carrier of linguistic features but also cultural meanings. In this thesis, language as a communication tool is also analyzed from both linguistic and cultural points of view. In order to avoid misunderstanding between Easterners and Westerners, both linguistic and cultural aspects are essential.

2.4. *Pragmatics*

According to Yule (1996: 4), pragmatics is “the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms”. Other than in linguistics, where the focus is on the language itself, the focus of pragmatics is more on the practical use of language by different users. Bardovi-Harlig (1999: 686) notices: “high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence.” Foreign language speakers from different cultural backgrounds tend to use various culture-bound linguistic forms or pragmatic strategies to express themselves. Meier (2003: 187) describes the importance of pragmatics to the study of intercultural communication: “pragmatics and culture are

foregrounded by intercultural communication as speakers from different cultures and with different pragmatic norms attempt to communicate effectively.”

Normally, people from similar cultures would appear to interact with each other more easily than with those who originate from other cultural backgrounds. Pragmatic failures occur when people from different cultures convey information differently. Riley (1989: 234) describes a pragmatic failure as “the result of an interactant imposing the social rules of one culture on his communicative behaviour in a situation where the social rules of another culture would be more appropriate.” For instance, a Japanese English speaker’s response to compliments may sound too modest to an American native speaker.

In the subsequent chapters, some typical features of linguistic and cultural influences will be named in order to analyze the reasons for a breakdown in intercultural communication. It needs to be kept in mind that the examples used in this paper are not intended to make any generalization, but rather to exemplify representative cases, which are likely to occur within an intercultural environment. Stereotyping a specific culture should always be avoided. A subcategory such as politeness can appear in both linguistic and cultural concepts. This paper will predominantly focus on the interaction between English native speakers and Chinese native speakers, who represent Westerners and Easterners respectively. In order to provide readers with a more comprehensive overview of the comparative study, Mandarin Chinese will be used in some examples.

3. From linguistic perspective

In order to understand both similarities and differences between English and Chinese, an investigation of linguistic features, such as syntax and phonology, is prerequisite. Linguistic miscommunication occurs due to the difficulty of linguistic encoding between interlocutors. To name an example, miscommunication could occur if the addressee interprets the words of the addresser differently from what the addresser really wants to express. Gass and Varonis (1991: 133) explain that this category of miscommunication “can be found in the difference between the grammars of the interlocutors, with grammar being loosely defined to include the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and prosodic systems.” In order to provide a more detailed illustration of experiences when Westerners encounter Easterners, some typical examples will be analyzed in the following sections.

3.1. Mispronunciation

The English phonological system is rather different from the Chinese one. Many Chinese English learners tend to search for a specific analogous sound in Mandarin Chinese³ in order to substitute the English pronunciation. Mispronunciation then occurs when either an English phoneme does not have an identical pronunciation in Chinese or the English phoneme just does not exist in Mandarin Chinese at all. The stress of a word and the intonation of a sentence in Mandarin Chinese are also distinct from English. Other than English, Mandarin Chinese is a language specifically understood and defined through the use of tone, where the change of pitch in a certain word can totally alter its meaning.

(2) Two colleagues (Speaker A is Chinese and speaker B is American) are eating dumplings in a Chinese restaurant.

A: What's the filling?

B: Delicious.

A: (Puzzled) I mean 'what is the filling'?

B: I'm feeling quite well, and you?

In this dialogue, speaker A's mispronunciation of the vowel [i] confuses speaker B. Chinese English speakers often face difficulties in pronunciation regarding how long to hold the sound of vowels, as [i:] in *sheep* and [i] in *ship* while diphthongs are frequently shortened to monophthongs, as in *career*.

In addition to this, Ho (2003: 146) states: "Another noticeable habit among Chinese students is their habit of deleting or adding a syllable from two-syllabic words or more than two-syllabic words." For instance, the [ə] sound is often added in some words ending with consonants, such as *need* would be pronounced as [ni:də] and *could* would become [kudə]. Furthermore, Chinese English learners tend to pronounce [θ] as [s] or substitute [l] for [r], since these sounds do not exist in the Chinese language. Ho (2003: 143) clarifies: "It is particularly problematic in polysyllabic words containing both /r/ and /l/ where words are mispronounced. A word like *generally* is reduced to a two-syllabic word – *gen-li* and sometimes into three-syllabic – *genrali*, depending on the pace of speech." Moreover, many English learners from south China may find it difficult to distinguish [l] and [n] due to their local dialect.

All these pronunciation problems could lead to a strong foreign accent when a native Chinese speaker speaks English, which might then logically result in misunderstanding during an intercultural conversation.

³ In order to keep the thesis more fluent, the term *Chinese* may be used as a substitute for *Mandarin Chinese* in some texts.

3.2. *Syntax and semantics*

Yule (1996: 4) defines syntax as “the study of the relationships between linguistic forms, how they are arranged in sequence, and which sequences are well-formed”, whereas semantics “is the study of relationships between linguistic forms and entities in the world”. Such a traditional way of understanding and using language is specifically related to pure linguistics without the influence of the sociocultural parameter. This concept is also the focus of this section.

The most fundamental distinction between Chinese and English is that Chinese is an isolating language, which is unique because of its logographic characters, whereas English is an inflectional language, whose characteristic attributes can also be observed in many Western languages. The contrast can be seen in the following example:

- (3) English: the ocean's beauty vs. the beautiful ocean
Chinese: hai de mei li vs. mei li hai
ocean's beauty beautiful ocean

In the given example, the English noun *beauty* changes to *beautiful* when it is used as an adjective. However, the Chinese noun *mei li*, which equals ‘beauty’ in English, has no change of its form when it is used as an adjective.

In Mandarin Chinese, neither the number of subjects nor the order of subjects and objects in a sentence can alter the focus of the context. On the other hand, in English, if a component of the sentence is placed in the subject position, it can be certain that the focus of the sentence lies around the subject. In inflected languages such as German though, the change of the subject of a sentence is presented by the case of noun words, such as *ich liebe ihn* and *er liebt mich*, in which the nominative form of the first person pronoun *ich* ‘I’ and third person pronoun *er* ‘he’ are changed to *mich* and *ihn* when used as accusative pronouns. This is similar to English as in *I love him* and *he loves me*. However, in Chinese, the change disappears completely:

- (4) English: I love him. vs. He loves me.
Chinese: Wo ai ta. vs. Ta ai wo.

In this example, the English pronouns *I* and *he* as nominative subjects are changed into *me* and *him* as accusative objects. A similar change is absent in the Chinese translation, in which *wo* stands for both ‘I’ and ‘me’, whereas *ta* indicates both ‘he’ and ‘him’. Such distinctive characteristics of both English and Chinese are likely to lead to potential difficulties for foreign language learners.

Moreover, since the Chinese language is topic-focused, the change of the position of syntactic subjects and objects of a sentence does not influence the meaning of the expression. This can be noted in the following example.

- (5) Jiu wo xi huan he, dan yan wo bu chou.
 Wine I like drink, but cigarette I not smoke.
 (word-for-word translation)
 I like drinking wine, but I do not smoke cigarettes. (correct translation)

In fact, the meaning of Chinese expressions is preponderantly dependent on the context of a written dialogue or conversation. In English, the difference between active voice and passive voice is easily noticeable, as in *customers must park the cars inside* and *cars must be parked inside*. However, the change of voice may not always be shown in Chinese. A foreigner in China may find a sign in the garage *Cars must park inside* grammatically erroneous. Similar signs with similar translations can be seen everywhere in China and are accepted and understood. Such misleading translations are due to the flexibility within Chinese syntax, in which an active voice form of an infinitive verb can denote either the active or passive meaning depending on the context.

One might ask under which circumstances do Chinese native speakers use a passive voice? The answer lies in the following contradictory examples.

- (6) Gong xi, ni shen le. v.s. Wo ting shuo ta bei kai chu le.
 Congrats, you are promoted. I heard that he/she was fired.

In the first sentence, the Chinese speaker congratulates another interlocutor on being promoted by using a form similar to active voice. In the other example, the passive voice is used when the Chinese speaker gets the information that another individual has been fired. In Mandarin Chinese, the passive voice is often used in a negative context. According to Xiao's (2009: 28) corpus-based study, "Chinese passives typically have a negative pragmatic meaning while English passives (especially be-passives) do not". This is one of many distinctive differences between English and Chinese.

The use of auxiliary verbs in English is basically absent in the Chinese language. In English for instance, the three most frequently used auxiliary verbs *do*, *be* and *have* are mainly used for simple tense (present or past), progressive tense and perfect tense. They are needed when one changes a positive sentence into negation or a question, as from *I read books* to *I do not read books* and to *Do you read books?* Mandarin Chinese, on the other hand, as a typical uninflected language, is not dependent on the change of word selections but rather on the words order and the context. Therefore, the equivalent of 'I read books' in Chinese *wo du shu* will have its negative expression as *wo bu du shu*, which literally means 'I not read

books’ and the interrogative expression will be *ni du shu?* ‘you read books?’. Undoubtedly, the lack of auxiliary verbs in Mandarin Chinese causes problems for Chinese English learners when studying the rather complex syntax of the English language.

Another typical mistake Chinese English learners tend to make is the morphological change from adjective to adverb. In English, the common distinction in a regular case is made evident by the addition of *ly* at the end of the adjective whereas in Mandarin Chinese, only one form is used for both, such as the character *kuai*, which stands for both ‘quick’ and ‘quickly’ without any change. This can be noticed in a representative example in picture A provided in the appendix. The English translation of the sign is false because the translator mistakes *carefully* for *careful*. A correct translation would be ‘be careful, it is fragile’. Moreover, subordinated sentences are also absent in Chinese. Chinese speakers often use adjectival phrases to denote subordination, as in *wo tao yan de shi qing*, literally meaning ‘I dislike matters’, for which the correct English translation is ‘the matters, which I dislike’.

Furthermore, the use of tense and modal verbs is also quite different between English and Mandarin Chinese. Taking the English irregular verb *go* as an example, its infinitive form will be changed due to number and tense, which are embodied in the inflectional variation of the original verb. More specifically, the third person singular form of the verb *go* in the present tense will be changed to *goes*. *Went* and *gone* are its past tense- and perfect tense form while *will go* is used to delineate its future tense form. In Mandarin Chinese on the other hand, there is no such variation in its tense time frames. In the Chinese present tense, no matter whether it is first, second or third person, the form of the verb remains constant, such as in *wo chi*, meaning ‘I eat’, *ni chi*, denoting ‘you eat’, *ta chi*, ‘he/she/it eats’. In the Chinese past tense the only change to differentiate from present tense is the addition of a suffix *le*, as in *wo chi le*, which equals ‘I ate’ in English. Chinese people distinguish tense by noticing the use of signal words such as *next summer* and *yesterday*, which again underlines the importance of context in Mandarin Chinese. This leads to the topic of the following paragraph, which is the contrast between English and Chinese within the structure of an expression.

According to Li and Thompson (1976: 459), there are two subtypes of sentence structure, which are either a structure “favors a description in which the grammatical relation topic-comment plays a major role” or a structure “favors a description in which the grammatical relation subject-predicate plays a major role.” Mandarin Chinese is a topic-focused language where the meaning of an expression is normally understood through its context, whereas in English, the arrangement of subject, object, predicate, and other parts of the sentence, define the meaning of an expression.

Another distinctive characteristic of Mandarin Chinese is the absence of any difference between countable and uncountable nouns, whereas in English, countable nouns can be counted by using numerals, such as *one book* as singular and *five fingers* as plural. Not only is the numeral placed ahead of a regular noun, but a suffix *s* is also added to it. Unlike the change of nouns in English or many Indo-European languages, suffixes to nouns are absent in Mandarin Chinese. This is related to the non-derivational morphological feature of Chinese nouns. As we can notice in a part of picture B in the appendix, *human being lived on land* and *Na Xi people hold ceremony*, the suffix *s* is missing in the former one and the article *a* is missing in the latter one. As Yip (2000: 57) states: “All Chinese countable nouns, in fact, may be said to be able to derive their notion of plurality from their linguistic or pragmatic contexts and always formally follow the principle of zero-derivation.”

The last characteristic of Mandarin Chinese syntax to introduce in this section is the unique use of Chinese personal pronouns. As discussed previously, number and plurality are not apparent in Chinese syntax. An exception is the lexicon *men*, which is normally used at the end of a personal pronoun to turn a singular pronoun into a plural one, such as from *wo*, meaning ‘I’ to *wo men*, denoting ‘we’. In collectivistic cultures, people tend to use the plural form *wo men* much more frequently than the singular form, even in cases where the singular form would be used in English. For instance, a Chinese person often makes statements such as *we believe the work can be done soon* or *you can totally trust us* although he or she is just describing his or her own attitude or opinion. Pan (2008: 52) made her empirical studies by analyzing interviews with Chinese employees. She found out: “In a collectivist society like China, group opinions take precedence over individual opinions. Individuals are considered to be part of a larger group and they operate on a collective level.” The Chinese linguist (2008: 52) also illustrates the disadvantage of using plural personal pronouns among Chinese people by saying: “it can lead to ambiguity because it is not clear whose view is being reported in the respondent’s answer.” Therefore, during intercultural communication, it is very possible that misunderstanding could occur due to the special use of the plural form of Chinese personal pronouns.

3.3. Incorrect translation

To avoid misunderstanding in intercultural communication, correct and exact translation into target language is essential. Many tourists who have visited China might have had the experience that erroneous translations can still be seen in many public places. Example pictures from picture A to picture G have been taken in China especially for the empirical

research of this paper. Picture A and B have already been analyzed in the previous section. These representative examples are from several popular tourist cities where professional and correct translations would be expected. However, the actual situation shows almost the opposite. Many incorrectly translated signs can still be noticed in China.

Modern Mandarin Chinese has gradually developed into a language system, which is inclined to meet a speaker's convenience. However, these loose syntactic rules of Chinese bring difficulties to the acquisition of English for Chinese English learners. In the example C of the appendix, the English translation includes several mistakes which Chinese English learners usually make.

- (7) "It is said that the symbol of success and victory
The TianLu only uplink cannot the downside"

The correct translation of the original Chinese text should be "It is said that this 'Tian Lu' (meaning road to heaven), which symbolizes success and victory, can only be walked upwards but not downwards." Despite the spelling mistake and the misuse of English words, the translation on the public sign misses the passive voice "be walked" in the second line.

In sample picture D found in the appendix, the correct translation of the shown brand's label used by China Eastern Airline could be 'brand new wet tissue'. However, the chosen translation 'distinct wet tissue' does not match the original meaning at all. The translator might have wanted to elevate the tissue to an outstanding meaning and emphasize its distinctiveness compared to other brands, but unfortunately, the combination of the two adjectives *distinct* and *wet* in English does not have a plausible meaning. Misleading translations of Chinese brand names into English appear quite often. A famous Chinese brand called *Jin Ji* is translated into 'golden cock', which obviously could have an inappropriate connotation in English.

The sample picture E given in the appendix, which was taken in the famous ancient city of Xi An in China, demonstrates the unique writing order of Chinese characters. In modern English, people normally write from left to right. The letters used to create a word cannot be arranged from right to left, because it could make the word unreadable. However, since the writing system in Chinese is constructed by independent characters, a Chinese word can be composed starting from any direction. In this sample picture, the Chinese characters are written from right to left and they literally mean 'this way to visit'. Amusingly, the English translation is also arranged in this pattern by the translator. The outcome is grammatically odd to English speakers since it is mechanically translated word for word, using the original order of the Chinese characters.

In sample picture F, the politeness is lost in the English translation of the Chinese sign. Originally, the translation is supposed to be ‘please do not step on the grass’. However, the imperative form is used in the translation and it sounds impolite or even offensive to passers-by who notice the sign. The same problem appears in sample picture G, found on the bathroom wall of a popular hotel in China. The original meaning in Chinese is ‘if you need to dry your clothes, please hang them here’. However, the English translation uses the imperative form and sounds very forceful to the guests, who are expecting comfortable and respectful service from the hotel.

Another example, which is picture H taken from Radtke (2009: 21), was found in the capital city of China, Beijing. This local private shop’s logo “decay” might not attract customers but rather drive them away since the meaning of the logo’s translation in English has a negative and unlucky meaning. The owner of the shop may have translated one of the meanings of *tui bian*, which can have both positive and negative meanings according to its context. The translation he or she most likely intended to choose was the word *change*. However, due to the lack of context, the translator apparently made the wrong choice and randomly picked up one possible translation for the word *tui bian*, which unfortunately had a quite negative connotation. As mentioned above, Mandarin Chinese is a context dependent language, which means the meaning of a word is linked to the context it is embedded in.

3.4. Inappropriate use of foreign expressions

Undoubtedly, appropriate use of language is significantly important for communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. When a Chinese English learner does not know the exact meaning of certain words or phrases in English, he or she might use them improperly. This is shown in the next dialog between a female Chinese employee and her American manager.

(8) The Chinese employee is doing an internship in the USA. The male American manager wants to clarify some business issues to her.

Manager: Have you seen my notice?

Employee: Which notice?

Manager: The one I left on your office door.

Employee: I did not see anything.

Manager: Maybe it is lost then.

Employee: Oh, that breaks my heart!

Manager: What?

(Both seem embarrassed)

This situation shows that the Chinese lady is not aware that the expression *break one’s heart* is normally used in a love relationship. In the example above, this response appears to be used

improperly. Westerners might use it only when it is sarcastically meant, whereas in Chinese, it is a common expression to convey sorrowful feelings.

3.5. *Misinterpretation*

Apart from linguistic stipulations, some Chinese English speakers often mechanically translate an utterance from their native language into English, the target language. At the lexical level, they might take for granted that the Chinese words are equivalent to those in English and then mistakenly transfer the characteristics of Chinese language into English. For instance, a commonly used Chinese expression is mistakenly used in the following conversation:

- (9) A British exchange student in China invited his Chinese colleague for dinner. He wants to change the original time they agreed on.
British: Hey, can you come a bit earlier tonight?
Chinese: Never mind.
(The British student feels confused.)

When giving response to a request, some Chinese English speakers tend to use a direct translation from Chinese to English. A native English speaker may often hear *never mind* as a reply to a question in China. This is because the most common interpretation of *no problem* in Chinese is *mei guan xi*, which can also be translated into ‘never mind’ depending on the context. However, the English addressee would then not be able to interpret the utterance as a positive answer to a request, but might understand it as a rejection phrase or even in a sarcastic way.

3.6. *Different strategies in speaking*

The study, application and use of language are quite sophisticated systems. They undergo processes of receiving, analyzing and then finally producing information, which may be expressed in spoken, written or nonverbal forms. In addition to analyzing linguistic characteristics in English and Mandarin Chinese, it may also be useful to look at how an utterance is formed and expressed differently by English and Chinese speakers.

When a Chinese has a group discussion with some Western fellow students, he or she might have the experience of being interrupted several times by the question: “so, your point is?” This might sound a bit offensive to the Chinese person since in most Eastern cultures, people would present an argument differently in comparison to how Western participants would present the same information. Many Easterners tend to first collect enough supporting points in order to reinforce their actual opinion before they would finally come to a

conclusion. However, this sometimes leads to a relatively long process, which might make the argument rather confusing and hard to follow for Westerners. Nevertheless, this manner of participating in a discussion is considered common from the perspective of a Chinese. This again shows the importance of reflecting cultural cognition during intercultural communication. This issue is also perceived by Cheng (2003: 51):

Asians, particularly Chinese, are postulated as having their own valued, or preferred and specifiable rhetorical patterns in discourse; and that is, inductive or delayed introduction of the first or main topic in the discourse. Conversely, a deductive pattern, i.e. early introduction of the topic, is used in Western culture.

Thus, it is not because Chinese speakers do not stick to the central topic, but they have different strategies to express themselves due to how they perceive pragmatics.

Furthermore, Easterners have a tendency to express themselves less directly than Westerners. It is thought to be tactful to leave some space for more dialogue rather than presenting a confirmative statement immediately. Cheng (2003: 49) describes some similar characteristics of Japanese people by pointing out that they “limit themselves to implicit and even ambiguous use of words, avoid leaving an assertive impression, and use qualifiers such as maybe, perhaps, probably and somewhat.” In addition, many Eastern languages such as Mandarin Chinese are rather more flexible and it is believed that the Western way of speaking is following a more linear process of understanding language.

3.7. Inappropriate pragmatic strategy

Talking to different interlocutors requires different strategies. In Japan, the way to talk to people of different professional positions and different age groups is strictly regulated. An inappropriate comment can lead to a job dismissal or rejection of a business transaction. Pragmatic strategy depends on both the speaker’s relationship to the listener and the circumstance under which the conversation is undertaken.

(10) A Japanese and his European fellow student have known each other for a long time at the university. One day, the Japanese wants to borrow something from the European.

Japanese: Would you be very kind enough to please lend me your notes of today’s lecture?

European: Sure ...

(feeling uncomfortable)

To a very close friend, a casual conversation is acceptable. Even if you have to ask for help, too much politeness seems unnecessary or even irritating. In contrast, to an acquaintance or a business partner, an appropriate conversation plays an extremely important role if someone

wants to develop a potential friendship or business relationship in the future. Undoubtedly, in intercultural communication, pragmatic strategy should be applied in a considerably delicate way.

3.8. *Limitation of vocabulary*

Different languages have different amounts and categorizations of vocabulary. It is possible that a word exists in one language but totally disappears in another one or no equivalence can be found in a foreign language while synonyms would be used to describe the same word. Examples appear in both English and Mandarin Chinese.

In contrast to limited kinship terms in English, Chinese has specific words that specify the terms for grandparents indicating whether they are from the father's or the mother's side of the family, which are *ye ye* (male) and *nai nai* (female) for grandfather and grandmother from the father's side whereas *wai gong* (male) and *wai po* (female) stand for the grandfather and grandmother from the mother's side.

The writing system of Mandarin Chinese is fundamentally different from Latin letters and consists of a rather stable collection of vocabulary and character compositions. In other words, the possible combinations of Chinese characters are limited whereas Latin letters maintain unlimited possibilities of combinations. As an example, before the 1980s, the word *Internet* did not exist and after the millennium, names such as *Google*, *dot.com*, *twitter* and *blog* first started to be used.

In order to add some new words and phrases to the Chinese glossary, there are two methods broadly adopted. The more convenient way is the use of character compositions, which have a resembling pronunciation to the original English word. A typical example is the Chinese translation of the word *Internet*. The Chinese *pin yin*⁴ transcript of the word is *yin te wang*, which literally means 'because special net'. Obviously, this direct translation is nothing related to the actual meaning of the word. The pronunciation of the existing Chinese characters *yin* and *te* is used to emulate the sound of the original syllables *in* and *ter* in English. *Net* already exists in both languages, which makes a direct translation possible. Similar examples can often be seen in modern Chinese vocabulary, such as *ba lei* from 'ballet', *ji pu* from 'jeep', *sha fa* from 'sofa', *bo ke* from 'blog', *ka fei* from 'coffee', *ba* from 'bar', *bi ji ni* from 'bikini', *hei ke* from 'hacker', *ji yin* from 'genes', *sang na* from 'sauna', *xi ha* from 'hip hop' and so forth.

