

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LINGUACULTURAL FEATURES OF ENGLISH AND KOREAN LANGUAGES

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Abstract. *Language is the tool with which we become aware of ourselves as one cultural being and of others equally as other cultural beings. Being aware of the logic underlying language will help people understand better their own reasoning and cultural context from which it comes, as well as the other's viewpoint. This also helps participants in conversation go beyond comprehending the surface meaning of the words to discovering the logic of their interlocutor's utterances ultimately for better and effective communications. In this article, we are going to analyze English and Korean languages in term of the interrelation between a culture and language.*

Key words: *linguistics, Korean, English, Socio-cultural, Causality-agency, yes-no questions, ellipsis.*

СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРНЫХ ОСОБЕННОСТЕЙ АНГЛИЙСКОГО И КОРЕЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКОВ

Аннотация. *Язык — это инструмент, с помощью которого мы осознаем себя как одно культурное существо и других в равной степени как другие культурные существа. Знание логики, лежащей в основе языка, поможет людям лучше понять собственные рассуждения и культурный контекст, из которого они исходят, а также точку зрения другого человека. Это также помогает участникам разговора перейти от понимания поверхностного значения слов к раскрытию логики высказываний собеседника, что в конечном итоге способствует лучшему и эффективному общению. В этой статье мы собираемся проанализировать английский и корейский языки с точки зрения взаимосвязи между культурой и языком.*

Ключевые слова: *языкознание, корейский, английский, социокультурный, причинно-следственная связь, да-нет вопросы, многоточие.*

INTRODUCTION

The fact there is a significant difference in Western and Eastern cultures is not new in the literature. Edward T. Hall stated the difference, adopting the term “low vs. high” contexts, the key idea being how a person is perceived in a certain culture. In the Western low-context culture, a person is perceived as a selfbounded, impermeable free agent, while, on the other hand, in the Eastern high-context culture a person is connected in terms of his or her relations to the whole, such as family and society.

Koreans and English people do differ profoundly, at least, substantially on the average in their systems of thought - their worldviews and cognitive processes - then in their attitudes and beliefs and in their values and preferences. The Korean society has the interdependent collectivistic “we” perspective, while the British culture reveals the independent individualistic “I” perspective. Perspectives or ways of thinking as the cultural heritages of societies are reflected in collectively held values of the members of a particular society and are reinforced and

transmitted from generation to generation through basic institutions such as the family, the school, and the state. In the next chapter I will discuss how these different perspectives are reflected on languages.

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

These differences even can be illustrated in a language. We are going to analyze cultural and linguistic distinguishing features of English and Korean languages.

Yes-No questions. For Yes-No questions, if someone asks a positive question, Koreans answer as native English speakers do. However, if the question is negative, the confusion comes in. Koreans answer “Yes, it wasn’t there” instead of “No, it wasn’t there,” or “No, it was there” instead of “Yes, it was there.” This contradiction between the first yes-no response and the following statement’s assertion bewilders native English speakers. What happens? Koreans’ yes and no has different functions compared to that of English native speakers. The native English speaker’s yes and no is to confirm his/her statement, that is, what he or she will say next, whereas the Korean’s yes and no reveals quite a different reference. Its first communication goal is to respond to what the other participant said, that is, to signal that “I” followed well what “you” said up to now. Koreans’ yes and no is the other participant “you”-centered, whereas English yes and no is the speaker “I”-centered.

Agency Construction. According to Choe (2011), when Korean speakers create a sentence to express an event, they tend to ask who or what the event is about, while on the other hand, English speakers ask what motion or changes occur in the event and what is involved in it. The initial planning of an English sentence is devoted to the identification of arguments based on transitivity, unlike in Korean where the initial step is the identification of a topic, that is, “*What is going on.*” Two sentences below convey the same argument that the speaker bought a toaster which did not work and the speaker wants the money back.

(a) *I bought this toaster yesterday, but it doesn’t work. I want a refund.*

(b) *You sold me this yesterday, but it doesn’t work. I want my money back.*

In terms of agency, the sentences (a) and (b) convey different meaning in that (b) is stated with implication that the shopkeeper made some mistakes. My Korean acquaintance confirmed that he/she would never say (b) under any circumstances especially in the beginning of conversation even if it is very clear that the shopkeeper tried to cheat. For Koreans, a “face”-threatening situation has to be avoided at whatever costs. They do not give much importance to the correctness or exactness of the description of the events in terms of causality-agency. Their process of attention, perception and reasoning is focused on establishing harmonious, at least, neutral relationship between the participants. Confrontation and debate are undesirable. Instead of pinpointing who does what, Koreans feel satisfied that his/her intention is well carried out by indirect statements. However, this kind of indirect speech often leaves Westerners – especially Americans - quite frustrated. English is “agentive” in the sense that the language conveys “The self [subject of sentence] has operated on the world. Korean language is in general “non-agentive.”

RESEARCH RESULTS

Ellipsis, to Leave It in the Air. According to Confucian teaching, the stability of society is based on unequal relationships between people (e.g. master-follower, father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband–wife, and senior-junior). These relationships are based on mutual and complementary obligations. According to Hofstede (2001), the Korean society exerts strong

power distance. In this context, it is quite natural that Koreans do not necessarily feel their competence as decision makers is on the line when they have to make a choice.

The most common way of refusing for Koreans is by not completing utterances. “Omission of main clauses is a productive mechanism for performing indirect speech acts in Korean since main clauses usually carry the speaker’s assertion”. (Byon, 2005. Recitation from Lee (2011)).

However, this discrepancy often leads to misunderstanding. As Nisbett (2003) explains, *Westerners-and especially Americans- are apt to find Asians hard to read because Asians are likely to assume that their point has been made indirectly and with finesse. Meanwhile, the Westerner is in fact very much in the dark. Asians, in turn, are apt to find Westerners – perhaps especially Americans - direct to the point of condescension or even rudeness (Nisbett, 61).*

What is going wrong here? The reality tells a rather different story. For Koreans [Asians], to leave the conversation unfinished in the air is one way to show politeness and respect for the other participant. It is a token of deference (see Hwang, 2000). Koreans consider it to be rude to have the participant take the final decision without room to add his own decision or thought: remember that in Asian societies, debate is not recommended because it shows disharmony is on the line. Confrontation and dissent in opinion should be avoided.

Let’s see a toothpaste commercial on Korean T.V.

Interviewer: What do you think after applying this product?

Interviewee 1: It seems that I feel clean.

Interviewer: Teeth became clean!

Interviewee 2: It is as if the smell disappeared.

Interviewer: The smell is gone!

The underlying strategy is clear: The interviewees transferred their authority decision makers or saying the ultimatum to the interviewer. For Westerners, it could be construed as hesitation or a kind of manipulation to avoid the answer. In Koreans’ point of view, it reveals speakers’ consideration and concern for the listeners, the other participant in conversation. Furthermore, for the Korean viewers, the strategy to leave it the air enhances the truthfulness of the interviewees’ statements.

CONCLUSION

People hold the beliefs they hold because of the way they think, and they think the way they do because of the nature of the societies they live in. The human mind is socially constructed notably by language, and people make linguistic choices to make meaning in the social context of use. Understanding what the other participant the in conversation said required sensitivity to both linguistic forms and their underlying sociocultural roots. Linguistic choices become more complicated when participants are anchored by different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. English has the international precedence of Lingua Franca or World English, which means that its speakers are not limited to just one country and cultural differences are almost always involved. The importance of understanding diverse sociolinguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds increases even more than ever.

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