Communicative purpose and style – a cultural comparison

Why?

The purpose of the study is to find out if people being part of specific cultures have certain communicative purposes and if these purposes significantly differ between cultures. A second, and secondary, purpose is to find possible communicative styles or patterns of expression within culture groups.

How?

The study is based on a questionnaire filled in by 300 participants. The participants are from many cultures, being in western Sweden (autumn 2014) to study in international university programs. Out of the 300 participants three larger groups between 40 and 50 individuals comes from Sweden, Germany and China.

One part of the questionnaire presents statements about 17 different communicative purposes. The participants can either agree or disagree with the statement. In another part of the questionnaire the participants can choose from different tendencies to communicate or express oneself (influenced by Halls dimensions of high and low context and high and low contact).

What?

Five out of 17 communicative purposes were more often agreed upon and there were no statistically significant differences between the culture groups. This suggests that we might have universal tendencies when it comes to why we communicate. We communicate to:

- share and increase enjoyment
- create or strengthen social bonds
- become informed
- coordinate, collaborate and/or cooperate
- share experiences

Three less "popular" communicative purposes differ between culture groups in a statistically significant way.

There are also some statistically significant differences between the three culture groups that are in line with the known tendencies based on high and low context cultures and high and low contact cultures. Chinese rely more on indirect and non-verbal ways to communicate. Swedes avoid eye contact more often. Chinese thinks that self-disclosure is less important. Swedes don't reciprocate self-disclosure. Germans like to be in control when they communicate.

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