⁴ See page 3.

Another way to translate foreign words into Chinese is using Chinese characters whose meanings are already related to the original words. For instance, the word *computer* had no equivalent character in Chinese at the time of its inception. It is translated to *dian nao*, which stands for ‘electronic brain’ and endows a metaphorical meaning. Therefore, the difficulty caused by the limitation of vocabulary is partly solved by using equivalent terms in the target language to translate.

It is believed that after the reformation and opening of China in the 1980s, there have been thousands of foreign words translated into Chinese by the methods discussed above. Most of these words came from modern domains such as computer technology. One can also easily notice that many such words contain distinctive cultural meanings, which are not universally shared by other cultures.

On the other hand, some Chinese expressions also encounter problems when translated into English, such as *kong fu*, *dim sum*, *feng shui*, *lychee*, *Confucius*, since these culture-bound words do not have equivalent terms in English. Some native English speakers find it especially difficult to understand the meaning of many Chinese dishes’ names, such as *ma yi shang shu*, which literally means ‘ants climb up the tree’. This name can lead to misunderstanding because the dish has nothing to do with real ants but consists of spicy crystal noodles and meat. The reason behind this strange occurrence is that most Chinese delicacies use metaphoric descriptions, which are totally culture-defined. To avoid mistranslation either from English to Chinese or Chinese to English, understanding the meaning behind the words is extremely important.

3.9. The simplicity of Chinese grammar

To end this chapter about miscommunication due to linguistic differences between Eastern and Western languages, representative characteristics of English and Mandarin Chinese are worth recapitulating. English is a widespread international language spoken and learned by people from all over the world. Compared to many other Western languages such as German, English grammar is relatively less complicated. However, as a surprise to most non-Chinese speakers, Chinese grammar has an even more simplified structure compared to English grammar. In order to demonstrate the simplicity of Chinese grammar, various representative cases have been analyzed in previous sections. Studying the simplicity of Chinese grammar provides the readers of this paper with an opportunity for better understanding of the linguistic challenges of the English language for Chinese English learners.

Various linguists have given their arguments about the simplicity of Chinese grammar from different perspectives. Chu (1998: 13) explains: “Mandarin morphology is relatively simple in terms of inflection and derivation.” Li and Thompson (1981: 62) also comment on the distinctive structural features of Chinese morphology. They describe that in Mandarin Chinese, tense, number, gender or case are not presented in the word structure and there is no inflection variations in Mandarin morphology. Defrancis (1984: 51) states his supportive opinion: “Subsequently this nineteenth-century view was replaced in some minds by the notion that Chinese actually represents a higher stage of linguistic development because it dispenses with unnecessary features such as conjugations and declensions that were retained in varying degrees by European languages.”

Concerning intercultural communication, it is important to understand and interpret each other’s language correctly but not how simple or complex a language might be. Although from a Westerner’s point of view, the English language might seem rather simple, it is still challenging for Chinese English speakers to comprehend the English language due to its relatively complex grammar compared to Mandarin Chinese.

4. From sociocultural perspective

After the research of intercultural miscommunication from the linguistic perspective, it is then necessary to acquaint oneself with the influence of culture on communication between Easterners and Westerners. Hall (2002: 8-9) points out the importance of sociocultural investigation on intercultural communication:

A sociocultural perspective on human action locates the essence of social life in communication. Through our use of linguistic symbols with others, we establish goals, negotiate the means to reach them, and reconceptualise those we have set. At the same time, we articulate and manage our individual identities, our interpersonal relationships, and memberships in our social groups and communities.

Thomas (1983: 99) describes that sociocultural miscommunication “stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior.” Pan (2000: 153) explains: “Most miscommunication occurs not at the level of syntax or a single speech act, but at the level of discourse, such as how to open a conversation, how to respond to a previous turn, how to introduce a topic, and so on.” The “level of discourse” is related to the influence of culture. In this chapter, many typical sociocultural differences between East and West in various domains will be described.

Before entering categories and details of sociocultural miscommunication, a common conversation between two Chinese acquaintances best describes the distinctive social behavior in Chinese culture in comparison with Western culture.

- (11) Chinese A: *zhou mo lai wo jia ju can* 周末来我家聚餐.
Come to my place for dinner party this weekend.
Chinese B: *bie ke qi, bu yong ma fan* 别客气, 不用麻烦.
Do not be so generous, I do not want to cause any inconvenience.
Chinese A: *mei guan xi, hen fang bian, chao ji ge xiao cai* 没关系, 很方便.
No problem, it is very convenient. I just prepare some small dishes.
Chinese B: *hai de ma fan ni chao a* 还得麻烦你炒菜啊.
But you still have to cook.
Chinese A: *fan zheng wo men ye yao chi fan* 反正我们也要吃饭.
No matter if you come or not, we have to eat anyway.
Yi ding yao lai a, bu ran ke sheng qi le. 一定要来啊, 不然可生气了
So do come please, otherwise I will be angry.
Chinese B: *na hao, zhi zhun jia chang bian fan* 那好, 只准家常便饭
Then it is fine, but please only prepare some simple food.
Chinese A: *hao, zhi yao ni yuan yi chang jiu hao* 好, 只要你愿意尝就好
Ok, as long as you are willing to taste my dish.

Similar dialogs like this can be often heard among Chinese people. In fact, Chinese speaker B would actually like to accept the invitation but the way he or she responds seems quite reluctant. The discussion ends as expected with a positive outcome where the invitation is accepted.

Some Westerners may wonder how a simple invitation can become such a complex issue among Chinese people. The fact is that such a conversation is as common as any other daily activities in Chinese society. It includes various elements related to politeness, such as sincerity, indirectness, turn-taking, modesty, pragmatic strategy and so forth. For instance, *bu yong ma fan*, meaning ‘no inconvenience’, is used to exaggerate the potential effort the inviter might need to initiate, whereas *hen fang bian*, meaning ‘very convenient’, is intended to persuade the guest by minimizing the effort the host has to invest. On the other hand, *zhi yao ni yuan yi chang jiu hao*, which means ‘as long as you are willing to taste’, is used to show one’s modesty. These different types of politeness will be further explained in subsequent sections.

In Chinese culture, declining an invitation several times is normal and mostly expected, even if one wants to accept immediately. Showing hesitant attitudes or expressing considerate thoughts about an invitation is intended to soften the “rejection”. In Japan, it is a polite pattern to say *no* several times before accepting an offer. Such a slightly interminable transaction process may seem inconvenient or even hypocritical to some Westerners, but it is the social

norm, which people respect and follow in many Eastern countries such as China and Japan. A well-known Chinese proverb, *mei you gui ju, bu cheng fang yuan*, which means ‘no manners, no achievements’, precisely highlights the importance of social rules in Chinese culture.

4.1. Greetings and farewells

According to Malinowski’s (2004: 250) explanation, the use of greeting is “to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas.” “How’s it going?” and “What’s up?” are common greetings that Americans use. It is often merely a way to greet other people without expecting any related answer to the question. This does not mean that the Americans do not care about a respondent’s answer. It is simply a way to say “hello”.

Chinese people often greet each other with a common expression “Have you eaten yet?” Western people may be surprised that Chinese people care so much about eating, which is actually not the case. The expression simply functions as a conversation opener. No detailed answer is expected. If a Westerner gives a response to the question, such as “No, I haven’t eaten yet”, the Chinese interlocutor might feel obligated to invite him or her for a meal.

Hu, Grove and Zhuang (2010: 16) studied another typical Chinese greeting, which is “a casual statement of fact about what the other person is doing [...] to show acknowledgment or solidarity.” Imagine you are working on your laptop and a Chinese colleague is coming to greet you: “Aha, you are playing games on your computer.” It might be interpreted as the colleague is accusing you of not working or pointing out something obvious, but for Chinese people, such a statement is just regarded as a functional greeting in social life.

With regard to ending a conversation, Westerners tend to end conversations more abruptly than Easterners. If someone finishes his or her talk during a group discussion and then leaves, other participants are not necessarily offended. On the other hand, Easterners tend to be more formal and observant. They expect some cues from the person who wants to leave earlier. It is considered rude to quickly withdraw from a group conversation.

4.2. Appellations and honorifics

Chinese kinship terms have the tendency to be generally used also among non-relatives. It is common for young people to address elders as *grandpa* and *grandma*, or call members of the same generation *big brother* and *big sister*, which are considered respectful in China. Kádár and Pan (2011: 136) formulated a description of the use of kinship terms in Chinese society:

“Many of these kinship terms can be used in social interactions with non-kin, in order to simultaneously signal solidarity, familiarity and deference, or they may be used as a politeness strategy to claim closeness and deference.” In Western countries, on the other hand, kinship terms are not so frequently used in social networking or sometimes could even be understood in a sarcastic way.

Two frequently used expressions to address unfamiliar interlocutors are the professional titles *lao shi* ‘teacher’ and *lao ban* ‘boss’ in modern Chinese society. Both terms are used irrespective of sex, age and formality. Teaching is a highly respected profession in China. Therefore, people use the term *lao shi* ‘teacher’ to address someone when they want to show respect to his or her intelligence. *Lao ban* ‘boss’ is more linked to a power relationship. It is considered polite to put oneself in a lower position to address another interlocutor. The use of *lao shi* ‘teacher’ and *lao ban* ‘boss’ is an important social strategy in Chinese culture. It is criticized by some scholars, who feel that such expressions are not sincere but rather superficial. However, as an old Chinese saying describes, *zun zhong ta ren jiu shi zun zhong zi ji*, i.e. ‘showing respect to others is showing respect to yourself.’

Besides the respectful appellations such as *lao shi* ‘teacher’ and *lao ban* ‘boss’, there is another more neutral way to address people one encounters, namely the term *tong zhi*, meaning ‘comrade’. The use of *tong zhi* has become popular among Chinese citizens due to its amiable implication regardless of social hierarchy, power distance or gender difference. There are other similar neutral appellations, which are extensively used in today’s Chinese society, such as *peng you* ‘friend’ and *tong xue* ‘fellow student’. An interesting point to note is that the use of the term *tong zhi* in China, due to the gradual change of language and culture, has developed a different meaning. Today, *tong zhi* not only denotes ‘comrade’ but is also used to describe ‘homosexual’. This is similar to the word *gay* in English, which used to stand for *happy* but today is more commonly used to identify a person as homosexual. This demonstrates the constant change of vocabulary in both Eastern and Western cultures.

A similar example is the appellation *xiao jie* ‘lady’, which is seldom used in contemporary Chinese society to address a female interlocutor. Less than fifteen years ago, calling someone a lady was fashionable and respectful, but nowadays, this word is often used to address a prostitute. As we can notice, the cultural meaning of a certain appellation is not permanently static and can also be subject to change according to the specific cultural background of social members and how those social members use and promote it. The positive implication sometimes can be turned into a negative one.

Apart from the various ways of addressing a person, there is also the social convention of using honorifics as politeness markers. In some Western languages, the honorific titles used to refer to someone are classified. In German speaking countries such as Austria, there is a distinction between the second person pronouns to call someone, namely *Sie* and *Du*, which respectively stand for the polite form and the informal form. *Sie* is normally used to address the elderly, people in higher positions or is generally used as a formal expression to people who are unknown. *Du* is used then between intimates, such as friends, same social status and so on.

In some more hierarchic societies such as Japan, there are more categories of honorifics, which should be used for specific groups in society. Disobeying this social rule might cause serious problems and is believed to be very impolite or uneducated. This can be problematic for speakers of languages such as English, in which *you* is used for both formal and informal functions. The politeness of the communication is demonstrated in other ways as well, such as by adding *please* at the end of the sentence or using nonverbal expressions.

Comparable to German, there are also two second-person honorifics in Mandarin Chinese. However, the use of these honorifics is not as strict as in Austria and Japan. Interestingly, nowadays many Chinese locals would even prefer to be addressed with the more informal honorific *ni*, which equals *du* in German and *you* in modern English. The reason is that they do not want to be treated as unfamiliar to or distant to other interlocutors.

As Kunihiro, Inoue and Long (1998: 91) describe, the term *Japanese honorific* is considered “notorious among learners of Japanese” due to its “complexity of usage” and is described as “a linguistic device used to keep one’s distance”. Japanese honorifics are classified into self-reference and addressee-reference, which are then further divided into diverse forms according to the sex of the interlocutors and the relationship between them. For instance, *I* is used as the first personal pronoun regardless of the gender in English. But in Japanese, the variation of addressing terms is more complicated. A male adult refers to himself as *boku*, whereas a female adult refers to herself as *watasi* when encountering others. It is worth knowing that the Japanese learn how to use honorifics from a very young age. They actually attend social etiquette courses at school and at the same time practise such manners at home. They will be corrected and even punished when not properly using the polite forms. Later on when they start their career, the first training they take might also be how to use honorifics appropriately. Only by following this social norm can they fit into their society.

For Japanese people, the honorifics are not just superficial terms, but a life style, a stepping stone for their career or a bridge in a relationship with other members of the Japanese society to which they belong. The function of honorifics is not only to create a good relationship between addressers and addressees, but also to provide the addressers with appropriate expressions in order to make a positive impression on the addressees. There are arguments about whether it is necessary to use the complex honorifics system as in the Japanese language or whether abolishing such a complicated system can make a communication more efficient. Moreover, many Westerners consider the concept of using honorifics to display one's hierarchy is not acceptable in a democratic society. Nevertheless, honorifics play an indispensable role in Japanese culture and it represents a unique and well-organized sociolinguistic system. The use of honorifics also helps Japanese speakers to show certain characteristics of a person. In a word, in many Eastern countries such as Japan, disobeying the language rules might cause problems for one's interaction with other people.

Adding a title to the name to address someone seems to be common in some countries such as China. It shows respect to the addressee's achievement in his or her area, especially in a professional environment. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Chinese students call their teachers "teacher + surname" in comparison to American students can say "Mr." or "Ms." plus surname. Interestingly, in some Western countries, the mention of the addressee's title is considered very important. In Austria, if someone phones a company or a governmental bureau, he or she has to mention the academic title if he or she knows the educational background of the recipient. Even on the nameplate of residential buildings in Austria, the title of anyone who has got an academic degree or other titles is always listed. Many people consider this too bureaucratic, since whether someone is properly qualified for the job is not dependent on the academic degree he or she holds. In Switzerland, the neighboring country of Austria, the academic title is often intentionally omitted to avoid distance and pre-judgment of one's qualifications.

The analysis of appellations and honorifics in East Asian languages provides readers with a great opportunity to look at phenomena, which are not investigated much in many languages, especially in Western languages, such as English. The contrastive features of such uses again demonstrate the difference between Eastern and Western cultures.

4.3. *Politeness*

According to Geyer's (2008: 1) notion: "the term 'politeness' is associated with civil or well-mannered behavior and with social attributes such as good upbringing, status and formal

etiquette.” It is expressly concerned with the domain of pragmatics, which has been extensively studied. Investigating the profound meanings of politeness in different cultures provides foreign language learners with the opportunity to understand more about the norms and values in other societies. House (2003: 25) relates the importance of politeness to interpersonal communication studies as she states: “Politeness is important for misunderstanding analysis as it is commonly taken to be one of the basic social guidelines for any human contact and interaction.” Lakoff (1990: 34) defines politeness as “a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange.” According to Jary (1998: 12), the strategy of being polite is to find the balance “between appearing rude and appearing ‘too polite’”. More specifically, Brown and Levinson (1987: 2) categorize “three main strategies of politeness”: “positive politeness” stands for self-restraint and saying as much as required; “negative politeness” means expressing too much or too little, crossing the boarder of what is needed in the situation and at last, “off-record politeness” implies being vague, ambiguous and implicit.

Regarding politeness in intercultural encounters, some Chinese English speakers tend to mechanically apply the conventionalized first language communication strategies to the target language. Unfortunately, this will lead to the opposite impression of being polite. The following example delineates this point.

- (12) A Chinese student visits a Western friend’s home. The friend’s mother tries to be friendly to the new visitor.
Mother: Would you like to drink something? Coffee or tea?
Chinese student: No, no. I don’t need anything. No hassle please.
(Nothing is served to him and the atmosphere becomes awkward.)

In Chinese culture, when the host offers something to drink or eat, the guest will always politely refuse at first, whether he or she would like to accept or not. The expectation is that the host should keep on asking, twice or more times, to show his or her hospitality to the guest. This protocol seems complicated, but it shows the indirect and polite characteristics of Chinese social rules. On the other hand, a native English speaker generally expects a positive reply from a guest. *No* would sound unfriendly and would be seen as a fully negative reply.

Members of one culture might not accept what is considered impolite in another culture. Thus, for a foreign language learner, it is not only important to study the social manners of being polite but also necessary to pay attention to what is understood to be impolite. A small incident in the opinion of one person could be a major issue in terms of politeness to another person. In a same vein, Lachenicht (1980: 680) remarks that:

It is important to study not only the socially positive, but also the socially negative. Just as we cannot attain an adequate appreciation of value without an understanding of rubbish [...] so we cannot attain an appreciation of the positive uses of language without an understanding of invective.

In China, it is common that people might make some noise at the dinner table. If someone is chewing the food or slurping the soup loudly, it is supposed to be a compliment to the cook or the host to demonstrate that the food is delicious. In contrast, slurping and smacking during a meal is considered to be very impolite in many Western countries, such as Austria. For an Easterner, this might feel a bit unnecessary, sometimes even restrictive, since for example, it can be very challenging to eat food like noodles by using chopsticks without making any noise. In some Eastern countries such as China and Indonesia, burping is not considered impolite. However, in most Western countries, it is impolite in both private and public surroundings to let out a burp. If someone does accidentally burp, he or she would be expected to say *sorry* in order to refrain from the possibility of offending other interlocutors. As Ide (1989: 230) proposes: “people in a culture choose strategies of politeness according to the cultural expectation and requirement”.

The distinctive characteristic of politeness in Chinese culture is based on reciprocation. There is a famous saying in Chinese called *li shang wang lai*, which means ‘politeness should be given and returned’. It is considered a social norm that if one receives a favor or present from another person, he or she should also do a similar favor in return, otherwise it is deemed as impolite. Chinese people tend to dislike the feeling of owing something to another person, even if that person happens to be a close friend or family.

It is also interesting to look at the politeness of inviting someone to an event and the reaction to the invitation in different cultures. For many Westerners, Chinese people sometimes seem less spontaneous. For instance, Americans regularly tend to invite people to their parties. It is a way to show their hospitality. If someone declines or does not appear at the party, it is not considered offensive. However, if an overseas Chinese student is asked to a party, he or she would stick to the “promise” he or she makes, since it is considered very impolite in Chinese culture not to accept an invitation and then even more impolite to not show up if one has accepted. Hence, the Chinese student will go even if he or she might not want to attend due to any personal reasons. On the other hand, if a Chinese person invites foreign friends to join them to an event, the situation changes immediately. Among Chinese people, if someone wants to invite others to his or her place, he or she will try to persuade them to come even when the others are not willing to come, because the Chinese believe

when there is hesitation it is only due to the shyness or indirectness of the interlocutor. A Westerner will regard such insistence of an invitation as rather forced and pushy.

It is important to note that the concept of politeness is universally understood. However, the way how politeness is performed and interpreted, is culture-dependent and language-definitive. As Lakoff and Ide (2005: 5) indicate:

finding an all-encompassing definition of politeness is no easy task. Even if scholars agree that this behavior is rule-governed like other aspects of language, the rules in any culture must be highly complex and context-based; and the problem of making connections across cultures and across linguistic grammars will be daunting.

Furthermore, the different views on politeness of Easterners and Westerners are also demonstrated in TV commercials. According to the comparative study of television commercials by Schmidt, Shimura, Wang and Jeong (1995: 308): “American advertising is essentially persuasive in nature, while Asian advertising emphasizes other functions, informativeness in the case of Chinese advertising and entertainment value and the establishment of positive feelings in the case of Japanese and Korean advertising.” This is demonstrated in commercial slogans from both USA and China. The use of imperative expressions in the American commercial “Consider the Acura Legend Coupe” (1995: 296), contrasts strongly with the use of the formal pronoun *nin*, which is the polite Chinese form of ‘you’ and implicit voice in the Chinese commercial *Xinqiu yinxiang, nin de lixiang*, ‘Xinqiu stereo system, your ideal choice’ (1995: 296), illustrating difference in conveying meaning in different cultures.

4.4. Modesty

Modesty is one of the most important traditional virtues in China. When a Chinese person receives a compliment from others, a common response will be *bu, na bu shi zhen de*, ‘no, that is not true’ or *wo geng na bi qi lai yao cha yuan le*, ‘I am much worse than that’, in order to show humility. This is exemplified by the Chinese student’s reaction in the following conversation.

(13) A Westerner joins an exchange students’ party. During a conversation with a female Chinese exchange student in front of other colleagues, the Westerner expresses his respect to the Chinese’s language skill.
Westerner: wow, your English is excellent.
Chinese: No, my English is not good enough.
Westerner: Sincerely, you speak English so fluently!
Chinese: No please, my English is just not that good.
(They both feel embarrassed.)

Hu, Grove and Zhuang (2010: 39) notice: “Traditionally, the Chinese are unlikely to respond to a compliment with thanks or any other acknowledgment of its validity. To do so would demonstrate a lack of the indispensable virtue of humility.” Yao (1983:73) provides a similar example of a conversation between an experienced Chinese carpenter, who wants to apply for a job at a furniture company in the USA, and his American interviewer, to underline the importance of being modest for a Chinese person.

(14) Employer: What are you skilled in, then?

Carpenter: I won't say “skilled.” I have only a little experience in making tables.

Employer: Can you make something now and show us how good you are?

Carpenter: How dare I be so indiscreet as to demonstrate my crude skills in front of a master of the trade like you.

(Adapted from Yao, 1983.)

In Chinese culture, a person is considered to be showing off when he or she actively demonstrates what he or she knows, as said in a famous Confucius saying: “those who know do not speak and those who speak do not know.” On the other hand, Westerners tend to be more confident about their skills. They are not necessarily being arrogant if they openly admit that they are good at something. However, this may be judged as too much self-esteem by Chinese people.

The importance of showing modesty varies significantly between Easterners and Westerners. This can be presented in a simple conversation between two Chinese when they meet for the first time. Normally, one starts a conversation by asking *nin gui xing* ‘what is your surname’, in which *nin* is the polite form of ‘you’ in Chinese and *gui* is a linguistic code used to show respect to a stranger. A frequent response will be *bi xing* plus family name. *Bi* is a component to deemphasize the pronoun *wo* ‘I’. In this description, one can see that Chinese people tend to emphasize the importance of the interlocutor by putting him/herself in a lower position.

In the Chinese value system, it is important to maximize the value of another person and minimize the value of oneself. This is related to the fundamental contrast between individualism and collectivism, since Chinese people tend to be relatively more other-centered and Westerners more self-centered. In comparison, Westerners often start a conversation with a self-introduction under the same circumstances as described above and then ask the name of the other participant. Though many similar self-deprecating terms are not used anymore in modern Chinese, such as *bei zhi*, which means ‘my humble job’ or *zhuo jian*, meaning ‘my clumsy suggestion’, in formal speech there are still many praising expressions which are used to address others, such as *gui ke*, ‘precious guest’ and *gao jian*, ‘genius idea’, and so forth.

Moreover, when a Chinese person wants to send his or her friend a gift, even a very expensive or valuable one, he or she would most likely say: “This is merely a cheap present” or “It is just a little gift”. After that, the recipient will maximize the value of the present by expressing his or her appreciation for the generosity of the giver. This is a way to show courtesy and modesty. Western people, on the other hand, may say: “This is a special gift for you, hope you like it.”

Hu, Grove and Zhuang (2010: 40) further state: “Well-mannered Chinese deprecate not only their own accomplishments and advantages but also those of their family members.” Westerners tend to verbalize their gratitude and appreciation more than Easterners do. Commendatory expressions are frequently used, such as *what an intelligent boy* or *such a pretty girl* and so on. Apart from that, the affection is conveyed more implicitly in the East. In the British novel *Sour Sweet* written by Timothy Mo (1999), which is a realistic life story about Chinese immigrants’ adaptation of British culture, the main character Lily always introduces her husband and son to other guests by saying: “my unworthy husband” (1999: 130) or “he’s a very plain child!” (1999: 47) to belittle their value in order to show her modesty.

However, modest attitudes and responses toward compliments do not mean the universal indifference to offering or receiving them. Chinese people love to receive and give compliments, but they react to them differently compared to Westerners. One further essential issue in this respect is how to compliment the opposite sex. In Western culture, the gender issue is not so significant. In Chinese culture, however, people tend to link compliments from the opposite sex to sexual intentions or romantic affection.

4.5. “Saving face”

Since the interpretation of politeness varies among different cultures, it is worth investigating how Easterners and Westerners perform acts of politeness differently from each other. An important concept to mention here is “saving face”, which is the way one is perceived by others. The meaning of “face” is not only biologically determined, as in facial expressions, but also culturally related. For instance, in Eastern cultures, the face issue plays a huge role in interactions with others. Smiling does not merely present pleasure but embodies more profound meanings. Austrians are considered to smile less than Japanese, but this does not indicate that Austrians are not as friendly as Japanese.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 13) claim that the notion of “saving face” is universal, but their claim has been hotly debated. In many Eastern countries such as China and Japan, the meaning of “face” is fundamentally important, since people within the same culture are

interdependent and an individual's action is always related to the family or any group he or she belongs to.

For a foreign Chinese learner or a tourist in China, besides understanding the meaning of the cultural implication of giving and saving face, attention should also be paid to the speaker's strategy of using the face issue to persuade the listener and to the listener's tactful reaction to the speaker. A frequent expression made by Chinese speakers is *gei wo mian zi*, which literally means: 'if you give me face, then do something as my favor'. This sounds rather pushy but is often used by many Chinese people to persuade the listener to accept the suggestion or request. Normally, it is considered an obligation for the listener to accept the offer. However, if the offer is obviously against the listener's will, he or she may tactfully decline. In order to avoid giving the requester an impolite impression, the listener can reply *qian ni ge mian zi, xia ci yi ding huan*, which literally means 'owing you a face, next time returning back for sure'. Such strategies are often seen in social interactions in Chinese society.

4.6. "Bad language"

There is another kind of language such as complaining and cursing, which, unlike politeness expressions, is considered as impolite, disrespectful or even taboo. It is interesting to evaluate the use of such "bad language" in different cultures and how it is received from the perspective of local people in various countries.

In the Chinese language, there are many idioms that are related to animals, including either positive or negative implications. Expressions that are related to *pig* and *mouse* are mostly positive. For instance, *little pig* is a popular nickname, which is considered cute and can even be used in a romantic context. However, in many countries such as Austria, being called *a pig* is very disrespectful. In India, *cow* is not accepted as a swearword, since a cow is believed to be a sacred animal, which gives life to the people. Similarly, in Arabic countries, people do not use the word *pig* or *swine* to scold or condemn someone, again for religious reasons.

In France, when rude people see the policemen coming, they will shout: "look, the dogs are coming". By the same token, in German speaking countries, many people call the policemen *bulls*. It is not uncommon that in many countries local people call foreigners from other cultures names referring to certain stereotypes and clichés. For instance, Italians are called *macaroni* and French are called *frog eater* or *snail eater*. During the Second World War, when the allies fought against the Germans, they developed many derogatory words for

the German people, such as *kraut*, *Gerry*. *Kraut* was derived from the experience that the Germans ate a lot of sauerkraut. *Gerry* is another term for the word *German*, which used to imply negative tone towards German people. Dutch people are called *cheese head*. The British are called *limey* because when they used to rule the high seas, they always carried limes with them to be able to supply themselves with vitamin C since they were away from land and access to vegetables and fruits. *Chink* was a term used to call Chinese and it also contained a negative implication, just as *cat eater* is a derogatory name for Asian people based on the negative stereotypic impression that they could eat practically anything alive. As we can notice from the discussion above, being cautious about using these terms in different cultural environments is very important.

4.7. Apology

If intercultural miscommunication occurs, methods and strategies to avoid further conflict and to mend broken relationships are required. The way in which people perform and interpret an apology varies extensively between Eastern and Western cultures. Márquez-Reiter (2000: 44) describes an apology as a “compensatory action for an offense committed by S (the speaker which has affected H (the hearer))”. Moreover, if this miscommunication occurs between two participants not specifically individuals, but two nations, appropriate apologies are extremely important, since they can influence the relationship between the people and governments of these two countries. The study of apology is related to the study of politeness and the meaning of “face”. Olshtain (1989: 156) indicates the relationship between apology and face: “the act of apologizing is face-saving for the H (hearer) and face-threatening for the S (speaker)”.

When investigating the study of apology, it is necessary to observe the concept of “saving face” for both participants. Meier (1998: 221) notices the importance of taking care of both the apologizer and the one who receives an apology by divide strategies of apology into “hearer-supportive” and “speaker-supportive”. The former approach emphasizes not to lose “face” of the apologizer whereas the latter approach calls for a considerate apology to compensate or save the “face” of the receiver. How to apologize properly and maintain the “face” of both participants are important social strategies to guarantee a successful intercultural communication.

As mentioned above, apology is not only influential when directed towards individual language speakers, but also to international relationships between countries. In order to analyze how apologies cause intercultural communication problems due to different cultural norms and values, the following case, the sinking of the Japanese submarine Ehime Maru near

Hawaii in 2001, is examined to provide readers with a deep perception of state apologies within the Japanese culture in comparison to state apologies in Western cultures. The accident was caused by the American submarine *Greeneville*, which was commanded by Captain Scott Waddle during a mission. Immediately after the tragedy, President Bush, State Secretary Colin Powell, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and the American ambassador in Japan sent one apology after another to the Japanese government. However, the response from the American side did not meet the expectations of the Japanese side because they have different understandings of apology. For the Japanese, the most unacceptable issue was the delay of the American captain's apology. His non-reaction after the accident infuriated the Japanese victims' families. In fact, the captain's silence during this tense period was due to an internal investigation on him and he was restricted by internal regulations against having any exposition. Unfortunately, two weeks after the tragedy, when the captain was finally allowed to send his official apology in written form to the victims' families, his delayed apology was considered to be too impersonal, unserious and was therefore eventually refused by the Japanese victims' family members, who repeatedly demanded a more sincere and public speech to compensate their unchangeable loss and grief.

According to Japanese ritual, if similar situations occurred, the apologizer should visit the victims' families personally and kneel in front of them to beseech their forgiveness. Apparently, the American captain's apology did not satisfy the expectations of the Japanese families. On the other hand, as Renteln (2008: 68) notices:

In the United States, apologies are strongly discouraged because of the litigious nature of American society. Lawyers typically discourage their clients from making apologies to avoid liability on the part of their clients. Because saying "I'm sorry" could require paying damages, individuals in car accidents are warned by insurance agents not to make an apology.

Taft (2000: 1155) criticizes the loss of sincerity of apology in some Western countries:

When the performer of apology is protected from the consequences of the performance through carefully crafted statements and legislative directives, the moral thrust of apology is lost. The potential for meaningful healing through apologetic discourse is lost when the moral component of the syllogistic process in which apology is situated is erased for strategic reasons.

The Ehime Maru accident ended with a compensation of 13.9 million dollars from the USA to the Japanese victims' families, which might be much higher than it would have been if the American captain apologized earlier. This accident then became a representative case with much attention focusing on intercultural miscommunication, which was related to the study of apology. Both personal apology and state apology were involved. What remains to be further

discussed is that a considerate apology is supposed to compensate someone instead of making the situation even worse. For Americans' understanding, the kind of apology, which was required by the Japanese victims, appeared to be hyperbolic. Intercultural miscommunication occurs when people's understanding of apology differs so much from each other.

Amstutz (2005: 245) formulated another important argument: "The increasing use of apologies by public officials has perhaps cheapened their impact, especially since tangible reparations rarely support such declarations." It is worth mentioning that the choice of the miscommunication between Japan and America is not supposed to be typical for all Eastern and Western cultures, but rather as a representative case which highlights distinctiveness of the concept of apology in different cultures.

An interesting point is stated by Renteln (2008: 67): "Commentators sometimes note that even though apologies between individuals are common in Japan, paradoxically the government has been reluctant to offer public apologies." A related example is the documented atrocity of the Japanese Army's massacre of Chinese civilians in Nanking in 1937 during the Second World War. It became a national scar for the Chinese people and remains an unsolved tension between the Chinese and Japanese governments, even today. The mutual hostility between China and Japan has existed for decades. Furthermore, such hostile attitudes have even spread to other areas such as import & export, tourism and the media. This demonstrates again the crucial importance of intercultural communication. Although state apologies may not accomplish the goal of restoring harmony between two countries, more active communication between people of these two countries could undoubtedly support the development of a more positive international relationship.

State apologies have always been a sensitive and controversial issue. What makes the Ehime Maru accident distinctive is its combination of both a state apology and a personal apology. It has become evident that there is a crucial link between the concept of apology and the concept of "saving face". Between Chinese people, a proper apology sometimes has to be very tactful. One should give the other interlocutor enough space to save his or her honor while saving one's own face at the same time. The importance of "saving face" can often be much more important than any other kinds of compensation. In some collectivistic cultures, an apology is actually not always sincerely given or taken. The function of apology is not to express personal feelings toward an incident or disagreement but to decrease the tension in order to avoid potential conflicts. In Chinese culture, allowing the guilty person to keep silent or leave without an apology can show the victim's generosity. Chinese people apologize to

save the face of both the addressor and the addressee. In contrast, Westerners apologize to save their own honor or to convey that they are truly sorry. They may even suggest solutions to fix the mistake.

Moreover, power distance also plays an important role. In Chinese society, when a person of a higher position makes a mistake, it is not necessary to apologize to the one in a lower position and this is not considered disrespectful. Conversely, when the person in the lower position does something wrong, a sincere apology is necessary. This is quite different from Western cultures, where an appropriate apology is always necessary, even between the boss and his or her employees, since the respect of personal boundaries is significantly important in an individualistic society.

Remarkably, it appears that people from Western cultures apologize relatively more often than people from Eastern cultures. For instance, Western people apologize when they cough or make any noise. This is not common in many Eastern cultures. Westerners apologize for trivial things, even between good friends. In contrast, if a good friend of a Chinese person apologizes for trivial matters, such as being a little late for their appointment, the Chinese might feel offended, because it somehow underestimates their close relationship. This sometimes causes misunderstanding between Westerners and their Chinese friends. On the one hand, an Easterner would feel that it is unnecessary when someone apologizes frequently for trivial things. On the other hand, when something really negative occurs, a Westerner's apology might appear less adequate or not sincere enough to the Easterner. Moreover, the method of accepting apologies is also distinctive in Eastern and Western cultures. When something inappropriate happens, Eastern people tend not to accept the apology in order to emphasize the seriousness of the problem. This kind of behavior might be considered impolite in Western cultures, where searching for potential solutions to the problem is the priority.

4.8. Privacy

When Westerners encounter each other, they prefer to talk about topics, which are not too personal, such as the weather or news. On the contrary, many Chinese people prefer to ask personal questions such as *how much do you earn* or *are you married*, and so forth. This may embarrass Westerners if they have not experienced that aspect of Eastern cultures before. In intercultural communication, we may cause pragmatic failures or feel offended if we are not familiar with what topics are commonly discussed in a foreign culture. These regular topics, such as income, age, marital status, cost of cloth, and so on may be acceptable in China but should always be treated with caution in Western countries.

- (15) A Westerner caught a cold and his Chinese colleague wanted to show his concern.
Chinese: You look pale, what's wrong?
Westerner: I'm feeling sick. I think I've got a cold.
Chinese: You should go to see a doctor. Drink more water. Try to sweat more which helps you send the cold away.
Westerner: (Silence)
Chinese: Did you take any pills? Chinese medicine is great. Maybe you should try that. Look at you. You should wear more clothes and do not forget to get more sleep.
Westerner: You're not my mother, are you?

In this case, the Chinese person's attentive care unfortunately resulted in a mutual misunderstanding between him and his colleague. On the one hand, the Chinese might feel offended and hurt after trying to be helpful. On the other hand, the Westerner reacted as if he was annoyed and in his individualistic concept, the Chinese crossed the boarder of personal privacy. This excessive solicitude eventually became annoying.

4.9. Leadership

The discussion of leadership in this section is mainly related to an important concept in culture studies, namely power distance, which is also referenced in the cultural legacy section. Generally, in small power distance societies, such as many Western countries, people dislike being told what to do or how to do it. Leaders in successful companies usually make their requests by asking questions instead of giving commands. For example, telling a Westerner "Finish the report before tomorrow" might sound aggressive, even if you are the boss. "Could you please try to finish the report by tomorrow?" or "if you have a chance, could you try to finish the report before tomorrow?" would be much more acceptable.

Hofstede (2001: 83) introduces the concept of power distance: "Power distance is a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between B and S as perceived by the less powerful of the two." B stands for the boss and S denotes a subordinate employee in his description. The author also argues that though power distance and the contrast between individualism and collectivism are different dimensions of culture, they are linked together. In other words, countries inclined towards individualism tend to sustain small power distance, whereas collectivistic countries tend to have larger power distance. This is explained by Meier (2010: 79) as the following:

A small power distance orientation involves a relatively high value placed on egalitarianism, whereas a large power distance orientation entails greater acceptance of and sensitivity to an unequal distribution of power. Small power distance is generally associated with individualistic groups and high power distance with collectivistic groups.

Authoritarian leadership is still tolerated and highly respected in many Eastern countries. When the manager requests his or her employees to perform a specific task by giving a direct order, he or she is not necessarily commanding but just trying to assign the job. In Western countries, even just talking to an employee, the manager tends to be more polite by using words such as *could* at the beginning of a question and *please* at the end of it. This will be deemed feeble or weak in China if one is in a management position of a company. Hence, a harmonious working environment at the office can only be achieved by mutual understanding between employees and superiors according to the social norms and rules within different cultures.

Similarly, different attitudes towards power distance between Easterners and Westerners can also be observed within a family environment. This is why many people have an impression that children in Eastern countries tend to show their respect to elder family members in a more explicit way than children in Western countries. Hofstede (2001: 99) clarifies that, “In the large power distance situation, children are expected to be obedient toward their parents [...] Respect for parents and other elders is seen as a basic virtue”. This relationship remains even when the children turn to adults. Hofstede (2001: 99) continues: “Parents and grandparents are treated with formal deference even after their children have actually taken control of their own lives.” In Western cultures, on the other hand, the situation changes as Ting-Toomey (1999: 70) describes: “In small power distance cultural situations, children can contradict their parents and speak their own minds. They are expected to show self-initiative and learn verbal articulateness and persuasion.”

4.10. Proverbs

A proverb is defined by Mieder (1993: 24) as “a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.” Basically, a proverb is a condensed expression of language with cultural meanings embedded in it. When analyzing proverbs, one should consider from both linguistic and cultural aspects. In this section, the focus is on the cultural meaning that proverbs convey.

- (16) A Chinese exchange student in the USA meets his American colleague after getting the final grade of a lecture.
Chinese: Hey! I’ve got a great grade from Prof. Keizer!
American: Congratulations! You’re a lucky dog, dude.
Chinese: Why did you say that?
(Getting annoyed and confused.)

In this conversation, the American student uses a common English expression, which is used to describe a lucky person, to show his delight for the Chinese student's success. However, in Chinese culture, the word *dog* is often related to derogatory meanings. The English proverb *love me, love my dog* becomes *love me, love my bird* in Chinese since birds have a more positive image than dogs. If one does not know the embodied meaning of these proverbs, one might easily feel offended by hearing similar proverbs, such as *every dog has its day* or *you can't teach an old dog new tricks*.

The metaphoric change of meaning can be also seen in other proverbs, such as *xiao cai yi die* 'a dish of food' in Chinese equals 'a piece of cake' in English and 'not my cup of tea' changes into *bu shi wo de cai* 'not my dish of food' in Chinese. Mieder (1986: xi) notices: "Studying proverbs can offer insights into a culture's worldview regarding such matters as education, law, business, and marriage." People from different cultural backgrounds will use distinctive proverbs to convey their feelings and thoughts when they communicate with each other. One can only understand a foreigner's exact opinion through the study of his or her culture. Without that, miscommunication is very likely to occur. In general, in many Western cultures, the main theme of proverbs indicates a connection to individualism, while in Chinese culture, particularly Han Chinese culture, a collectivistic doctrine is the principle topic.

Until now, many typical intercultural miscommunication situations have been discussed from both linguistic and sociocultural perspectives. In the next chapter, some light will be shed on a rather more implicit means of miscommunication.

5. Nonverbal miscommunication

Studies of intercultural communication have predominantly concentrated on spoken channels of communication, but evaluation should be given to nonverbal channels as well. Kendon (1983: 20) portrays the interaction between verbal and nonverbal communication as follows:

Gesture and speech are available as two separate modes of representation and are coordinated because both are being guided by the same overall aim. That aim is to produce a pattern of action that will accomplish the representation of a meaning.

Verbal and nonverbal communications work together to transmit information between interlocutors. In fact, a large amount of information is sent and received through nonverbal communication, especially in an international interaction process.

Nonverbal communication is not only related to visual messages, such as signs and symbols, or auditory information, such as paralinguistic and silence, but also to haptic codes,

such as body contact, or gustatory components, such as food. Various linguists have given their definitions of nonverbal communication and divided it into diverse categories. Knapp and Hall (2009: 5) provide a rather general definition: “To most people, the phrase nonverbal communication refers to communication effected by means other than words, assuming words are the verbal element.” This chapter will focus on some representative cases of nonverbal miscommunication.

Due to the great difference between possible interpretations of nonverbal messages in different cultures, one should aim to grasp the meanings and implications behind them. The number four, for instance, is avoided in various forms in China, except as a number for calculation, because its pronunciation is identical to another Chinese character *sì*, which means ‘death’. The number three can be unlucky, for example, if there are only three people appearing on a photograph in Indonesia. Similarly, in many Western cultures, the number thirteen is thought to be an unlucky number and is routinely shunned to be used for any reference except as a number. Therefore, the thirteenth floor is sometimes not named by using its arithmetic number in many buildings. Without extra knowledge about nonverbal expressions in other cultures, a non-native speaker may not notice the connotation of the written or spoken words.

Nonverbal communication has several functions that can help verbal messages to be better expressed. One can use nonverbal communication to enforce his or her expression by changing the tone or pounding the table; one can use it to make the conversation more efficient or vivid by simply performing some gestures; one can use it to mitigate the embarrassment or inconvenience caused by directly spoken messages such as rejecting someone’s invitation; one can use it to demonstrate clear messages under specific circumstances like a policeman directs the traffic; one can use it to represent a country or a culture, such as national emblems and flags; one can use it to express individuality, such as getting piercings or dying hair; one can use it to present one’s identity by what one’s wearing, how one’s manners are, or what one’s attitude towards other participants is, and so forth. In some situations, nonverbal communication is even more effective than verbal communication.

Miscommunication can occur when speakers and listeners are not from the same cultural background and do not share the same nonverbal expressions. Using similar gestures, for instance, can have totally distinctive interpretations in different cultures. Thus, one should be attentive when he or she uses nonverbal messages.

It is important to keep in mind that descriptions about typical cultural differences are not permanent truths, but only to provide some significant examples of actual experiences.

One should avoid generalizations and stereotypes about a certain culture. Individuality exists in any culture and should be respected. All examples given in the following paragraphs are embodied with meanings in diverse cultures.

5.1. Proxemics

The term *proxemics* was first proposed by Hall (1963: 422) as “[t]he study of man’s spatial relations and boundaries”, which examines the interpersonal spatial relationship between speakers and listeners in various cultures. The author analyzed different degrees of intimacy concerning interpersonal communication, starting from the closest body contact until a distance of twelve feet, representing the range from intimate to public distance. The ordinary distance between people varies in diverse cultures. A huge contrast, for instance, is noticeable between Chinese and Italians. In China, maintaining a certain distance from other people is considered polite and appropriate. But in Italy, people have closer body contact with each other and feel more comfortable with such contact.

The distance between close friends or relatives is also different in various cultures. In Western countries, parents kiss or hug their children very often. This is believed to enforce the relationship between family members. In Chinese culture, on the other hand, children keep a certain distance from their parents, especially from fathers, in order to show their respect. The intimacy between children and parents is almost always demonstrated in more implicit ways.

However, interestingly, when a Westerner travels in China, he or she might get annoyed or even offended by people constantly rubbing against each other in the metro or pushing each other in a crowd, which is not considered unusual among Chinese. For instance, queuing for public transportation such as metro or bus in China might be a catastrophic experience for many Western tourists since Chinese people are used to pushing each other without complaints or arguments. Jumping the queue happens quite frequently, although it is considered impolite in China to do this. Mehrabian (2007:19) explains: “[t]he implications of observations about implicit distance limits are that the immediacy hypothesis holds for variations in the distance that a communicator might assume within the acceptable range of distances for a given kind of social situation.”

5.2. Kinesics

The study of interpersonal communication through body motions, facial expressions, eye contact and other postures is called *kinesics*. The term firstly appeared in Birdwhistell's analysis (1970: xi) of human behaviors. A common positive gesture in one culture might be

considered offensive in another culture since the underlined meaning in the body movement is much more profound than what a simple action can show. Thus, appropriate body language in nonverbal communication is also crucially important in intercultural interactions.

5.2.1. Eye contact

In some Western countries such as Austria, not looking into the participant's eyes during a conversation is considered dishonest or disrespectful, despite gender difference or power distance. However, in some Eastern cultures such as Japan, people are taught even from their early childhood that avoiding direct eye contact when confronting a stranger of a higher social position or the opposite gender is proper and expected.

In Chinese culture, however, such a social rule is less strict than in Japanese culture. Having occasional eye contact is appropriate and considered to be helpful for an open and delightful conversation, unless it is between people of different genders, who are not yet familiar with each other.

The duration of eye contact is also distinctive in various cultures. The Americans tend to look at each other longer than Chinese people do. If keeping eye contact longer than average, a Chinese person might think that the addresser has an unusually strong interest in him or her. On the other hand, if the addresser does not establish eye contact with the addressee, he or she would be considered too shy or too uninterested. It is known to be tactful to change the focus of one's sight on the other participant, such as occasionally looking into the eyes, then onto the cheek or nose, instead of gazing directly into his or her eyes, which are named "the windows to one's heart" in the Chinese language. Eye contact can provide a lot of information, which is otherwise conveyed by many written or spoken messages.

5.2.2. Facial expressions

Many facial expressions are universal codes shared by most cultures, such as smiling, which represents happiness and weeping, which indicates sadness. However, some facial expressions, which exist in one culture, might not be understood in another culture and could represent totally different meanings. Sticking out one's tongue in China is considered an acceptable facial expression when someone feels embarrassed after having done something wrong. It is normally followed by a smile. However, in some Western countries such as Austria, it can be considered as an insult to stick out one's tongue in front of someone else and in the United States it is often used a sign of dislike.

Smiling without showing teeth has been considered to be virtuous in Chinese culture, especially for a woman. There have been countless literary works praising women's virtue, which is presented by smiling with closed lips or by using hands to hide the smile. In a famous Chinese poem called *yong zhu Luo shan*, 咏苕萝山, written by Li Bai, meaning 'praising the Zhu Luo mountain', the poet portrayed a beautiful lady named Xi Shi by saying *hao chi xin nan kai, cheng ying bi yun jian*, 皓齿信难开, 沉吟碧云间, which means 'she smiles without showing her snowy teeth and such beauty is reflected on the water surface'.

5.2.3. Gestures and postures

In the United States, moving the fingers pointing up toward someone with the palm facing inward toward one's own body is often used to imply "come here". However, the same gesture in the Arab world is considered inappropriate. Even worse, one should be careful about such a gesture in Singapore since it might symbolize death.

How people from different cultural backgrounds use their fingers to indicate numbers also varies. In several European countries, the number "1" can be counted by sticking one's thumb in the air. In China and many other countries, holding up the index finger stands for "1". Another number "3" can be expressed by forming a circle with the thumb and the index finger while the three remaining fingers are straight up. This hand gesture means also "okay" in both China and the United States. Interestingly, the same hand gesture can symbolize currency in Japan. In France and some other European countries, it indicates the number "0" or implies "excellent", whereas in Italy, the gesture implies a sexual intention or aggressive hostility. The "V" gesture by holding up your index and middle finger (palm outward), which also indicates number "2" in most countries, normally indicates a positive meaning, such as peace or victory. However, when the gesture is presented with the palm facing inward, it can be interpreted as an insult in member nations of the British Common Wealth, some Middle Eastern countries and other regions. Most Eastern people are not familiar with this fact, which is why the "V" gesture is one of the most common hand signs seen on their photographs.

In most cultures, handshaking is a polite gesture when people greet each other. In addition, how firm people give a handshake is diverse in different countries. In the United States, a firm handshake is expected. In China on the other hand, a gentle handshake with less pressure is more appropriate, while in Moslem cultures, it is extremely impolite if a man intends to shake the hand with a woman. Most Moslem women will not shake hands with a man.

The posture used to greet people has various forms in different cultures. Thai people greet each other by putting their palms together, which symbolizes their humility. The Japanese are rather more formal. They normally bow their upper body up to 90 degrees, sometimes even repeatedly, to show politeness and respect. Japanese women sit with their legs bent backward to show their courtesy. This is due to the strict social hierarchy of the Japanese society. In some Eastern countries such as China and Vietnam, forming a fist with the right hand and then holding it in the left hand in front of the chest is a popular posture to greet or congratulate someone. This is originated from an ancient Chinese ritual, performed by two warriors to show their mutual respect before a combat. The posture is still frequently used in modern Chinese society.

5.3. *Paralanguage*

The next important component of nonverbal messages is delivered in a rather implicit way, which comes along with the utterance of verbal codes, more specifically spoken expressions. Vocal codes such as tone, tempo, volume, laughter and weeping are embodied in verbal expressions and are not apparent. Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2012: 268) propose that, “paralanguage is concerned with the communicative characteristics of the voice and with how people use their voices.”

Many people from South Asia, such as Vietnamese, speak in a very light and gentle voice. Low volume of voice is believed to represent good social manners and is always judged as a sign of a higher education. Voices are only raised when someone is angry or needs to express his or her excitement. When encountering Americans, for instance, the Vietnamese might feel offended due to their loudness.

5.4. *“Silence is golden” rule*

After the analysis of the influence of some acoustic codes on nonverbal communication, the opposite of voice, which is silence, is also worth an investigation. It is interesting that by making no sound one can also achieve the purpose of communication, such as showing sympathy, agreement or rejection, dislike and so on. Different cultures endow silence with different meanings. As Huang, Andrulis and Chen (1994: 166) note, “[a]lthough the Chinese people have created a very colorful and expressive language, they do not praise a person who speaks too much.” In China, those who know when it is proper to keep silent are considered to be reliable and trustful partners.

Generally, silence means agreement in China, whereas in the United States, it means being less interested in the subject or lack of initiative or motivation to participate with other interlocutors involved in the communication. Those who actively or intentionally present their abilities or talents, which are seen as a positive demonstration of one's status or background in some Western cultures, would seem to be boastful or arrogant in Chinese society.

The rule of silence is even more stringent in Japan. In a Japanese classroom, one might find that a lesson is teacher focused and students are only expected to follow passively. There is a tendency that Japanese students are not encouraged to participate. A student's question to the teacher can be interpreted as a challenge of the higher position in Japan. It is common that a student obeys what the teacher says without challenging the teacher or raising any questions. This is quite different from the active and encouraged learning environment in a more open Western classroom.

Therefore, when an individualistic Westerner encounters Easterners in an intercultural communication experience, following the "silence is golden" rule would guarantee him or her a more respectful and credible mutual understanding. As Oliver (1971: 264) concludes, "silence in Asia has commonly been entirely acceptable, whereas in the West silence has generally been considered socially disagreeable."

5.5. *Haptics*

The term *haptics* is linked to the study of touch between human beings. In many Western countries, greeting someone by having facial contact or kissing is quite common. In France and Switzerland for instance, people tend to kiss three times on the face. In Eastern countries such as China, this would be too intimate or would even be considered aggressive to a lady. Also, between men in Arab culture, the similar gesture of kissing could be seen. However, this is not observed between a man and a woman. Other than facial contact or kissing, shaking hands is a more standard gesture when it comes to greeting someone, both in a professional and a private relationship in Eastern and Western cultures.

It is believed that touching can also demonstrate power distance. In some Eastern countries such as China, it is very rude to touch a boy's head except by his elder family members, because a male's head is regarded as his pride and intelligence.

Andersen and Guerrero (2008: 162) summarize: "Various cultures perceive touch in a variety of disparate ways [...] haptic behavior is the *sine qua non* of interpersonal interaction in all close relationships and perhaps the most basic and fundamental form of human communication."

5.6. Gustatory and Olfactory perceptions

Though most nonverbal messages are visual, other perceptions are also very important for interpersonal communication, such as gustation and olfaction.

Food is a substantial element in our daily life and has become a cultural symbol for many countries: Sushi for instance, reminds us of Japan, Pizza is indicative of Italy and Peking duck is related to China. The culture of food can be described as a representative indicator to illustrate local people's life. It is national but also international, such as Chinese or Italian restaurants, which have spread all over the world. They can offer authentic cooking but very often adapt their cooking style to the taste of local people in other cultures. The popular sweet and sour taste offered by Chinese restaurants in many European countries, for instance, is not that common in local Chinese cooking. Similarly, noodle is originally a traditional Chinese dish but is nowadays more often linked to Italian cuisine in Western countries.

Whether the food is modified or whether it remains as its original taste, the outcome is positive since it brings more varieties and even provides its old form with brand new characteristics. In fact, the adaptation of food from other cultures can be considered as a good example for intercultural communication, since it does not abandon the inherent quality but rather adds new features to the original form. Such innovation and blending can break through the barriers of intercultural communication and decrease misunderstanding. This concept of adaptation and understanding of other cultures is what we should encourage in the future studies on developing intercultural competence.

To name another example, the meaning of Yin and Yang is also embedded in the choice of food in Chinese culture. Based on Confucius' philosophy, the pursuit of balance is obeyed by people, in diverse domains. Different kinds of food are divided into Yin and Yang categories. Yin stands for food with a cool, dark and fluid quality whereas Yang is linked to food with a warm, bright and spicy quality. It is believed that in order to remain healthy, one needs a balance between Yin and Yang elements in his or her body. If someone eats a lot of oily and spicy food, which belongs to the category of Yang, he or she needs to consume some Yin food, such as pears and lotus seeds, to neutralize the warm quality of Yang. Otherwise, according to the Yin and Yang philosophy, the disproportion of Yin and Yang forces in one's body might cause pain or illness such as throat sore or fever due to the surfeit of Yang elements and faintness or coldness due to the surfeit of Yin elements. The concept of Yin and Yang is widely respected in modern Chinese society. Being aware of the Yin and Yang

tradition can help Westerners avoid intercultural miscommunication when dealing with Chinese people.

After the analysis of gustatory perception of nonverbal communication, the next sense to be analyzed pertains to smelling. Unlike the widespread usage of perfume in Western countries, few Chinese people, especially males, use perfume, unless for professional reasons. It is considered feminine or even inappropriate for a male to wear strong fragrant smell in China.

Cultural meanings are embedded in different norms and forms. By looking at the diversity of intercultural communication based on different perceptions like vision, gustation and olfaction can help foreign language learners better understand other cultures.

5.7. Color, clothing and personal appearance

As a part of everyone's daily routine, it is common to interpret the information and cultural meaning of one's look or apparel. Things like piercings, tattoos or other physical features have become a popular subculture of appearance in many countries. In most Western countries, changing one's appearance is an individual decision and will be normally accepted as a form of personal expression. However, such a phenomenon is treated differently in some Eastern cultures. For instance, in Chinese society, getting a tattoo is still considered quite rebellious. Many traditional Chinese people might even judge a person, especially a teenager, with a piercing or a tattoo, as an anti-social person or even a potential criminal. This kind of prejudiced attitude towards a person's individual choice of outward appearance creates a barrier to interpersonal communication in both domestic and intercultural environment.

What type of clothes to wear, under what circumstances, is a comparatively universal social behavior. For instance, wearing a suit to the opera or sportswear in a fitness center is appropriate. In Tibetan culture, a host usually offers his or her guests a Khata, which is a piece of white cloth used as scarf to symbolize friendship and good luck.

Color is another evident element to represent cultural meanings. For instance, red is a color for passion and love in many countries, but it stands for bad luck in Korea. The color white is used for the wedding dress in Western societies and is also connected to innocence. In China, however, it is worn to attend a funeral. A green hat has a specific meaning in China. If a male wears a green hat, he might be disrespectfully judged by other people, since this indicates that his wife is cheating on him. It originates from the Yuan dynasty, where entertainers, actors and singers, who were considered as subservient to the audience, should wear green color hats or green covers on their heads by law. Later in history, a green hat

would usually be expected to be worn by a male whose wife or relatives were thought to be involved in the prostitute industry in order to show that he is ashamed about them. This has been passed on for generations in Chinese society.

5.8. Territoriality

The term *territoriality* is defined by Sack (1986: 19) as “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.” With regard to nonverbal communication, territoriality concerns the question of how space can be used to implicate cultural meanings.

In an ordinary Japanese apartment, space is usually very limited due to the dense population on the island. Thus, how to utilize the limited space has become a unique part of Japanese culture. *Tatami* is a traditional Japanese mat used to sit on. The name is originated from the Japanese verb *tatamu*, which means ‘to fold’. By using *tatami*, the need for furniture can be reduced and space can be saved since people would normally sit on the floor. Many Japanese people also sleep on the floor or on a mattress, which will be folded against the wall during the daytime. In some Western societies, however, if a guest is asked to sit on the floor, it might be understood as impolite or disrespectful.

Nonverbal messages can also be transmitted through the representation of architecture. To focus on a more precise contrast between Eastern and Western cultures, buildings may be used as an example since they are constructed in very diverse ways. In some Eastern countries such as China and Japan, skyscrapers are used everywhere in big cities for living and working purposes. In comparison, high buildings are not very often seen in living areas in some Western countries such as Austria and Switzerland. Many Western families prefer to have houses with gardens or balconies. Many Europeans love to grow plants in their garden and having one’s own vegetables is becoming more and more popular. There are even TV programs like “Gardeners’ World” on BBC, which shows garden work as a leisure-time activity in British families. This does not usually occur in Eastern countries. An interesting example illustrating the meaning of territoriality for Chinese people is provided as follows:

(17) A Chinese immigrant family is seeking a new flat in Britain. The British realtor helps them find an ideal house. In front of the house, there is a lovely view of the sun setting over the hills to the West of the house. The family finds it unacceptable and rejects the recommendation for this place.

In this situation, misunderstanding emerges due to an important custom in China - Feng Shui. As Smith and Stewart (2006: xv) define: “Feng Shui is the study of all forms of energy, including the energies of spaces, and how those energies affect people.” In Chinese culture,

people should be very cautious about the decoration and location of the living place since it is believed to influence health, wealth, luck and family relationship, even one's career prospects. A Feng Shui specialist can manipulate the physical environment manually to create a balance with nature and the natural environment. Even a tiny change of the placement of any furniture, plants, artwork, the bed location and shape can influence the whole harmony of the natural environment. If the entry of the house faces the West, where the sun sets and the day ends, it brings bad luck to the family that lives there. The British realtor might be confused about the rejection because to him the flat he offered would be an excellent choice, based on Western ideas of how a beautiful view brings quality to a living environment. In fact, the importance of Feng Shui has evolved to be internationally renowned. Thus, the concept of Feng Shui should be taken into recognition when dealing with Chinese people.

5.9. Chronemics

According to Ting-Toomey (1999: 134), the term *chronemics* is about "how people in different cultures structure, interpret, and understand the time dimension." In many Western countries such as Switzerland, punctuality is highly valued. Being late is believed to be rude, whereas being punctual is considered mandatory, as a social rule, no matter whether in private matters or public affairs. Similarities can be found in many Eastern countries too, such as Japan, where being on time is extremely important.

Generally, waiting for five or maybe ten minutes can be tolerated and accepted in most countries. However, it is common in some Western countries, such as Italy and Spain, where the range of acceptance for being late for an appointment tends to be much broader. Some Westerners appear to be more flexible to wait for latecomers. In Austria, there is an unwritten rule that a professor at the university or someone of equal academic grade may be accepted to be up to fifteen minutes late to a lecture or an appointment. This is called *Akademisches Viertel*, meaning 'academic quarter'. An interesting situation often occurs in Thailand. When fixing an appointment with a Thai friend or acquaintance, a European often has to mention the time issue to the Thai person beforehand by asking him or her: "are we going to meet according to Thai time or European time", especially if the European wants to avoid waiting too long.

In some cultures, being late intentionally has its certain implications or functions and is usually acceptable. For instance, in China, it is not only accepted, but even expected of a lady to be late for a date with a man. This on the one hand is understood to show the valuable status of the lady, and on the other hand, the modesty and patience of the man.

Besides punctuality, how people mark the time with calendars is also diverse in different cultures. Unlike the New Year's Eve celebration on December 31st in most Western countries, Chinese people celebrate lunar New Year normally in February according to the traditional Chinese lunar calendar. It is also called the spring festival. The exact date of the Chinese New Year is not fixed since according to the lunar calendar there are 354 or 355 days in a year.

How people perceive time is reflected in their social and private activities, which directly influence communication and relationships between people, both in a domestic or intercultural environment. Studies on chronemics provide us with another important insight to observe similarities and differences between Eastern and Western cultures.

5.10. Signs and symbols

Unlike a direct interactive communication process such as an interpersonal conversation, an indirect way to communicate with others consists of using signs and symbols. A unique characteristic of signs and symbols is that they are normally used to transmit information passively and one-sidedly. The designer of a sign intends to transfer a specific message to the readers, but how the readers interpret the message can vary a lot in different cultures.

Jandt (2004: 123) illustrates the difference between signs and symbols: "Signs are sometimes arbitrary in character, sometimes based on a real or fancied analogy, and usually simpler than symbols [...] Symbols frequently are based on likeness, metaphor, or comparison." Traffic signs are representative examples for nonverbal communication, like the zebra print on the road for the pedestrians is used worldwide. If a foreigner driving on a road in China could not understand the traffic signs, many problems could arise. Thus, traffic signs are made to be internationally recognized in most countries in order to give drivers clear indication for directions or rules of the road.

However, there are also culture-bound signs, which require people to have prior knowledge to recognize their meanings. A typical example is the traffic sign with a kangaroo figure, which is only seen in Australia to warn drivers to look out for the appearance of kangaroos. The understanding of the combination of the sign (linguistics) and the meaning behind (culture) is the best way to produce a clear expression, which can be correctly interpreted in any language and culture. Only such a combination can be used to cross language barriers.

Symbols can carry a lot of cultural meanings, some of them are universal, such as the image of a heart to demonstrate love, but some of them are only understood specifically

within a certain culture. For instance, the image of Yin and Yang is a representative symbol of Chinese tradition and the crescent used on a minaret is indicative of Muslim culture. Both are cultural symbols, which are well known worldwide. A frequently used Chinese symbol for a tattoo is the character *fu*, meaning ‘luck’, which is normally hanging reversed on the house door, because the pronunciation of the Chinese verb *dao* ‘reverse’, is identical to the verb *dao* ‘come’ and the outcome of a reversed *fu* means ‘luck comes’. However, some popular Chinese symbols may be misunderstood or used incorrectly by foreigners. For instance, some Westerners mistakenly use inappropriate Chinese calligraphic characters as tattoos, which sometimes can be embarrassing if the person wearing the tattoos is not really familiar with their original meanings in Chinese.

The choice of a unique symbol for a company, which is also known as its logo, is very important since it represents the company. Many companies try to expand their business into more international markets and a very important step is to design an eye-catching and iconic symbol. Some successful and famous brands such as McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, or Apple are representative for American culture. Even photographs of famous people can become popular cultural symbols, such as Che Guevara and Mao, who were both recognized as revolutionary spiritual leaders in their countries.

Symbols and signs are easier to understand for people from any culture in comparison to verbal language. That is why in many international big events, such as the Olympic Games, or at many international airports and tourist zones, signs and symbols are extensively adopted for use. Thus, both creating and interpreting the meanings of signs and symbols are extremely important for a successful intercultural communication.

5.11. Objects

Cultural meanings may be embedded in almost any object. The meaning of a simple object might be evaluated differently by people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This can be observed in the following situation.

(18) An American exchange student in China started dating a native Chinese girl. When the American heard that the parents of the Chinese girl recently moved to a new apartment, he suggested visiting her parents together with her. The Chinese girl was very impressed. The American bought a wall-clock as a present to surprise his girlfriend and her parents. After the visit, the Chinese girl’s parents forbid her to see him again.

The choice of a gift, which would appear to be an easy action, should sometimes be very carefully considered in Chinese culture. In this situation, the American student did not know

that a clock as a gift to a Chinese person is deemed very unlucky since the pronunciation of the word *zhong* ‘clock’ in Chinese resembles the pronunciation of *zhong* ‘end’, which implies *death* in the combination of *song zhong* ‘sending someone death’. This is considered very disrespectful towards the Chinese girl’s parents.

5.12. Case study: ceremonies and festivals

In both Eastern and Western countries, ceremonies and festivals normally embody profound cultural meanings. In Western societies, weddings and funerals are usually held in contradictory manners. In a Western wedding celebration, the color white is often chosen to be worn by the bride and might also be the theme hue of the decoration. Guests join the celebration to share the happiness of the newly married couple. In a funeral ceremony, the main color is black, which symbolizes mourning and sadness in memory of the departed. This contrast is not seen in Chinese society.

Chinese people like to call weddings and funerals the “red” and “white” celebrations, since red is the color of the traditional Chinese wedding dress and white is the color used for funerals. What is worth noticing here is that funerals will also be celebrated as weddings in China. In the traditional Chinese ideology, both birth and death are natural processes within the circulation of life. Birth is the start of death and death is the start of birth when a person has the chance of reincarnation. Logically, Chinese people also present their sadness when attending a funeral. However, to an outsider unfamiliar with Chinese culture, the atmosphere of the celebration may seem rather happy, but in fact, this is just a way to honor the departed. The celebration of a Chinese funeral feast sometimes can last several days. The relatives of the departed will organize an open-air area with tables, seats and a stage, on which professional bands and singers perform. People consider the bigger, the longer and the louder the celebration is, the more respect and love are believed to be shown to the departed.

Another important ceremony is wedding, which is also performed in totally different ways between Eastern and Western cultures. In China, wedding guests traditionally bring “red pockets”, cash wrapped in red envelopes, as presents. What is unique to point out from a Chinese traditional wedding is the activity after the celebration. Guests are encouraged to gather around and request the married couple to present some intimate actions in front of them, such as hanging an apple in the air to let the couple eat it up together to eventually end up kissing. Moreover, the guests will toast the couple one after another until the couple gets drunk. This is called “teasing the bridal chamber”, a tradition that started already in the Han

Dynasty about 2000 years ago in China. It is believed to bring good luck to a newly married couple and keep them from any misfortune.

As well as culturally specific ceremonies in different cultures, diverse types of festivals are held all over the world. In some Western countries, people are disguised to join a parade to celebrate. Halloween, which originates from ancient Celtic rites, is one of the biggest events in the United States. American children celebrating Halloween are dressed up with costumes and also wear make-up to present a certain character. In Austria, a similar traditional festival is called “Perchtenlauf”, which is presented by two groups of masked locals battling against each other, one as beauty standing for good spirits while the other one as ugliness representing demons. This festival is believed to wish for fertility of cultivation.

Similarly, Chinese people wear traditional clothes and hold up a lion model or a dragon model to perform unique dancing movements, which is accompanied by the sound of gongs and firecrackers, on a traditional festival called Lantern Festival. It is organized to pray for nice weather and a good harvest. However, the latter two festivals are not as widespread as Halloween, which is nowadays celebrated in many countries worldwide. It has become a big iconic and commercial product of the American culture. In a similar vein, many Western festivals became also popular in the Far East, such as Christmas and Valentine’s Day. Though every country has its own national festivals and holidays, such reception of other cultures can be seen as a good example of successful intercultural communication.

Observing or participating in ceremonies and festivals of other cultures helps people better interpret the cultural meanings behind norms and manners that may present the possibility of misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

5.13. *Bills and tips*

In Chinese society, it is a common practice that the husband hands over his salary to his wife and the wife gives him a certain amount of pocket money every month. People see this as being economically reasonable for the family and respectful to the wife. This is nowadays not often seen in Western societies. As mentioned in chapter 2, Chinese people tend to be more interdependent, which is shown in the family, where earnings and expenses are put together as a shared responsibility. It could be considered as a sign of mistrust if the husband or the wife would have his or her own bank account in a Chinese family.

Another interesting social norm is how cost is shared among acquaintances or friends in Eastern and Western cultures. In Chinese society, it is common that one pays for the whole group if going to a restaurant or any entertainment location, especially when this person has a

higher social status or is older than the other participants. If the participants are of the same age group, paying the bill alternately is a regular tradition. It is the etiquette that everyone should participate, since in collectivistic ideology giving is considered a virtue. The expression *going Dutch* is not so popular among Eastern people compared to Westerners such as Austrians. It is common in many Western societies that either every person pays his or her own bill or one person pays the entire bill first and then everyone pays his or her part.

It is worth mentioning again that the difference between East and West is more a tendency, not a definite and universal condition, since even in the Netherlands, where the term *going Dutch* originates from, it is not unusual to share the cost at all.

Furthermore, how to give tips varies a lot between Eastern and Western cultures. In many Western countries such as Austria, giving some extra money is a social custom to show hospitality and thankfulness after receiving a service from someone else. In the USA, tipping is absolutely common and the amount of the tip is sometimes calculated in the bill in advance for customers' convenience. In contrast, in many collectivistic countries such as China and Japan, giving tips is unusual and sometimes even considered awkward or rude, though this seems to contradict the virtue of giving in Chinese culture. An exception is the tourist industry, in which most service is provided to foreigners, and where tipping the porter or tour guide is acceptable.

5.14. Customs and superstitions

The final section of this chapter is about two very interesting aspects of culture, which exist in both Eastern and Western countries. In many societies, there are customs and superstitions which people have believed in and obeyed for centuries. Some of them became a social manner or a form of politeness while others turned to negative beliefs. If a foreigner encounters unfamiliar behavior originated from old customs or superstitions, he or she might feel confused or even irritated. This might then lead to one's disrespect or lack of understanding for another person's behavior. Getting to know customs and superstitions in other countries can also help better understand the cultural meanings behind linguistic codes in order to acclimatize with other societies.

China has a long cultural history of over five thousand years. Many old customs have been followed for generations. Elders in a Chinese family always tell children to hold their bowls during the process of having a meal, which is supposed to be a polite manner in Chinese society. After serving guests tea, one should not point the spout of a teapot towards the guests, because this is considered exceedingly impolite. Many Chinese mothers keep

reminding their children to rub their forehead before going out, which is a gesture for safety and good luck.

Moreover, Chinese people consider opening a present immediately after receiving it as a very impolite behavior. Unlike exchanging gifts casually among Westerners, how to give and receive gifts is regulated in Chinese society. A Chinese would only accept a gift when he or she has something equal to give in return. If a Westerner gives a Chinese person a gift just to show sympathy or purely because he or she feels like it, the Chinese would normally refuse at first to avoid the feeling of indebtedness, though the Westerner might not ask anything in return. However, the Westerner might feel irritated or even offended by the refusal of his or her gift. This cultural difference is not only evident between good friends in China, where individuals are considered to be having a close relationship with each other, but also between acquaintances. This is linked to the social custom of Chinese people that the balance between giving and taking is both a custom and a virtue.

On the other hand, there are illogical or irrational rules, which some people just follow without questioning the reason or the meaning behind them. This is called superstition. Superstition is defined as “belief, half-belief, or practice for which there appears to be no rational substance” according to Encyclopedia Britannica (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/574567/superstition>, 12 December 2012).

Some rituals in Chinese culture also originate from superstition. For instance, tossing soya beans to expel ghosts, jumping over a fire basin to keep the evil spirits away or wearing red underclothes to receive good luck. Other examples that are believed to bring bad luck are behaviors like looking into the mirror at midnight or holding an open umbrella while walking under a roof. Moreover, on New Year’s Eve, one should not throw away garbage because it can symbolize losing luck and money in the coming year. If someone places the chopsticks in the middle of a bowl of rice, it will be considered very unlucky, since it resembles the shape of a tombstone. Another example is that some Chinese parents believe in the connotation of names of their future son- or daughter-in-law. If the name of their son/daughter fits together with the name of his or her partner, a marriage will be blessed. If not, further steps in the relationship will not be approved by the family. A rather negative example is seen in many Arabic and African countries, where the ritual of circumcision for women still exists.

Superstitions can also be seen in Western cultures. For instance, finding a four-leaf clover is a sign of luck and stepping on one’s own shadow is as well believed to bring good luck. Negative examples are as follows: if someone breaks a mirror, even by accident, he or she is believed to have seven years of bad luck; one should not pass under a ladder that is

leaning against a wall since it also symbolizes bad luck. Furthermore, black cats, crows or owls are thought to be symbols of bad luck in many Western countries. However, though these superstitions still exist in Western cultures, most Westerners do not really take them so seriously compared to how Easterners treat their superstitions.

It is not possible to overlook the widespread influence of beliefs and religion on traditions, customs and superstitions. Many Eastern countries have Buddhism as the main religion whereas Christianity is one of the biggest religions in the Western world. Buddhists believe that human beings are light as feather, or even as minor as dust. This does not mean that Buddhists do not respect human life, but that they focus more on the selflessness within a bigger society and emphasize the importance of cooperating with other members of the society. There is an old Chinese saying *yi ge zhong guo ren shi tiao chong, yi qun zhong guo ren shi tiao long* ‘a single Chinese is a worm but a group of Chinese is a dragon’, which demonstrates the mighty strength when the energy of individuals is united. Christianity on the other hand, highlights the importance of each single person. Individualism is supreme and sublime in Western societies. It is highly promoted that one should be independent and have his or her own life style and character.

Strictly speaking, popular beliefs like fortune telling, Feng Shui and astrology all retain some elements of superstition, for which there is not really any scientific proof. A basic understanding of customs and superstitions is important in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of other cultures.

6. Other barriers to intercultural miscommunication

After the analysis of intercultural miscommunication from both a linguistic and a sociocultural perspective, it is also important to identify other reasons that may create obstacles for fluent intercultural communication. Fielding (2006: 485) lists some major barriers including “[d]efensiveness, different world views, different values and beliefs, prejudices, different languages, different ways of using and interpreting the non-verbal code, different ways of constructing messages and unequal power and failure to allow for individual differences within a culture.” To avoid overlapping or redundancy, this chapter will focus on four of the most influential factors, which, next to the linguistic and sociocultural factors discussed before, that can cause barriers to intercultural communication, namely anxiety, ethnocentrism, mental models and cultural reactions. All these factors focus on personal attitude and individual reactions to new cultures. At the end of this chapter, one specific case

will be discussed, introducing the influence of the media and its function as the transmitter of intercultural miscommunication.

6.1. *Anxiety*

We might all have anxious experiences, for instance, when we are not yet able to speak a foreign language fluently, we might not feel confident about using the language to communicate because we would be worried about embarrassing ourselves by making mistakes. It is natural that when we find ourselves in a new environment or encounter a stranger, we might develop insecure or even anxious feelings due to a fear of not being able to handle the situation as easily as we would under familiar circumstances. Anxiety can be caused by either linguistic or cultural factors. Stephan and Stephan (2003: 116) explain that if people interact with foreigners, the feeling of anxiety often arises. They (2003: 116) further clarify:

In such situations, people may be anxious about possible negative consequences of the interaction. People fear negative psychological consequences (e.g., being exploited, harmed), negative evaluations by outgroup members (e.g., being rejected or ridiculed), and negative evaluations by ingroup members (e.g., rejection, being identified with outgroup members).

This kind of feeling can be a barrier to a successful intercultural communication.

Many Westerners tend to have the impression that some Easterners are not easy to communicate with and that they seem reluctant to interact with Westerners in an active manner. In fact, many Easterners might have experienced the problem of being very anxious in a situation of international communication. Kowner (2002: 339) describes:

Many Japanese perceive communication with non-Japanese as an unpleasant experience and tend to avoid it. To account for this “foreigner-complex”, scholars have advanced a number of explanations based on Japan’s isolation, linguistic barriers, and the interpersonal shyness of the Japanese people.

Similar situations also occur in China. Many Chinese students are motivated to practise countless grammar exercises to learn a language. However, opportunities to communicate with native English speakers are scarce and the implementation of cultural seminars is seldom realized in many Chinese schools.

Chinese educators have identified this problem and language schools are beginning to apply new methods for foreign language learning, which are becoming more popular and effective. For instance, there is a language school called “Crazy English” established by Li Yang, who is famous for his daring teaching methods, which include speaking loudly in front

of other people without creating any anxiety about making mistakes. According to Li's (2009: 211) description, this method is "a practice aimed not only at meeting the physiological demands of fluency, but also at the characteristic self-censuring of Chinese learners from fear of public failure, the key constraint on Chinese success in speaking English". Li Yang's three 'ly' principles are made to encourage Chinese English learners to speak English "as clearly as possible", "as loudly as possible" and "as quickly as possible". By using these techniques, Li Yang believes that one can defeat his or her inner anxiousness and improve the efficiency of learning a foreign language significantly. Therefore, as observed from the discussion above, only by overcoming the pressure of anxiety and using efficient learning skills can non-native English learners have the chance to further understand and improve their linguistic and intercultural competence.

6.2. *Ethnocentrism*

When someone is an expert in a language and establishes contact with other cultures, attitudes play a bigger role in how one decides to look at others than personal feelings. Stephan and Stephan (2003: 114) believe that "All groups are ethnocentric." In other words, no matter if one is a Westerner or an Easterner, each and every one of us has the tendency to feel rather ethnocentric. Summer (1906: 13) raised this anthropological estimation over a century ago by claiming that people from diverse cultural groups all believe that "one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled or rated with references to it." The original meaning of China as a country is *zhong guo* 'the middle nation', which implies China is the center of the world. Since China was closed for centuries to the rest of the world before the Chinese Economic Reform in 1978, Chinese people were told through propaganda that the Chinese culture is the superior culture of the world. Such beliefs can be traced to ancient Chinese dynasties where people used to have a fairly rigid conviction that China is the world's strongest country. Only by gradually developing economy and establishing contact with foreign cultures will people begin to understand other worlds.

In Western countries such as Great Britain, which used to be the kingdom governing numerous colonies, the superior ethnocentrism was also an accepted concept. A rather recent definition of the term is given by Jandt (2004: 76), describing ethnocentrism as "negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one's own culture. To be ethnocentric is to believe in the superiority of one's own culture."

Obviously, irrespective of whether it is based on history or the present, ethnocentrism is deemed a major barrier to intercultural communication. Stephan and Stephan (2003: 114)

reveal two consequences of ethnocentrism. Firstly, “people base their expectations regarding cross-cultural interaction on their own culture’s norms and rules regarding social interaction” which then “leads to an almost complete misunderstanding of the values, intentions, statements, and actions of others, thereby turning attempts at cross-cultural communication into serious miscommunications.” Secondly, “one’s own group’s norms, values, and behaviors are seen as moral, good, and proper, whereas those of groups that differ from one’s own often are seen as immoral, wrong, and improper.” Being cautious about one’s own ethnocentrism is elementary to understanding other cultures accurately and to interpreting different social manners appropriately.

6.3. *Mental models*

The term *mental models* is used to describe an individual’s recognition of concepts in a realistic world. Rickheit and Sichelschmidt (1999: 9) define mental models in a broad sense as follows: “a mental model is to be understood as a dynamic symbolic representation of external objects or events on the part of some natural or artificial cognitive system.” More specifically, Johnson-Laird (1983: 397) describes:

[m]ental models play a central and unifying role in representing objects, states of affairs, sequences of events, the way the world is, and the social and psychological actions of daily life. They enable individuals to make inferences and predictions, to understand phenomena, to decide what action to take and to control its execution, and above all to experience events by proxy; they allow language to be used to create presentations comparable to those deriving from direct acquaintance with the world; and they relate words to the word by way of conception and perception.

Mental models are applied in this section in order to provide a framework for people’s cognitive conception of the world and their attitudes towards other languages and cultures.

6.3.1. Stereotypes and generalizations

Many people tend to have an oversimplified impression of others, which can be positive or negative, factual or just based on inaccurate information. Jones (1997: 170) defines a stereotype as: “a positive or negative set of beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a group of people.” To provide some examples: boys are considered better at sports than girls, golf players are believed to be rich and blond girls are accused of being vain. Such stereotypic impressions can occur in different domains.

When discussing stereotypes from the aspect of culture, which is the theme of this paper, Stephan and Stephan (2003: 114) explain: “Cultural stereotypes are created through socialization, media portrayals, norms, and laws (e.g., statutes regarding outgroup marriage),

as well as through direct experience.” Some common stereotypic impressions about people from other cultures are descriptions such as “Asians have slanted eyes”, “Chinese students are diligent but not creative” or “French people are romantic”. This can be very problematic for some people who are being stereotyped. As Jandt (2004: 98) exemplifies: “Asian-American high school students of all backgrounds complain that teachers often counsel Asian-Americans to go into math and sciences”, since in these teachers’ stereotypical mental model, “Asians are perceived as not being free thinking or extroverted”.

Sometimes, people being stereotyped might even be convinced of such stereotypes themselves since they have heard and experienced them continuously and they might eventually assume that such stereotypes are true. In a study conducted by Spencer, Steele and Quinn (1998: 4-28), they observed thirty female and twenty-four male students’ math performance after dividing them into two groups. All students had strong math backgrounds. The stereotype that men are supposed to be better at mathematics than women was only told to group one, which led to a quite interesting result. Female students in group two, who were told that there was no gender difference regarding mathematic skills, performed significantly better than those in group one.

Jandt (2004: 94) observes stereotypes from a psychological perspective. The author (2004:95) explains the reason why stereotypes emerge is because “[w]e do not so much believe what we see as see what we believe. We tend to discount any perceptions that don’t conform to our beliefs.” Similar to the experiment mentioned above, such uncertainty or disbelief in one’s own skills could negatively influence one’s performance. Steele and Aronson (1995: 797-811) testified in their research that people who are stereotyped tend to repeat a certain task more often and perform slower and less accurate compared to those who are not stereotyped.

After developing a certain opinion about a single member of a group, one might start to generalize over the whole group to which the individual belongs. People have to be attentive when describing members of other cultural groups. According to Bennett and Bennett’s (2004: 151) theory:

cultural generalizations can be used to describe cultural groups at varying “levels of abstraction.” For instance, it is possible to make some cultural contrasts between peoples of Western cultures and peoples of Eastern cultures. Such cultural groupings are at a very high level of abstraction, so they support only very general contrasts, such as “more individualistic” versus “more collectivist.”

Similar comments on both Easterners and Westerners in this paper are not intended to stereotype any of them but are rather used for a comparative study of linguistic and cultural characteristics.

Jandt (2004: 96) summarizes four negative effects of stereotypes, which are: “They cause us to assume that a widely held belief is true when it may not be”; “Continued use of the stereotype reinforces the belief”; “Stereotypes also impede communication when they cause us to assume that a widely held belief is true of any one individual” and “The stereotype can become a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ for the person stereotyped.”

However, stereotypes can also be perceived as positive in some situations. For instance, elderly people are considered more trustworthy and experienced, the Swiss have the reputation of being punctual, the Germans make precise and high quality products, Asians are generally believed to work harder and more efficiently, and Asian women are caring and good tempered. Nevertheless, Schneider (1996: 430) argues that, “[m]ost of us are perfectly willing to wear the positive generalizations we get with pride, but we bristle when people assign us negative traits. However, even positive generalizations can feel wrong or can seem to provide an unwelcome message.”

According to Weiten, Dunn and Hammer (2011: 214): “Stereotypes are widely held beliefs that people have certain characteristics because of their membership in particular group.” Such a type of generalization is often negative and exists as a barrier to intercultural communication. Once a stereotype is adopted by the majority of people, it is difficult to get rid of. Thus, one should be cautious about stereotyping, or generalizing over people from other cultures. Thomas (1983: 107) states: “every instance of national or ethnic stereotyping should be seen as a reason for calling in the pragmatist and discourse analyst”. In a word, only by avoiding stereotypes and generalizations and trying to understand and accept norms and values of people from other cultural groups, can a successful intercultural communication be achieved.

6.3.2. Prejudice

Unlike the positive and negative features embedded in stereotypes, the next category, prejudice, is generally represented in a negative manner in intercultural studies concerning race and ethnics. As Kleg (1993: 114) demonstrates, prejudice is “a readiness to act, stemming from a negative feeling, often predicated upon a fixed overgeneralization or totally false belief and directed toward a group or individual members of that group.” Another

linguist Aboud (1988: 4) writes: “The most salient characteristic of prejudice is its negative, hateful quality. This negativity defines prejudice.”

It is pointed out by Jones (1997: 139) that, “Prejudice can be based on favorable or unfavorable judgments, but most scientific approaches emphasize the antipathy, the negative judgment – that is, the unfavorableness.” Normally, negative impressions are more noticeable and apparent than positive ones. Jandt (2004: 98) claims that, “[l]ike stereotyping, anyone can be prejudiced and anyone can experience prejudice. Prejudice exists in cultures around the world.” For instance, due to the currently severe financial situation in both Eastern and Western countries, public opinion within countries such as Greece and Japan is affected by biased information propaganda created to spread the idea against foreigners who are allegedly taking away jobs from local citizens. The foreigners there then suffer from prejudice of local citizens, which leads to the rise of social conflicts.

Jandt (2004: 107) explains: “[p]rejudice can be strong when there is direct competition for jobs” and gives another representative example: “When Chinese immigrants worked on building the transcontinental railroad across the United States when jobs were plentiful, Chinese were perceived as hard-working, industrious, and law-abiding. But after the railroad was completed and jobs dwindled, Chinese were perceived as criminal, crafty, and stupid.” This kind of prejudice is of course unreasonable but somehow provides a channel for unemployed or unsatisfied people to release their anger by blaming foreigners. Unfortunately, foreigners in those countries are condemned as guilty or thoroughly demonized as the reason for the new wave of great depression. This does not help the economic problems to vanish but even worsens it and it often leads to hostility towards the wrong target groups.

When looking at a more macro environment such as personal interaction, prejudice blocks a possibility to get to know other people since a negative impression is already preset. The negative influence caused by prejudice towards others is more fatal than certain stereotypes.

6.3.3. Racism

When hostility towards members of ethnic “out-groups” other than one’s own “in-group” is identified, it can be intensified to an extreme level of being inherently ethnocentric - racism. As Jandt (2004: 102) states: “Racism involves not only prejudice but the exercise of power over individuals based on their race.” Van den Berghe (1967: 11) defines racism as follows:

[...] any set of beliefs that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups are intrinsically associated with the presence or the absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics, hence that such

differences are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups socially defined as races.

Marger (2008: 20) emphasizes the perception of racism nowadays by drawing attention to its negativity: “In recent years, the term *racism* has often been used in a sweeping and imprecise fashion, describing almost any negative thought or action toward members of a racial-ethnic minority or any manifestation of ethnic inequality”.

There are multiple examples of historical and anthropological studies focusing on racism. Due to the limited scope of this paper and its specific focus, the discussion of racism will only be related to language and culture. Cultural racism is defined by Marger (2008: 25) as “[t]he discrepancies in social achievement among ethnic groups”, which “[a]re the result of cultural differences rather than biogenetic ones.” Marger (2008: 26) summarizes:

racism is a belief system that has proved tenacious, though modifiable in style and content, in multiethnic societies. Even though popular thinking has drifted away from the old biological racist ideas, more subtle racist notions have taken their place. Racism, then, is a social phenomenon whose consequences continue to be felt by both dominant and subordinate ethnic groups.

Racism can be experienced worldwide. Linguistically, some terms are often used to categorize certain ethnic groups. For instance, Westerners are sometimes called *yang gui zi*, ‘foreign devils’ by some Chinese, whereas *chink* is a very disrespectful term used by some foreigners to address Chinese people.

The obvious antagonistic attitude or even resentment towards other ethnic groups has been a sensitive issue in some countries such as the USA. Anti-foreigner communities such as the Neo-Nazi skinheads or the KKK continue to demonstrate and intend to strengthen the superiority of white Caucasians over other ethnic groups in extreme ways. Racial conflicts have been a huge social problem in the US-American society for decades. According to the FBI 2010 Hate Crime Statistics (<http://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2010-hate-crime-statistics.html>, 12 Dec. 2012), of the 6624 single bias incidents, 47.3 percent were motivated by a racial bias and 12.8 percent were motivated by an ethnicity/national origin bias. This shows that in countries like the USA, where these statistics are compiled and maintained, the problem of racism is still existent and very disruptive.

Stereotypes, prejudice and racism are learnt, not inherent. How are they spread to people around the world? The significant influence of media is one of the main reasons. This will be analyzed in the last section of this chapter.

6.4. Cultural reactions

Language and culture both represent one's personal identity. That is why even having immigrated to and lived in a foreign country for decades, Chinese immigrants still celebrate traditional Lunar New Year and Swiss immigrants still kiss three times when they greet their Swiss friends. Learning and understanding other cultures and languages does not mean losing one's own cultural identity. The process of adapting to another culture is rather long and complex. Many immigrants may finally feel at "home" after years while some of them will still be struggling between Eastern and Western cultures.

People show different reactions to a new culture or a new language. The premise of getting to know another culture is acquiring its language. By learning a new language, people focus on practicing their speaking, listening and writing skills and improve their comprehension of rather more complex texts by attending language schools, universities, and nowadays also through Internet courses. This is rather easy to manage today. Another perspective of cultural adaptation is training intercultural competence, which is more challenging since acquiring or adapting to another culture needs more than just language practicing. One might attend cultural seminars, take a trip to another country, accomplish an exchange semester as a student or even live in another country for a period of time.

In this section, some typical cases will be analyzed to give readers a framework, in which they can reflect their own experience or learn from other people's mistakes in order to increase their own intercultural awareness. When one begins to get to know a new culture, culture clashes often emerge and he or she might experience culture shock. These reactions are also considered barriers to intercultural communication.

6.4.1. Culture clash

When people from diverse cultures get together but cannot get along well due to their different understanding and interpretation of meanings, culture clash occurs. For instance, if a Chinese immigrant is working in the USA but he or she constantly feels tension or pressure because of the fact that his or her belief in values and world-view significantly differs from those of his or her American colleagues', he or she is experiencing culture clash. On the other hand, many Western expats also encounter culture clash in China. Owing to the individualistic ideology of Western culture, the foreign expats normally prefer to make their own decisions in a working environment. However, this might clash with the collectivistic dogma in Eastern countries, where the boss can direct the employees and the employees are likely to become hesitant without the boss' order.

A representative incident can be seen in Spencer-Oatey and Xing's (2000: 272-288) research of a problematic meeting between Chinese and British business partners. To put it in a nutshell, the British company organized a business trip for the Chinese delegation after the contract had already been signed and the products had been shipped. The visit was scheduled rather as a pleasure trip including interesting activities. According to the contract, the budget for the trip came from the Chinese company and if the cost did not exceed the budget, the rest of the budget would be given to the Chinese visitors as "pocket money".

The original plan seemed perfectly safe, but the outcome was catastrophic. Firstly, the British company arranged a relatively cheap hotel because they thought the more money that was left over, the more money that remained for the Chinese delegation. However, the Chinese visitors complained about the quality of the hotel and considered the choice of their accommodation as disrespectful. Secondly, the oblong shape of the table chosen by the British company for important business meetings seemed inconvenient in terms of effective communication to the Chinese. Additionally, the single dedicated chairman seat was taken by the head of the British delegation. This was understood as an offense, since the Chinese participants did not feel equally treated. Fourthly, the pride of the Chinese delegation was hurt at the beginning of the welcoming party because they were not given a chance to return a speech after the British manager's welcome speech. This action seriously clashed with a traditional Chinese protocol for such occasions. Finally, the Chinese visitors canceled the activities arranged by the British company since they preferred to spend more time on shopping and doing sightseeing by themselves. This gave the British hosts an impression that the Chinese delegation did not appreciate their hospitality.

As we can perceive, the issue of face played an extremely important role in this case. Both sides experienced culture clash during the short business trip and furthermore, both were negatively influenced by their different interpretations of foreign social manners.

6.4.2. Culture shock

The expression *culture shock* is defined by Adler (1975: 13) as "a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences." For instance, when people from a collectivistic country like China visit or immigrate to a Western country, the shock from experiencing a totally different culture may be felt. This can be observed by looking at, for example, how people behave in a restaurant or how they cross a street, unless one is well prepared to adapt to a new culture. Camilleri (2002: 11) explains:

“When visiting the target country for the first time, learners are faced with high degrees of uncertainty. They find various aspects of the new cultural environment unfamiliar, particularly the mentality or thought patterns surrounding them.”

Jandt (2004: 320) provides readers with statistics of people’s experience of culture shock: “Studies show that from 30% to 60% of expatriates suffer serious culture shock, whereas about 20% have no difficulty and enjoy the challenge.” Barna’s (1976: 3) observation of culture shock is comprised also of the physiological perspective as she depicts culture shock as “the emotional and physiological reaction of high activation that is brought about by sudden immersion in a new and different culture.” This can be linked to one of the barriers of intercultural communication, namely anxiety, examined in the preceding section.

Seelye and Seelye-James (1996: 5) distinguish the following five levels of culture shock: “the preliminary stage (events that occur before departure); the spectator phase (the initial weeks or months of living in another culture); the increasing participation phase; the shock phase; and the adaptation phase. Some add a sixth phase, the reentry into your home culture.” Pedersen (1994: 3) recapitulates Adler’s (1975) classification of culture shock, which divides it into “the honeymoon stage”, “the disintegration stage”, “the reintegration stage”, “the autonomy stage” and “the interdependence stage”.

People experience culture shock in varied ways, depending on their language skill, personal character, attitude, intercultural competence, and so forth. Jandt (2004: 322) divides the symptoms of culture shock into two categories, which are “physical and psychological symptoms.” For instance, when a Westerner is concerned about the weather, the drinking water or the cleanliness of street restaurants in some Asian countries, he or she might be experiencing physical symptoms of culture shock. If an Easterner feels irritated by the use of nudity in public commercials in some Western countries, he or she might be going through psychological symptoms of culture shock. These symptoms often lead to miscommunication within an intercultural environment. Bennett (1998: 217) provides the explanations of culture shock as a barrier to intercultural communication as follows:

When we are anxious, lonely, and disoriented, our communication skills degenerate. Isolation and tension are exacerbated, producing barriers and defensive communication. In the intercultural context, disorientation is particularly lethal, for it only serves to further isolate us from our environment. We block out the new forms and styles of communication available to us in order to preserve the old. Culture shock is thus a major obstruction in intercultural communication.

In sum, both culture clash and culture shock are common reactions of people who encounter foreign cultures. Such reactions can cause major barriers to intercultural communication if a

person does not know how to handle them. How to increase one's intercultural tolerance and competence in order to be well prepared when encountering culture clash and culture shock will be discussed in chapter seven.

6.4.3. Case study: the “Banana Man”

Talking about adaptation to new cultures, there is a unique group of people that need to be mentioned, which is the second and subsequent generation of immigrants in foreign countries. It is interesting to notice that even when many immigrants to foreign countries have lived outside of their motherland for decades, they still keep their own cultural identity, such as the second generation of Turkish and Chinese immigrants in many European countries. They live in a bi-lingual and bi-cultural or even multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment.

There is a metaphoric Mandarin term *Banana Man*, which is used to address Chinese born in Western countries, implying that they have “yellow” skin outside but “white” mentality inside. In Cantonese, a similar but rather negative expression *Bamboo Man*, denoting being Chinese outside but empty inside due to the loss of one's cultural identity, can be found. This term carries a derogatory or inferior meaning since it is used to despise the second-generation of Chinese immigrants. Both terms represent fairly controversial images of second-generation Chinese immigrants, who are on certain degree excluded both from Eastern and Western cultures. They are outsiders to both groups, although, on the one hand, they might be born with Western citizenship, on the other hand, they were still offspring of the Chinese ethnicity.

Foreign people will always experience different levels of judgment by local citizens. Regardless of whether they are local people or immigrants, what they aim to achieve is the same, a peaceful and well-off life. Judging others or being judged by others could block a mutually beneficial communication between varied cultural groups. Jandt (2004: 118) concludes: “Stereotypes, prejudice and racism are learned from other people or institutions that are prejudiced. Prejudice continues to exist because of socialization and the apparent social, economic, and psychological benefits that come from it.” Only by avoiding these attitudes can people have a better understanding of other cultures and break down the barriers to intercultural communication.

6.5. Media as transmitter

Cultural stereotypes, prejudice and racism are widely transmitted through diverse media, such as art, music, literature and movies. Jandt (2004: 106) believes: “Just overhearing racist

comments has been shown to negatively affect the listener's evaluation of the person being spoken about." Media is especially influential on the young generation. As Jones (1997: 176) argues: "The younger the individual is, and the less formed his or her beliefs are, the more likely it is that the person will be affected by the messages that come across the airwaves." Investigating particular cases such as movies originating from diverse cultural environments is both interesting and essential for the study of intercultural miscommunication. The following paragraphs concentrate on movies produced in the USA since they are one of the most influential transmitters.

Jandt (2004: 119) notices that, "The movies and television programs of popular culture still portray many minorities and foreign groups in a stereotyped way." Hollywood movies have been a powerful conduit to audiences around the world. Thus, the way how other cultures or ethnic groups are portrayed in Hollywood movies can have a direct impact on audience from different cultures. Monaco (2009: 299) criticizes that, "Racism pervades American film". This can be traced back to the beginning of the movie industry in the USA where African-Americans were portrayed as second-class citizens or criminals. As Silk and Silk (1990: 145) illustrate the common situation in the 20th century: "the portrayal of blacks in mainstream American movies during this period was either non-existent, patronizing, or downright racist." The authors (1990: 129) claim that, "Overall, Hollywood was no more or less racist than most other sections of American society."

Nowadays, though the way in which directors present other cultures or ethnic groups in their films contains more comic features, stereotypes can still be seen in many Hollywood films, where Russians and Chinese are portrayed as members of a mafia gang or people from Middle East are considered potential terrorists. The film *The Dictator* by Larry Charles, for instance, includes a hilarious scene where the leading actor played by Sacha Baron Cohen takes a helicopter together with a friend and two Americans, who mistake him for being a terrorist because he mentions some sensitive words such as "911" and "Empire State Building" in an Arabic sounding language. Another example is the successful TV series *Desperate Housewives*, in which white Americans are mostly portrayed as well off, leading an ideal life style whereas members of other ethnic groups are usually portrayed as working class people, such as cleaning ladies or gardeners.

Undeniably, there are also positive examples about other ethnic groups in current movies, such as portraying Asians as Kung Fu masters and computer geniuses, or African-Americans as great musicians or hilarious comedians. However, these are still stereotypes that generalize over people. Furthermore, there are also movies that try to guide the audience to an

unbiased and realistic depiction of other ethnic people's lives, such as *The Help*, where Emma Stone in her role as Skeeter Phelan, a white American author, tries to find justice for black maids who have been commonly treated as slaves by white American families during the African-American Civil Rights Movement from 1955 till late 1960s. The influence of media is extremely widespread and powerful. An objective and unbiased observation of the information transmitted by media helps people better understand other cultures.

7. Recommendations on solutions to intercultural miscommunication

After different categories of intercultural miscommunication have been analyzed in the previous chapters, this chapter will suggest some possible solutions to assure successful communication.

For English learners, it is essential not only to acquire language skills but also to be capable of developing intercultural competence. Obtaining intercultural competence is the foundation of a successful international interaction, no matter whether one is involved in the domains of business, academics or everyday private life. Particularly for Chinese English learners, there is still a large space for amendment and improvement. This chapter will provide readers with some suggestions for both individual learners and foreign language educators. To be more specific, English education in Chinese schools and “China English” as a newly developed variety of English will be investigated and utilized as representative cases.

It is worth mentioning that putting culture-related solutions ahead of linguistics-related solutions has two specific reasons. Studies on improving language skills such as practicing grammar, learning vocabulary and translating texts, have already been researched by numerous linguists in the last decades but less attention has been given to the question of how to develop one's intercultural competence effectively. Furthermore, solutions to miscommunication caused by linguistic factors are more explicit and noticeable whereas the influence of culture is rather implicit. In the end, the linguistic aspect and the cultural aspect can be compared metaphorically to the Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang, which are two inseparable parts of a whole. Language and culture may be described on the one hand as distinctive and unique, but on the other hand as mutually influential and interdependent. Only the combination of language and culture can ensure one's intercultural competence and lay the groundwork for successful intercultural communication.

7.1. *Developing intercultural sensitivity*

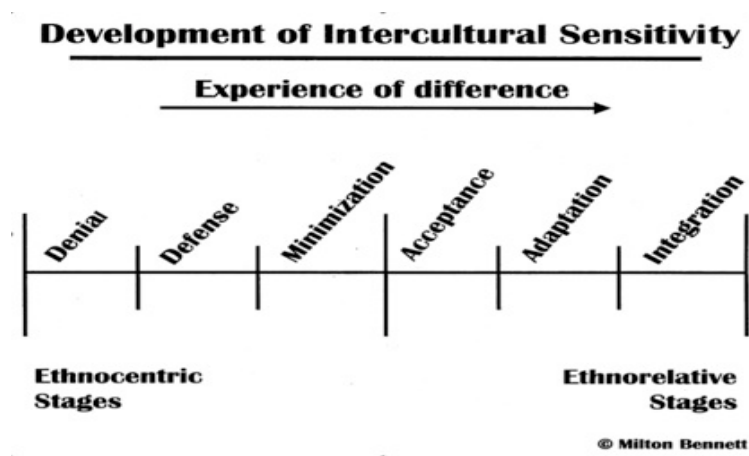
The adaptation to a foreign culture is similar to the process of learning a new language. To practise and improve intercultural competence, one needs interest in and tolerance towards foreign cultures. One should be continually open-minded and flexible when moving within various cultural frames. Brislin and Bhawuk (1992: 416) point out how to adapt to other cultures effectively: “people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures.” The importance of understanding cultural differences is remarked by Lewis (2000: 2):

Cultural diversity is not something that is going to go away tomorrow, enabling us to plan our strategies on the assumption of mutual understanding. It is in itself a phenomenon with its own riches, the exploration of which could yield incalculable benefits for us, both in terms of wider vision and more profitable policies and activity.

On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore one’s own identity and experience, because they are important factors likely to cause intercultural miscommunication. Seelye (1991: 38) states that no one can disregard the influence of his or her own culture behind. In fact, the best way to be competent in intercultural communication is to raise one’s intercultural sensitivity.

Bennett and Bennett’s (2004: 153) “Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity” provides English learners with a well-structured scale to measure and improve their intercultural communication competence. The model includes two main categories: “ethnocentric stages” and “ethnorelative stages”. They are further divided into six sub-stages: “denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration”.

Figure 1 Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity



(Adapted from Bennett and Bennett, 2004.)

Bennett and Bennett (2004: 153) explain that the first category, consisting of “denial, defense and minimization”, stresses that the central value is one’s own culture, whereas the second group, consisting of “acceptance, adaptation and integration”, emphasizes the importance of experiencing one’s own culture “in the context of other cultures”. The authors (2004: 153) then conclude:

In general, the ethnocentric stages can be seen as ways of avoiding cultural difference, either by denying its existence, by raising defenses against it, or by minimizing its importance. The ethnorelative stages are ways of seeking cultural difference, either by accepting its importance, by adapting a perspective to take it into account, or by integrating the whole concept into a definition of identity.

According to their model, achieving the category of “acceptance of difference” is the ideal and achievable target for many foreign language learners.

Gaston (1992: 15-20) explains and illustrates the methodology of dividing one’s development of intercultural sensitivity into four stages, which lead from recognition to reaction to empathy and then finally to respect. These four stages provide foreign English learners with an outline for self-assessment of their own attitudes towards other cultures. The first stage – recognition, basically consists of spending time to establish an unbiased perception of other cultures without having a preset judgment. The second stage – reaction, is defined by the necessity that after noticing the differences, one should be aware of other norms and values in diverse societies and if any unfamiliar situation occurs, one should be able to cope with other possible reactions different from one’s own. The third stage – empathy, is the willingness to accept these differences, to develop positive tolerance towards unfamiliar behaviors, and then to embrace other cultures. Ultimately, reaching the final stage – respect, is described as being able to appreciate both one’s own culture and cultures of others. Only by going through all these stages can someone manage to be interculturally competent.

Undoubtedly, misunderstanding could only be avoided if both participants of a conversation are interculturally competent. Bremer et al. (1988: 193-194) suggest improving intercultural sensitivity from the perspective of mutual understanding between interlocutors. They firstly underline the foundation of mutual understanding as follows: “the interactive nature of the understanding process requires that both sides negotiate to achieve sufficient shared inferences for a commonality of meaning to be established”. Further on, they point out that such shared understanding needs native speakers to “decentre”, meaning that they need to take a step back from their conventional views about communication in order to understand people from other cultures.

According to Altshuler, Sussman and Kachur's (2003: 400) research, "[i]ntercultural sensitivity is a complex cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral phenomenon". Foreign language learners might spend much time on taking culture seminars, intercultural workshops or exchange programs in a target foreign country. It may take a long time before one feels really tolerant and comfortable when confronted with other cultural phenomena. However, only by accomplishing the development of intercultural sensitivity can a fluent intercultural communication be guaranteed.

7.2. Reducing stereotypes and prejudice

As mentioned in previous chapters, attitudes such as stereotypes and prejudice are typical barriers to intercultural communication. How to decrease the risk of holding negative attitudes towards people from other cultural backgrounds is the central topic in this section.

The premise of a successful intercultural communication is interlocutors' positive attitudes towards people from other cultural backgrounds. As Byram, Nichols and Stevens (2001: 5) illustrate:

Intercultural attitudes (*savoir etre*): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. This means a willingness to relativise one's own values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones, and to be able to see how they might look from the perspective of an outsider who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviours.

Novinger (2000: 42) also indicates that, "[a]ttitude is an important factor in intercultural communication, because one person's perception of attitudinal similarity in another is a stronger correlate of attraction than that of cultural similarity."

At present, a rising number of people from various countries become more and more tolerant to and interested in other cultures. For instance, in some Eastern countries such as China and Japan, many members of the younger generation tend to be captivated by Western culture. They read Western literature, watch Western movies and study Western history. Many students plan exchange semesters in Western countries in order to increase their knowledge and create more opportunities. It is considered trendy to celebrate Christmas, to eat Italian food or to go to concerts performed by Western artists.

At the same time, there are also more and more Westerners starting to be fascinated about Eastern cultures, such as learning Chinese calligraphy, visiting Peking Opera, going to Asian restaurants, reading Japanese manga books and so forth. Such positive impressions of other cultures and the encouragement to promote foreign cultural products can break through

stereotypes and prejudice. This can be seen as a great opportunity to develop one's intercultural sensitivity towards different cultures. People will have a broader perspective when facing an international situation and the barriers between diverse cultures will be even less existent. More importantly, one should not only be interested in positive facets of a certain culture but also aim for a more global view of it. One should not only look at the surface but also learn to be able to identify reasons behind circumstances and issues related to intercultural miscommunication. By managing a more thorough understanding of other cultures, the accomplishment of Bennett and Gaston's theories can be achieved.

Jones (1997: 301) explicates his estimation about how to beware of the disadvantage of generalizations:

To reduce prejudice, then, is to reduce the tendency to form negative out-group attitudes and to believe in group-level stereotypes [...] The less we generalize from the group to the individual, the more we individuate a person's particular and unique qualities, and the more deliberative, methodical, and focused we are on them as individuals.

The author (1997: 302-308) proposes four approaches to reduce stereotypes and prejudice: "[t]he salvation approach – focus on the perpetrators of prejudice"; "[t]he remediation approach – focus on the targets of prejudice"; "[t]he colorblind approach – treat every person as if his or her race does not matter" and "[t]he transactional approach – consider the perspectives and purposes of all people." In his opinion, there is no perfect strategy to totally demolish stereotypical attitudes and every approach discussed has its flaws.

According to Jones (1997: 302-308), the approach to focus on the perpetrators of prejudice, namely the prejudiced people, emphasizes the importance of changing people who believe in negative stereotypes through providing unbiased information and education in order to alter their narrow-minded and dogmatic attitudes. The disadvantage is that acknowledging the prejudiced people as the dominant group could already to a certain degree lead to an imbalanced image of reality. However, if the focus is only on the people who are being stereotyped, in other words those who the remediation approach deals with, the outcome could be "a double-edged sword", as Jones (1997: 303) draws an analogy: "On the one hand, it acknowledges, rightfully, that the effects of centuries of discrimination cannot be wiped out in a stroke of the legislative pen. On the other, it seems to accept the lower capabilities or performance of those it targets for remediation." The remediation approach is therefore insufficient because simply gathering minority groups together cannot alter the mainstream's inclination towards prejudice. The colorblind approach aims to create a neutral society without distinguishing the diversity of its members. This is out of goodwill but unfortunately

rather unrealistic. Members of minorities might even be offended since their underprivileged status is taken for granted compared to the privilege of the dominant group. Jones (1997: 306) recapitulates: “the colorblind approach is flawed because its worldview does not conform to reality and because it puts many who would abide by its assumptions in danger of losing further ground.” The last suggested approach, the transactional approach, is the most reasonable and most feasible strategy among the four approaches. It respects an individual perceiver’s perspective of any culture and highlights the importance of negotiation between social groups. As Jones (1997: 307) concludes:

Neither the salvation nor remediation approach alone can work, because each treats only one of the elements of the problem. The colorblind approach seems to do worse – it ignores the problem altogether. The transactional approach offers the best hope for a final positive solution.

One should not forget that only by being aware of problematic areas can one still make progress and by combining different strategies together can he or she develop his or her intercultural competence. The analyses of these approaches are both realistic and helpful.

Besides suggestions for changing individuals’ attitudes towards people from other cultures, there are also studies claiming that improvement can be realized in domains such as governmental authorities and the media. Jones (1997: 297) for instance, states that “[i]mprovement in intergroup relations required both public and private institutional and organizational support.” Allport (1954: 469) explains: “[t]he establishment of a legal norm creates a public conscience and a standard for expected behavior that check overt signs of prejudice”. Jones (1997: 299) takes a similar view, pointing out that, “reducing prejudice could come about only if the leadership at the top articulated values that clearly rejected intolerance as an acceptable behavior and backed that position up with social policies that punished those who failed to abide by these precepts.” The author (1997: 299) specifically criticizes the USA as a representative example: “[t]oday, it seems to many people that the leadership of the country has [...] created a climate that is unsupportive of strategies to change the nature of race relations”. Rights and duties should be equally given to every individual, not only to certain groups. The media as another influential transmitter for stereotypes and prejudice has been evaluated in preceding chapters too. To decrease negative stereotypes and prejudice in various media forms is as well essential for a successful intercultural communication.

Individuals’ positive attitudes towards each other constitute the basis for reducing stereotypes and prejudice in people’s daily life. Byram and Morgan (1994: 31) describe the importance of attitudes to linguistic and cultural studies for foreign language learners: “The

relationship between attitudes and knowledge, between affective and cognitive aspects of young people's development is a complex one at the very heart of language and culture teaching." Attitudes can be influenced by governmental authorities and the media but can also interact with them. Within an unbiased social atmosphere, people from different cultural backgrounds can get along with and understand each other much more easily. The combination of improving both public and individual attitudes provides a platform for successful intercultural communication.

7.3. How to stop interpersonal conflicts

The suggestions given in the last sections help interlocutors to secure a harmonious mutual understanding in order to avoid intercultural miscommunication. However, if the misunderstanding or conflict has already occurred, repair strategies are required. How people deal with interpersonal conflicts varies significantly from culture to culture. As mentioned in chapter 4, the issue of face is an extremely important factor that can influence interpersonal communication between Easterners and Westerners. The concept of face has its distinctive interpretations in different cultures. To solve the potential problems caused by the issue of face, one has to understand and respect the meaning of face in both Eastern and Western societies.

A basic but efficient way to stop interpersonal conflicts is through negotiation between opponents. Negotiation is defined by Faure and Sjöstedt (1993: 7) as a "joint decision-making process through which negotiating parties accommodate their conflicting interests into a mutually acceptable settlement." Pruitt (1981: 6) states that negotiation is both "a form of social conflict, since it involves the defense of opposing positions" and "a form of conflict resolution, since the roots of conflicts are often examined and rectified during negotiation." In an intercultural interaction, negotiation is not only useful for economical, political or social reasons, but also for private matters.

When handling conflicts between Chinese people, an efficient way is to find a mediator, who can neutrally decrease the tension and prevent further disputes between competing parties. In Chinese society, a mediator is always someone of higher social status or an elderly person known and respected by both competing parties. The mediator transmits the information between the two parties and should be unbiased and attentive about saving the face of both sides. Elmer (1993: 67) informs readers of the advantage of inviting a middle person or intermediary between two conflicting parties: "a mediator avoids face-to-face

confrontation, thereby minimizing the possibility of loss of face, shame or dishonor for both parties.”

Augsburger (1986: 183) clarifies different methods of handling conflicts between Western countries and other countries:

Western styles of conflict resolution value one-to-one direct address, confrontation, self-disclosure, negotiation, and resolution [...] In the other two-thirds of the world, conflicts are immediately referred to a third party – an older, wiser, neutral, skilled family member or a trusted person from the community. Triangulation serves to save face for both parties and to reduce shaming in the system.

The most common method of solving interpersonal conflicts tends to be very different between Eastern and Western cultures. The use of mediators is following the fundamental contrast between directness and indirectness and between individualistic and collectivistic ideologies. Understanding how people in other cultures avoid interpersonal conflicts helps to assure a harmonious and successful communication with people from other cultural backgrounds.

7.4. *Raising intercultural awareness in EFL⁵ education*

Many foreign language learners begin to develop an interest in other languages and cultures especially after attending language courses at school. The Council of Europe (2008) promulgated a white paper to strengthen the development of foreign language education and studies with the following proclamation: “[l]anguage learning helps learners to avoid stereotyping individuals, to develop curiosity and openness to otherness and to discover other cultures”. (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/whitepaper_interculturaldialogue_2_EN.asp, 10 December 2012). As discussed before, language and culture are both learned. Likewise, intercultural awareness is also learned.

Regarding foreign language education in China, one specific and controversial issue that has arisen is whether educators should use textbooks specifically designed for Chinese children or not. It is often observed in English textbooks used in China that although the book is written in English, little introduction of Western culture is provided anywhere in the text. In addition, all the characters are only Chinese people and the setting is also predominantly China. For instance, if in a textbook a conversation between two characters named Alex and Mary takes place in London, the same example might be changed to Li and Hong in Beijing in a Chinese English textbook. Children therefore rarely learn any culture perspectives from their schoolbooks. Orton (2009: 145) notices: “[r]eferences to native speaker life and society

⁵ EFL= English as foreign language.

concern only neutral, humdrum activities of no cultural import, used for the practice of grammatical structures.”

It is undoubtedly extremely important for EFL learners to acquire early in the learning process both language skills and intercultural competence. Before interfacing with and obtaining personal contact with native speakers, many English learners might only have the possibility to practise their English at school. As Camilleri (2002: 9) elaborates: “the majority of language learners seek to acquire some competence in the foreign language before actually being in a position to interact with its native speakers. This is what most foreign language learning in schools is all about: a preparation for the eventual embarkation in the new environment.” Therefore, it is recommended and beneficial to develop and implement a more effective learning method for other languages and cultures in the classroom.

Following related discussions in previous sections, the idea that mastering a language by mechanically practicing grammar is nowadays dismissed as a myth. Camilleri (2002: 9) points out: “Successful intercultural communication, therefore, takes place when the foreign language learners’ communication patterns and their understanding of the deeper structure of such patterns overlap sufficiently with those of the native speakers.” To achieve this level of foreign language learning, one needs not only linguistic competence as a useful tool, but also culture-related methods that connect the communication patterns between EFL learners and native speakers. The Council of Europe (2001: 103) has assessed the importance of intercultural awareness:

Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community’ produce an intercultural awareness. It is, of course, important to note that intercultural awareness includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds.

A foreign culture seminar is an ideal environment for language learners to improve their intercultural awareness. This view is supported by Mao’s (2009: 145): “[t]he ultimate goal of teaching culture is to nurture the intercultural communicative competence that will complement with language competence to accomplish to a fuller extent the communicative function of language.”

It is generally accepted that engaging in intercultural interaction encourages foreign language learners to understand other cultures and languages better. Opportunities to communicate with native speakers have been shown to motivate language learners to be more open and active in making progress in both language skills and intercultural competence. As Camilleri (2002: 11) states, “The more knowledge and experience they share with the interlocutors, the easier communication becomes.” An example is the utilization of the

“English Corner”, which becomes more and more widespread in many Chinese schools. Students can join this interactive group to talk in English with native speakers and to interact through diverse cultural activities. It is intended to provide many Chinese English learners with an opportunity to have more contact with English language and culture after regular school lectures.

Moreover, Zimmerman (2010: 192) describes another benefit of implementing culture seminars in language education, namely the function of reducing impartial attitudes towards other cultures: “Prejudice is one of many abstract concepts that can be an interesting and challenging discussion topic for students in the EFL classroom.” Camilleri (2002: 23) also recognizes this problematic area in foreign language education:

A particular problem for foreign language learners in the area of rigid and inflexible perception is related to a kind of stereotypical imaging and understanding of the target community members. What distinguishes the beginner from a more seasoned foreign language learner in the context of cultural awareness is the ability to see beyond stereotypes.

In order to train foreign language learners’ intercultural awareness, the application of culture seminars can provide virtual situations to recognize problems and find solutions. Learners should be open and tolerant to unfamiliar situations. Camilleri (2002: 23) reiterates the importance of intercultural flexibility: “The cognitive aspect of intercultural communication is related to the capacity of being mentally flexible in dealing with ambiguity and unfamiliarity [...] This flexibility of perception and thought patterns is a key to openness and acceptance of another culture, and thus to successful cross-cultural adaption.”

In addition to traditional means of learning a language at school, a popular and practical way is tandem language learning. This method has been applied both by students in a school environment and by independent language learners. More and more students on an exchange program in foreign countries seem to benefit significantly from cooperation with their tandem partners. During the process of tandem communication, both language partners share their own cultural understanding with their partner and receive other cultural meanings from each other. The face-to-face interaction provides a stage for the promotion of both linguistic and cultural competence. O’Rourke (2007: 46) explains the mutual benefits of tandem language learning: “[e]ach partner at different times takes the role of learner and expert, so that both sides of the learning process are constantly in focus.” Within the process of tandem communication, partners have the chance to exchange their views on diverse aspects, such as clothes, taboos, television programs and literature. They also have the chance to discuss their possible misunderstandings about a target culture or discover how their

partner would react to different social phenomena. Most topics that would be discussed or used are culture-related.

In today's modern society, diverse varieties of communication media and tools are used by language learners. The access to Internet courses has caught many people's attention and is considered a very convenient and efficient way to study foreign languages and cultures. The advantage of using Internet communication as a new learning method is proposed by Ware and Kramsch (2005: 190): "Web-based technologies have been advocated as particularly promising examples of computer-based learning with the potential to enable language students to interact across geographic, linguistic, and cultural lines." Besides Internet language courses, there are still other methods and activities such as reading Internet resources and chatting online with native speakers, which can help EFL learners to improve their language and intercultural awareness.

The study of values, norms, traditions and customs in other cultures can create a better understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds, in order to further interact with them successfully, especially in EFL classrooms. Sharma (2004: 137) believes that through intercultural contact "[p]eople will get to know and understand each other better and, as a consequence, they will become not only more tolerant of their differences but also embrace the diversity of humankind as a stimulus for personal growth." The motivation for exploring other cultures and the tolerance towards other cultures are both essential to intercultural communication, especially when the global village becomes less and less distanced due to the connection of Internet and other media.

The common method that English teachers use in China for teaching the English language is often concentrated on testing students' grammar and pronunciation but seldom do they explain how to use different phrases and sentences properly in a certain context. This situation still needs to be modified and improved. Chinese English learners at school have the pressure to pass English exams. They study hard to be good at memorizing vocabulary, analyzing sentence structure, exercising reading comprehension and writing predefined texts. Teaching techniques concerning intercultural awareness are rarely imported in many schools in China. Teachers, both native and non-native, should employ more intercultural interactions in the classroom and try to encourage students to conduct intercultural communication activities.

Improving conventional studying strategies such as language teaching at school and developing new technology like online communication are both important for foreign

language education. Moreover, only when an interactive learning environment is created can students really learn how to use the English language properly under different circumstances.

7.5. *Communicative translation instead of literal translation*

After postulating suggestions that would lead to a successful intercultural communication from the perspective of culture, attention should also be paid to problematic issues within the domain of linguistics. Intercultural miscommunication occurs often in translation works. It has already been mentioned in the previous chapters that some Chinese expressions cannot be simply translated into English, such as *cheng yu* ‘Chinese idioms’, names of Chinese dishes, historical items and cultural subjects. It is important not only for Chinese English learners to increase their pragmatic knowledge about Western cultures, but also for foreign Chinese learners to be aware of distinctive characteristics of Chinese culture in order to avoid misunderstanding.

Due to the popularity of the English language in China and the rapid development of tourism in many Chinese cities, it is particularly important to take a closer look at translation from English to Chinese or from Chinese to English, especially those unsuccessful translations produced by Chinese people. The suggestions made for a successful translation in this section mainly come from the Chinese perspective, which will provide readers with a better understanding of the reasons for the problems encountered in translating from English to Chinese and vice versa.

There are two methods commonly used for translating English into Chinese or vice versa, which are literal translation and communicative translation. Literal translation is considered less culturally related since it is performed mechanically from English words to Chinese words or reversed, irrespective of cultural coherences. When the English word does not imply any further meaning except its original one, the literal translation into Chinese is acceptable. It can become problematic when there are implicit meanings behind the text. To name an example, the translation of the English word *green* is *lǜ* in Chinese, whereas the English word *grass* is translated as *cao* in Chinese. Therefore, the English phrase *green grass* can be translated word-for-word as *lǜ cao* in Chinese. Since the expression is only describing an item without cultural significance, the literal translation can be successfully applied.

In comparison to a direct literal translation, communicative translation is more recommendable when the literal translation does not lead to the intended interpretation. Newmark (1988: 46) explains: “Communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily

acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.” The emphasis of communicative translation is on the contextual meaning rather than literal meaning. Due to the distinctiveness of both English and Chinese languages and the large difference between the two cultural backgrounds, there are many items that cannot be easily and directly translated from one to another. A popular example is a fruit originated from China, which is called *ma ti*, literally meaning ‘horse’s hoof’. If a foreigner visits a Chinese restaurant and reads the name *horse’s hoof* in the menu, he or she might consider the restaurant serves real horse’s hoof as a dish. *Ma ti* is water chestnuts in English. If someone does not know the real meaning of it in Chinese but only the literal meaning of the characters, misunderstanding is very likely to occur. Similar cases of misleading translations of Chinese dishes’ names can still be seen in many restaurants in China.

More examples for misleading literal translation can be seen in the following text. An expression to consider is the English idiom *It is raining cats and dogs*. Translating word-for-word will misinterpret what the idiom really means. Communicative translation on the other hand, can correctly transfer the actual meaning into a targeted language. In Chinese for instance, it is called *kuang feng bao yu*, ‘crazy wind and brutal rain’. Another perspective to analyze communicative translation is from English to Chinese. The equivalent Chinese expression of *When in Rome, do as the Romans do* is *ru xiang sui su*, meaning ‘when arriving at a new location, follow the customs there’, which is neither culturally- nor regionally-defined. Such a translation jumps out of the limitation of lexicons and even elevates the original English expression to a widely understood level. Chinese readers will then correctly understand the meaning in their own cultural concept.

The examples provided above are all based on translations between English and Chinese. If an interpreter wants to accomplish a translation in a smooth and fluent manner in accordance with Chinese culture, the method of communicative translation is more efficient than the method of word-for-word translation. Especially if translating for official documents or public signs, one should be capable of comprehending both source language and target language. Translators should make sure that if they use the communicative translation technique, they should change the original form into a comprehensible form, which can then be easily understood by target language readers. If translators want to use communicative translation proficiently, they must have an extensive grasp of the knowledge and culture of both the source language and the target language. As for foreign language learners, Liddicoat (2000: 51) clarifies that they should learn to comprehend what the native speakers really mean before they start to translate. Otherwise, mistranslations occur.

7.6. Case study: “Chinglish” vs. China English

After discussions of the role of cultural difference pertaining to intercultural miscommunication in preceding sections and the analysis of translation strategies between English and Chinese, the focus of this section is the use of the English language in China.

English is considered to be one of the so-called “three keys” in China that a graduate needs, besides obtaining a driving license and computer skills, in order to open the door to a career after university. As Adamson (2004: 195) notes:

At present, the role and status of English in China is higher than ever in history as evidenced by its position as a key subject in the curriculum, with its growing use as a medium of instruction as many schools adopt a bilingual approach to education; and as a crucial determinant for university entrance and procuring well-paid jobs in the commercial sector.

In recent years, studies focusing on intercultural communication have been given more and more attention. Multiple studies have been conducted over the past years but few have actually corrected those traditional problems of Chinese English learners’ lack of knowledge about intercultural sensitivity. Given the importance of English as a lingua franca, the awareness of possible intercultural miscommunication is essential to foreign language education in China.

One problematic area is the everyday use of Chinglish among Chinese English speakers. Chinglish is an evolved combination of English and Chinese, an acknowledged Chinese style English. According to Pinkham (1998: 1), Chinglish is defined as “English with Chinese characteristics”. Chinglish is often used when a Chinese English speaker is not able to distinguish linguistic and cultural differences between English and Chinese.

As tourism is flourishing in China, more and more information signs are translated into English to provide tourists with better directions and guidance. However, the original Chinese meaning is often lost when translated into English. Visitors to China with a good command of English may find it odd when they see public signs provided as examples in Radtke’s (2007: 19-26) book about Chinglish, such as “You can enjoy the fresh air after finishing a civilized urinating”, which was actually intended to mean “please remember to flush the toilet in order to keep a tidy environment for other users”. Clearly, the translation does not manage to provide an accurate and suitable meaning. To name more examples demonstrated by Radtke (2007: 19-26), an instruction sign often displayed on public service vehicles in China, “After first under on, do riding with civility”, should originally request people to first let passengers exit the vehicle before entering. These examples are without question ridiculous but at least harmless. However, the following translations could be

considered discriminatory or derogatory. “Deformed Man Toilet” and “Cripples’ Lane” are both supposed to provide handicapped people with advantageous service, but unfortunately are translated into very inappropriate expressions. The word *disabled* could be suggested as a better expression in this case. Radtke (2009: 7) illustrates his own collection of ludicrous Chinglish translation from Chinese to English by asking: “is Chinglish really gone” in China. The author (2009: 7) notices:

[y]ou step into one of the side streets near the Drum Tower and find it there in all its glory: a bar offering “coffee with iron” and a “last rape soup”, public parks inviting you to “let us do the birds friend” and to “Fall into water carefully.” Happily, you realize the Chinglish is indestructible.

Thus, reeducating English learners in China to use proper English instead of Chinglish is one major difficulty, due to its popularity and seemingly convenience.

The reason for many incorrect translations in China is laziness and the reliance on online translation tools or computer software, such as “Google translator”. In order to verify and validate this hypothesis, a very popular Chinese expression *hao hao xue xi, tian tian xiang shang* ‘study well/hard, make progress everyday’ is chosen as a sample for online translation. According to Google, the word-for-word translation of this expression is ‘learn every day up’, which does not match the actual meaning in Chinese. In fact, the use of a dictionary or an online translator can help one translate more efficiently and accurately in a relatively short time. However, one should not rely only on these mechanical translation functions but should rather comprehend the actual coherence of the expression to be translated. During the process of using the communicative translation in addition to computer-assisted-translation, one can recognize that behind the surface of any expression lies a more profound cultural meaning.

The number of non-native English speakers worldwide today has increased considerably compared to the number of native English speakers. The English language, as a lingua franca, tends to have more and more tolerance toward other varieties of English, such as Australian English and African American Vernacular English. Jenkins (2003) points out many issues currently faced by English native speakers. For instance, the ownership of the English language, the questions of whether there should be only one Standard English or whether the existence of new varieties of English is acceptable or not. The author (2003: 90) notices: “Within so many different English language groupings in existence, new varieties within these groupings continuing to emerge, and the numbers of speakers of existing varieties expanding year on year, there is a very real concern as to how long the English

languages will retain the potential for mutual intelligibility.” To this topic, diversification from linguist to linguist is evident.

This phenomenon can also be found in China, which has its own variety of English, namely China English. It is important to distinguish China English from Chinglish. Deterding (2006: 175) notices the evidently increasing number of Chinese people learning English and the uniqueness of this Chinese variety of the English language. He (2006: 195) believes that this in the near future, China English “will truly be in the forefront of the development of the language.”

There are many unique Chinese culturally related expressions for which English equivalents cannot be found, such as the *Four Modernizations*: the modernization of industry, agriculture, science, and technology; *black hand*: a behind-the-scenes mastermind who plans political or criminal activities; *develop-the-west*: the slogan of a policy of investing money and talent to develop the western regions of China, and so on.

It is important to recognize the existence of both China English and Chinglish due to their widespread existence/use in China. From the point of view of intercultural communication, Chinglish is a rather inefficient method conducted by many Chinese when they translate Chinese into English, whereas China English is a newly developed variety of English as lingua franca to endow the English language with Chinese values and meanings, which can help translators to create culturally understandable expressions in their translations. It is not intended to promote that Chinese English learners should use China English as a methodology in their language studies. However, the use of China English can be seen as a promising way to get acquainted with English when Chinese learn English as a new language and this will make it easier for them to grasp the linguistic aspect of English. As mentioned in previous chapters, one should implement cultural perspectives into foreign language studies and learn culture-bound English instead of mechanically memorizing vocabulary and grammar. To conclude, people should learn authentic and culture-bound English and when necessary, apply China English in translation productions.

8. Empirical research of intercultural miscommunication

After theoretical analyses of the characteristics of both linguistic and cultural influence on intercultural miscommunication and possible solutions, as provided in the previous chapters, in this chapter, an empirical study is conducted to investigate attitudes and experiences of respondents from different cultural backgrounds. A questionnaire was designed for respondents to present their opinions on diverse situations. The data consisted of individual

comments made by respondents and a Likert scale section, which was then calculated into points that helped to demonstrate dissimilarities between Easterners and Westerners. The reason for concentrating on questions from the perspective of Eastern cultures is the assumption that people from collectivistic cultures tend to be more dependent on their traditions and customs and they are considered less flexible than people from individualistic cultures. The completion of the empirical research was accomplished with the help of students of the University of Vienna and the Mandalingua language school in Shanghai.

8.1. *Methods and aims*

The aim of the empirical study is to determine the influence of linguistics and culture on intercultural communication. It is aimed not only to compare respondents' attitudes and tolerance to intercultural miscommunication examples, but also to observe the existence of intercultural diversities between Easterners and Westerners as hypothesized in this paper.

The respondents chosen in this study consisted of thirty people from both Eastern and Western cultures. Twenty of them were academics due to the reasons of accessibility and their comprehensive understanding of the English language. The personal information collected only concerned culturally relevant data such as nationality and age of the participants and their intercultural experience while other information like gender and religion was not required. Some of the respondents have lived in other countries for a period of time but others have not. This was expected to affect the outcome of their questionnaires.

The empirical study was completed either in a face-to-face interview or through the Internet. The results were then collected to compare Easterners and Westerners' reactions. They were expected to meet or support the hypotheses discussed in previous chapters and, moreover, to give readers a realistic overview of examples mentioned in the paper. The empirical research was not intended to provide ultimate proof of any hypothesis but rather to indicate a tendency in attitudes from Easterners and Westerners.

To be more specific, the aims of the empirical study are summed up as follows:

- ⇒ to assess the validity of hypotheses which demonstrate the contrast between Eastern and Western cultures
- ⇒ to investigate the influence of intercultural experience on individuals' attitudes towards other cultural phenomena
- ⇒ to examine stereotypes and prejudices held by people from Eastern and Western cultural backgrounds
- ⇒ to look at individuals' opinions about the importance of intercultural seminars

- ⇒ to compare Eastern and Western individuals' tolerance towards foreign cultures
- ⇒ to explore linguistic and cultural influence on intercultural competence
- ⇒ to examine different reactions to a certain behavior within the same cultural group (e.g. within collectivistic cultures, Korea is rather different from China.)

8.2. *Questionnaire design*

Brown (2001: 6) defines questionnaires as: “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers.” Oppenheim (1992: 100) explains the use of a questionnaire as follows:

A questionnaire is not some sort of official form, nor is it a set of questions which have been casually jotted down without much thought. We should think of the questionnaire as an important instrument of research, a tool for data collection. The questionnaire has a job to do: its function is measurement.

Therefore, the questionnaire was designed to be specific and consistent to the topic of this paper and was furthermore formulated to support the hypotheses discussed in previous chapters.

Oppenheim (1992: 103) classifies questionnaires into two types: “the self-administered questionnaire” and “the group-administered questionnaire”. The former kind of questionnaire is given to respondents who are asked to complete it by themselves whereas the latter kind does not demand individual respondents but rather a group to finish the questionnaires together, such as a class of students. Since the aim of the questionnaire used was to find out individuals' response to intercultural miscommunication, the first type of questionnaire was chosen. Oppenheim (1992: 103) comments on the self-administered questionnaire:

This method of data collection ensures a high response rate, accurate sampling and a minimum of interviewer bias, while permitting interviewer assessments, providing necessary explanations (but not the interpretation of questions) and giving the benefit of a degree of personal contact.

In consonance with Oppenheim's comment, the purpose of the questionnaire is to get to know individuals' attitudes towards other cultures and their intercultural sensitivity without the influence of a third party.

The questionnaire includes three parts: personal information, general questions and case studies. For the personal information part, respondents were required to announce their

nationality and to indicate whether they considered themselves individualistic or collectivistic. This was intended to provide initial impression of the respondents, which was then compared to their actual reactions after the questionnaire was completed. The general questions section was combined by yes or no questions, Likert scale questions and fill-in boxes. This part was set to learn about respondents' direct and indirect experience of intercultural miscommunication, stereotypes and prejudice. Finally, the case studies section provided respondents with fourteen representative situations using a five-point Likert scale to detect their attitudes towards foreign cultural phenomena. It was designed to draw up statistics in order to examine different reactions between Easterners and Westerners and their intercultural sensitivity. All fourteen examples represented realistic situations that put respondents in the position of the experiencer.

8.3. *Questionnaire assessment*

The assessment of the thirty questionnaires provided this thesis with very interesting results. A noteworthy point can be already seen in the very first part of the questionnaire, personal information, where a few respondents considered themselves neither individualistic nor collectivistic but rather in between, especially those who had more international experience. Most of the respondents however, answered as expected: Easterners identified themselves as collectivistic whereas Westerners defined themselves as individualistic.

83% of the respondents have directly or indirectly experienced intercultural miscommunication or culture shock and they all agreed that having experience in foreign countries could enhance one's intercultural competence and reduce one's stereotypes towards other cultures. 85% of the respondents believe that sociocultural barriers are the main reason for intercultural miscommunication compared to linguistic and non-verbal barriers and 25% of the respondents have chosen that all these three reasons are prominent. Furthermore, most of the respondents believe that traveling or living experiences in foreign countries can contribute a change to their stereotypical impression about people from other cultural backgrounds. Only 20% of the respondents stated that they attended cultural seminars during their school time, while half of the 20% claimed that those seminars took place on a regular basis. During the data collection, out of those 20% of the respondents, 80% agreed that it would have been helpful for their development of intercultural competence if there were more culturally related courses in their school time.

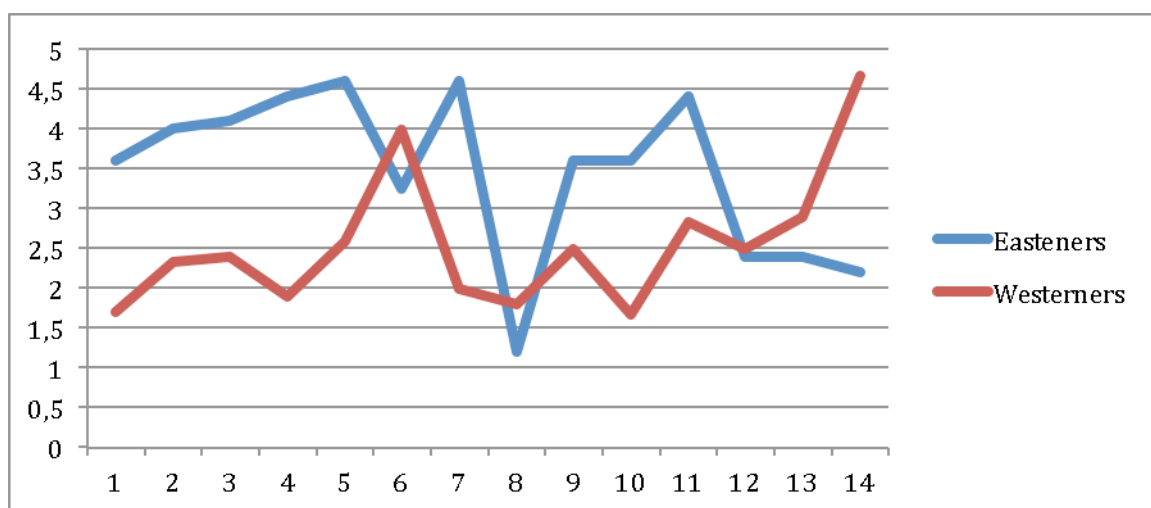
On the second page of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to write down stereotypes they have heard about certain cultures. All respondents provided some commonly

known stereotypical descriptions and it can be observed that similar stereotypes appeared quite frequently. More specifically, typical stereotypes about Chinese people being diligent in their work and study and indirect towards other people are also the impressions of Chinese respondents about themselves. Close family and social relationship are considered to be typical for Chinese people and seen as a significant positive point, whereas loudness and the lack of the right for free speech are considered negative facts. To name more examples, Japanese are considered excessively polite and shy. Germans are regarded as punctual, strict and rigorous. British are deemed gentleman-like but very reserved. As for Americans, almost all stereotypes provided by the respondents were negative, such as no culture, superficial, obese, and in some instances even described by American respondents themselves the same way.

Interestingly, food is a subject appearing very often in the stereotype part of the questionnaire. For instance, some respondents believed that Chinese people eat every type of food, nevertheless, the Chinese food was still considered tasty and healthy. The respondents were then asked to give some comments on stereotypes about their own countries. 80% of the respondents gave rather positive examples.

In the part of case studies, fourteen questions were provided based on a five-point Likert scale. Among these fourteen questions, ten of them include examples that can be frequently experienced in Eastern cultures. The other four questions concern situations often seen in Western cultures. The points were calculated in order to present a tendency of tolerance towards the given situations and the statistics of reactions from Easterners and Westerners can be seen in the following graphics.

Figure 2 Tolerance towards cultural phenomena



As expected, most of the Eastern respondents are tangentially more tolerant towards the first ten examples except situation six and eight. This is in accordance with the hypotheses of this paper. Interestingly, within the same cultural group, divergence exists. An evident disparity can be noticed between Austrian and American respondents, who are both defined as people from individualistic cultural backgrounds, but the respondents from these two countries have quite different reactions to some situations, such as their opinion about punctuality.

Two specific cases are worth further consideration. The situation of being half an hour late in example eight seems to be an interesting case, which was only totally accepted by Thai respondents in this study. Similarly, the situation of a professor being late to his or her lecture was only somehow acceptable to Austrian respondents.

A remarkable point to notice is the influence of age on respondents' reactions. There is a tendency for respondents belonging to a younger age group to show more tolerance towards other cultures.

Based on the results collected from the thirty respondents, regardless of their individual educational background, it can be observed that the difference between Easterners and Westerners concerning their reactions to various intercultural situations is statistically significant. Nevertheless, one can notice that cultural phenomena are not always universal and Westerners' responses show more diversity than those of Eastern participants.

9. Conclusion

This paper has tried to provide a comprehensive overview of many important issues related to the research of intercultural miscommunication. The reason for analyzing problematic cases caused by the lack of linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence is to provide readers with representative experiences to consider, reflex upon, and consequently, to avoid potential misunderstandings when they encounter similar situations. Empirical examples and case studies should provide a foreign language learner with an opportunity to prepare themselves for future interactions with interlocutors from other cultures. Due to the increasing amount of intercultural contacts between Eastern and Western countries, it is extremely important to understand and tolerate foreign cultures.

Corresponding definitions and methodologies have been proposed in order to establish a fundament for further analyses. On the one hand, language and culture are different from each other. They have their own distinctive characteristics. On the other hand, language and culture are two inseparable parts of interpersonal communication. Language provides linguistic codes, giving speakers a channel to express themselves, whereas culture endows the

expressions with a variety of possible interpretations. Language consists of culturally defined codes and culture is embedded in and expressed by language. From the linguistic perspective, miscommunication may occur when interlocutors mispronounce, misinterpret or do not have or know of equivalent expressions for a term in their native tongue, when they try to express them. From the sociocultural perspective, miscommunication may occur when interlocutors do not share the same cultural concepts or are not aware of cultural differences.

Two fundamental theories used as the foundation for the thesis are: 1. the theory of individualistic vs. collectivistic; 2. the theory of high- and low context cultures. Inhabitants of Western countries such as the United States are generally considered individualistic, whereas people from Eastern countries like China have the tendency to perform in a more collectivistic manner. It is important to notice that this categorization of being more individualistic or collectivistic has been only applied to indicate a tendency in the comparative study.

The paper has exemplified various characteristics of Chinese and English languages, which represent two of the most frequently used languages of Eastern and Western countries. Barriers to intercultural communication have been analyzed from verbal, nonverbal and sociocultural perspectives and they are further divided into subcategories, which are constituted by representative examples. Besides these most influential factors, there are still other obstacles, which can also cause intercultural miscommunication, such as interlocutors' attitudes towards each other, stereotypes and prejudice. These barriers are also addressed in detailed discussions in the paper.

As mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, it is intended to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of intercultural communication and in their future interpersonal contact they would pay more attention not only to their language skills but also to intercultural competence. After discussing barriers to intercultural communication, some useful recommendations have been given to improve one's intercultural sensitivity and linguistic proficiency. This has then been followed by an empirical research, which has verified the existence of different interpretations of certain cultural and linguistic cases between Easterners and Westerners and the necessity to implement more culturally related content in foreign language education.

In this paper, the analyses of language and a culture's influence on intercultural communication have been divided into further categories but it is also continuously emphasized that language and culture are interdependent and mutually influential.

Concerning foreign language education, it is not possible for non-native English learners, even those who are highly proficient in English, to avoid all pragmatic problems, but

it is necessary to raise the awareness of intercultural competence and to notice pragmatic failures in intercultural communication. The command of culturally accepted forms of language allows speakers to access positions of power and influence in different spheres of society. In future studies, people should continue to try to strengthen the implementation of a combination of linguistic and cultural aspects in language studies. Educators worldwide have the responsibility to assist their students in the development of intercultural sensitivity.

The analyses in this paper demonstrate that the problem of intercultural miscommunication is relatively complex and widespread, which is why this cannot be immediately solved by recognizing various typical barriers or merely implementing efficient linguistic and cultural courses in foreign language education. It is a rather long learning process to really comprehend and to tolerate other cultures and even more difficult to maintain the established understanding. Not to mention the strong influence of diverse media, which have a huge impact on the receivers, especially when they sometimes transmit biased information and promote prejudiced attitudes towards a certain cultural group. All these barriers create challenging obstacles for foreign language learners. This is another objective this paper has tried to convey, providing analyses of representative barriers to miscommunication, possible recommendations for solving the problems and some empirical experiences to support the proposals. Ultimately, this thesis is aimed at providing the readers with different examples for consideration, some issues to pay attention to and to encourage them to make progress in foreign language study in the future.

Indeed, every individual has his or her own perception, interpretation and evaluation of the study of intercultural miscommunication. However, providing these analyses in order to help readers recognize stereotypes and prejudice rather than simply generalize over a certain cultural group and encourage them to show respect and tolerance to foreign cultures is the prerequisite of a successful intercultural interaction.

To sum up, the issues and examples analyzed in this thesis show clearly the importance of implementing intercultural themes in foreign language education and related subjects. When Easterners encounter Westerners, intercultural miscommunication occurs in diverse situations. To realize the importance of improving one's linguistic proficiency and intercultural awareness helps a foreign language speaker to raise sensitivity about the prevalent existence of misunderstanding during interactions with people from other cultural backgrounds. Linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence are not only crucial to interpersonal contact, but also to business and governmental interactions as discussed in this paper. In a more and more globalized world today, merging linguistic and cultural

components in foreign language studies will lead to a better intercultural communication and mutual understanding between people from Eastern and Western cultures.

10. References

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11. Appendix

11.1. Pictures

Picture A.



Picture B.



Picture C.



Picture D.



Picture E.



Picture F.



Picture G.



Picture H.



(Adapted from Radtke, 2009)

Fotos A bis G: Xiaoming ZHU

Foto H: aus Radtke, 2009

Ich habe mich bemüht, sämtliche Inhaber der Bildrechte ausfindig zu machen und ihre Zustimmung zur Verwendung der Bilder in dieser Arbeit eingeholt. Sollte dennoch eine Urheberrechtsverletzung bekannt werden, ersuche ich um Meldung bei mir.

11.2. Questionnaire



QUESTIONNAIRE

Intercultural Miscommunication

Note: This is a checklist type of questionnaire. Only in certain parts you are expected to write down your answer. Please type anything in the blank to indicate what you choose.

Personal information

Nationality: _____

Age: _____

Do you consider yourself more individualistic or collectivistic?

Individualistic: emphasizing the value of individuals, being independent.

Collectivistic: emphasizing the value of family or social group, relying on the group.

Individualistic	In between	Collectivistic

Part A: General questions

1) Have you ever lived in a foreign country for over six months? If so, where and for how long?

2) Have you ever experienced miscommunication with someone from another cultural background?

Never	Yes, indirectly	Yes, directly	Sometimes	Often

3) What is the main reason for intercultural miscommunication in your opinion?

- Linguistic barriers (e.g.: mispronunciation, grammar)

Yes	No

- Socio-cultural barriers (e.g. politeness , directness)

Yes	No

- Non-verbal barriers (e.g.: gestures, signs)

Yes	No

4) Have you ever been in a situation where you were surrounded by members of another culture and did not understand what was happening?

Never	Yes, indirectly	Yes, directly	Sometimes	Often

5) Have you ever experienced a cultural shock?

Never	Yes, indirectly	Yes, directly	Sometimes	Often

6) Have you traveled to many countries? If so, do you think traveling experience can enhance your intercultural competence?

No	Yes, sometimes	Yes, always

7) Has experiencing other cultures by yourself ever changed your stereotypical impression about a certain culture?

No	Not sure	Yes	I have never had stereotypical impressions

8) What kind of stereotypical description about a certain cultural group have you ever heard? (e.g.: The French are romantic.)

- The Americans:
- The Chinese:
- The British:
- The Japanese:
- The Germans:

And what stereotypes have you ever heard about your own country?

9) Was there any seminar about other cultures given during your school education?

No	Yes, but seldom	Yes, often

Part B: Case studies

To which level can you be tolerant to the following situations between people from diverse cultural backgrounds? Please rate on a five-point scale, from 1 “totally unacceptable” to 5 “totally understandable”.

1) You are talking to a colleague. He/she keeps looking away and is intentionally trying to avoid direct eye contact with you.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2) You are very impressed by a colleague’s English skills and express your compliment to him/her. He/she keeps saying: “No, my English is really poor.”

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

3) You are a foreign student studying on exchange. During a math lecture, the professor makes an error in his calculations. You point this out directly in front of other students. The professor seems embarrassed and asks you to come to his office later.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

4) You work at a small electronic store. A customer wants to buy a product and keeps bargaining with you for a much lower price.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

5) You are invited to a university colleague’s birthday party. You delicately wrap up a nice present for him/her and come in a great mood. After you hand him/her the present, he/she just leaves the present unwrapped till the party is over.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

6) You are invited to a dinner. You are having a cocktail and one of the guests says: “Wow your drink looks great, must be very tasteful.” You want to show your hospitality and invite this person to taste your cocktail. This person feels awkward and says: “No, please don’t.”

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

7) You invite your new neighbors to dinner. They slurp and smack while they eat.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

8) You have an appointment with a friend. He comes almost half an hour later than the original plan.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

9) You know a colleague is in need of a reference book for a seminar. By chance, you have that book and need it no more. You give it to the colleague but he rejects affirmatively.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

10) You are asked by a colleague to join his home party on the weekend. You agree to come but at the end cannot manage to. You try to send an apology to the colleague but never hear from him again.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

11) You pass by a restaurant and notice that there is a goat hanging in front of the restaurant being cut apart.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

12) You and other students are waiting about 15 minutes for the professor. Then he shows up without any apology or explanation.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

13) You start working at a company. A colleague knocks at your office door and comes in. He sits on your desk next to you and starts talking.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

14) You are the team leader of an international program. After your presentation in a meeting, an employee says: "I do not really agree with point 3 in your presentation."

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Thank you very much for your help!

11.3. Abstract

Language provides people with a channel to communicate with each other, while culture helps people to distinguish from each other and at the same time understand each other in a more sophisticated way. With the rapid development of intercultural communication in domains like business, academic, private or governmental interactions, the need for proficient language skills and intercultural awareness among people from all over the world has increased significantly.

Comprehending a language is not only the result of learning linguistics, such as syntax, semantics and phonology, but it also requires the implementation of culture-bound knowledge, unbiased attitude and tolerance towards people from other cultural backgrounds. Thus, the investigation of intercultural communication and miscommunication provides foreign language learners with a great opportunity to look at the language acquisition process in a complete framework, in which both language and culture have their own characteristics, but also interact with and mutually influence each other. Miscommunication is likely to occur due to speakers' lack of language skills and their insufficient intercultural competence.

Since acquiring both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence is the prerequisite for a successful intercultural communication between East and West, it is worth investigating on the differences and similarities of Eastern and Western languages and cultures. Furthermore, it is necessary to look at some main barriers, which might cause intercultural miscommunication. After this, some useful suggestions are provided to help interlocutors to modify their stereotypes and prejudice, reduce their intercultural anxiety and to improve their linguistic and sociocultural competence.

This paper is aimed to provide readers with a comprehensive overview of important issues related to the study of intercultural miscommunication. Due to the increasing amount of intercultural contacts between Eastern and Western countries, the hypotheses of this paper are based on two fundamental theories, namely the theory of individualism vs. collectivism and the theory of high context vs. low context cultures. English and Mandarin Chinese are analyzed to represent two of the most influential languages from West and East.

How do people from diverse cultural backgrounds perceive the world differently? What is the mutual influence of culture and language on each other? How do Eastern and Western cultures differentiate from each other linguistically and culturally? How does intercultural miscommunication emerge? What are the barriers to intercultural communication? The answers lie in the study of intercultural miscommunication and the comparative study of language and culture, more specifically, the study of linguistic and sociocultural influence on

intercultural communication. These questions will be analyzed in this thesis, using a combination of theoretical basis and empirical data.

When Easterners encounter Westerners, intercultural miscommunication may occur in diverse situations. Recognizing the importance of improving one's linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence helps a foreign language speaker to raise sensitivity about the prevalent existence of misunderstanding during interactions with people from other cultural backgrounds. In a more and more globalized world today, a foreign language learner can only develop better skills for intercultural communication and understanding of people from foreign cultures by combining linguistic and cultural components in their studies.

11.4. Zusammenfassung

Sprache gibt Menschen die Möglichkeit zu kommunizieren, während Kultur dazu beiträgt, sich voneinander zu unterscheiden und gleichzeitig gegenseitiges Verständnis fördert. Mit dem rapiden Anstieg interkultureller Kommunikation im Geschäftsbereich im akademischen Umfeld, sowie im Privat- oder öffentlichen Bereich, hat die Notwendigkeit ausreichender Sprachkenntnisse und der Entwicklung eines Bewusstseins für interkulturelle Herausforderungen deutlich zugenommen.

Eine Sprache zu beherrschen setzt mehr als das pure Lernen von linguistischen Aspekten wie Syntax, Semantik und Phonetik voraus. Mindestens ebenso wichtig ist die Implementierung kulturell bezogenen Wissens, wie auch eine unvoreingenommenen Grundhaltung und Toleranz anderen Kulturen gegenüber.

Das Studium interkultureller Kommunikation und auch Fehlkommunikation bietet Studierenden fremder Sprachen eine wertvolle Möglichkeit, das Erlangen einer Sprache ganzheitlich zu betrachten, wobei sowohl die reine Sprache, wie auch die damit verbundene Kultur jeweils einzigartige Charakteristika aufweisen, gleichzeitig aber miteinander interagieren und sich gegenseitig beeinflussen. In diesem Zusammenhang kann Fehlkommunikation sowohl durch ungenügende Sprachkenntnisse als auch durch mangelhafte interkulturelle Kompetenzen entstehen.

Nachdem sowohl das Erlangen linguistischer Fertigkeiten wie auch interkultureller Kompetenzen als Voraussetzung für eine erfolgreiche Kommunikation zwischen Ost und West gesehen werden kann, ist es zielführend, die Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten östlicher und westlicher Sprachen und Kulturen einer näheren Betrachtung zu unterziehen.

Weiters ist es nötig, einige Hauptfaktoren für interkulturelle Fehlkommunikation zu erforschen. Danach werden einige nützliche Anregungen vorgebracht, welche es Gesprächspartnern ermöglichen sollen, Stereotypen, Vorurteile und interkulturelle Ängste abzubauen, sowie ihre linguistischen und soziokulturellen Fähigkeiten zu stärken.

Das Ziel dieses Werks liegt darin, Leser/innen einen umfassenden Überblick über das Studium interkultureller Fehlkommunikation bereitzustellen. Vor dem Hintergrund der steigenden Zahl interkultureller Kontakte zwischen östlichen und westlichen Staaten, basieren die in diesem Werk vorgestellten Hypothesen auf zwei grundsätzlichen Theorien, nämlich der Gegenüberstellung von Individualismus versus Kollektivismus, wie auch die Gegenüberstellung von Hoch- Kontext versus Niedrig-Kontext Kulturen. Als zwei der jeweils wohl einflussreichsten Sprachen aus Ost und West werden Englisch und Mandarin Chinesisch analysiert.

Auf welche Weise nehmen Menschen verschiedener Kulturen die Welt unterschiedlich wahr? Wie beeinflussen sich Kultur und Sprache wechselseitig? Wie wird die verflochtene Beziehung von Sprache und Kultur definiert? Wodurch unterscheiden sich östliche und westliche Kulturen linguistisch und kulturell? Wodurch entsteht interkulturelle Fehlkommunikation? Worin liegen die Barrieren für interkulturelle Kommunikation? Die Antworten auf diese Fragen liegen im Studium interkultureller Fehlkommunikation und im vergleichenden Studium von Sprache und Kultur, im speziellen der Analyse linguistischer und soziokultureller Einflüsse auf interkulturelle Kommunikation. Die Analyse dieser Fragen wird in dieser Arbeit mit Hilfe einer Kombination aus theoretischer Basisarbeit und dem Sammeln empirischer Daten bewerkstelligt.

Wenn Angehörige östlicher und westlicher Kulturen aufeinander treffen, kann es in unterschiedlichsten Bereichen zu interkultureller Fehlkommunikation kommen. In einer mehr und mehr globalisierten Welt ist es nötig, Studierende fremder Sprachen durch die Schaffung eines Bewusstseins für die Bedeutung linguistischer Fähigkeiten, in Verbindung mit interkultureller Kompetenz, für weit verbreitete Formen interkultureller Fehlkommunikation zu sensibilisieren und so ein besseres Verständnis für Angehörige anderer Kulturen zu erlangen.

11.5. Curriculum Vitae

Education

- **Magister Study English / American Studies and Economics**
University Vienna, Austria 2006 – present
- **Bachelor-Study English Translation**
University Hunan, China 2001 – 2004
- **School-Certificate Examination**
Chang Jun Middle/High School, Changsha, China 1994 – 2000

Professional Experience

- **English, Mandarin & Computing Coach** Institute Fun-Bildung, Vienna, Austria, 2007 - present
- **English Coach** Dancing School Stanek, Vienna, Austria, 2011 - present
- **Journalist** Europe Hua Xin Newspaper, Vienna, Austria, 2009 - present
- **Assistant Manager 5*** Preess Hotel, Changsha, China, 2005 - 2006
- **Sales Consultant** Hunan Silk Export/Import Co., Ltd, Hunan, China, 2003 - 2005
- **Program Organizer** - Hunan TV, Business Channel, Hunan, China, 2003 - 2004

Languages

- Chinese: Native tongue
- English: Fluent in speaking and writing
- German: Fluent in speaking and writing
- Japanese: Basic knowledge

Further Education

- **German Qualification Exam, Niveau C1** VWU Vienna, Austria 2006
- **Driving License** 2005 in China
- **Basic course of Hotel Management** 2005
- **Basic course of Traveling Guide** University Hunan 2004
- **Computer skills**: up-to-date Windows with MS Office, Mac Office, Internet & eMail, HTML & FTP, Photo editing, Photoshop, etc.