Module 5

Communication and Culture 1

Introduction

Culture and communication are two big concepts that cannot be talked about separately. Culture influences communication because communication is shaped by deeply held cultural values and beliefs. The way we communicate and the meanings we make are defined by cultural norms. Likewise, communication influences culture because culture is enacted through communication. As Edward T. Hall, who is credited with founding the field of intercultural communication, once said, "Culture is communication."

This module explores some aspects of intercultural communication, and in particular Hall's framework of high-context and low-context communication. Intercultural communication refers to communication between people coming from different cultural backgrounds. It is not a new field but it is all the more relevant in the era of globalization where cross-cultural interaction and exchange is taking place much more extensively and rapidly in the workplace, popular media, and cyberspace.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this module, you should be able to:

1. Differentiate communication in high-context and low-context cultures; and
2. Analyze Filipino communicative behaviors.

1.0   Cultural Differences in Communication

Some people speak frankly and directly while others "beat around the bush." Communication between these two types of people can be fraught with tension. What accounts for the difference in communication styles? From Hall we learn that the difference is cultural and not simply a matter of personality.

Activity 1

Read pp. 3-31 of *Understanding Cultural Differences* by Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall which is available at http://teaching.up.edu/bus511/xculture/Hall%20and%20Hall%201990,%20ch1.pdf.

Answer the following study questions:

1. What kinds of stimuli are defined by context?
2. How are these stimuli different in high and low context cultures?
3. Give examples coming from your own experiences.

We can say that when we communicate, we bring into it a cultural understanding of the concepts of time, space, and context that will shape the meanings embedded in our messages even as the process of communication (in turn) shapes our understanding of these three concepts. Notions of time, space and relationships vary among cultures. These constitute contexts that are inextricably bound with the meanings of messages conveyed in interactions. If we google the dictionary meaning of context (a noun), we will find that it is "the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed."

The importance of context in messaging and interaction is defined by cultural orientations. Some cultures are characterized by high-context communication and other cultures by low-context communication. High-context (HC) communication is indirect rather than explicit. It assumes that the people who are interacting are familiar with each other and the communication situation, and can rely on implicit and nonverbal cues to communicate with and understand each other. In contrast, low-context (LC) communication is explicit and detailed. More of the information in a message is spelled out and defined. Direct or explicit verbal messages

are valued more than the non-verbal.

As stated earlier, context is shaped by a culture's notions of time, space, and relationships. In high-context cultures, families tend to close-knit and there is centralized social structure. They share communal spaces and can tolerate narrower personal spaces. Time is understood to be fluid and not fixed, a process that belongs to others and nature. In low-context cultures, relationships are formal and brief, there is a stronger sense of individuality, and social structure is decentralized. Personal space and privacy are important; hence space is compartmentalized. An individual's time is her own; thus, events and tasks have defined schedules.

2.0   Filipino Communicative Behaviour

It is said that among all Asians, Filipinos are the most Westernized. The American influence in particular is readily apparent in the Philippines, from the American shops and fast-food in every street corner to the forms of entertainment, such as music, TV shows, and movies, that Filipinos enjoy. There is also the Filipino's use of American English. English is one of the official languages in the Philippines, and it is spoken by millions of Filipinos. According to the Education First (EF) Ltd. report in 2016, the Philippines is one of the top 15 countries in the world that have the best non-native English speakers. Many expressions used in social media and in everyday conversations among Filipinos are American.

Activity 2

Watch Nas Daily's One Minute video about the Philippines which is available at http://go.-globe.com.ph/videos/featured-videos/2017/january/how-american-is-the-philippines.html. Do you agree with the video's claim that the Philippines is very American? Why or why not?

However, the Americanized Filipino culture, according to Melba Maggay (2002), is an external appearance (*panlabas na anyo)* and may not accurately reflect the entirety of the Filipino culture. Filipinos have an internal culture *(panloob na kultura*) which can be difficult to understand from a Western standpoint. And the Filipino way of communicating can be confusing for many foreigners. While Americans, for example, might prefer a more direct and straightforward manner of exchanging information, Filipinos tend to communicate through *pakiramdaman* and *pagpapaligoy-ligoy,* which rely on the implicit connection between two speakers. Using Hall's terminology, Filipinos tend to engage in high-context communication.

In the previous section, we learned that people from high-context cultures communicate through context-dependent non-verbal codes and meanings that are implicitly shared both by the speaker and the listener, whereas a low-context culture prefers a more literal and explicit exchange of information. Whereas the former focuses on the communication context, the latter puts more importance on the message content. Beating around the bush, or *pagpapaligoy-ligoy*, is an aspect of communication in high-context cultures where there is a higher level of shared understanding between people. According to Maggay (2002), our long history of communal relationship has resulted in a heightened sensitivity and shared understanding in which messages need not always be expressed in words, but are conveyed through nonverbal codes that are understood by both speaker and listener. However, in countries like the United States where societies are more atomized than communal, it is important that messages be explicitly stated and expressed in a straightforward manner to avoid confusion.

It should be noted, however, that there is no single homogenous Filipino culture. As an archipelago, the Philippines consists of rich and diverse cultures, each with their own ways of living and understanding of the world. Language, according to Everett (2013) is more than just a tool to exchange information but is a cultural tool that shapes the way members of a community behave, think and know, and that which arises out of a "social need for meaning and community" (p. xi). Language is produced by culture as it also produces culture through usage and interaction. This means that a language – with all its vocabulary, form and structure – reflects and reproduces a social reality of its own. For example, a Batangueño and a

Lagunense who both come from the same Tagalog region will have different understandings of the Tagalog word *"banas."* It means "being irked" for the former, and "feeling hot or humid" for the latter. How much more for words that come from two entirely different languages? The Philippines has more than 170 languages. This number is an indicator of the differences and diversity in cultures in the country. Hence, care should be taken in characterizing Filipino communication behaviors. As a matter of fact, intercultural communication may transpire even between Filipinos talking to one another. A Filipino Muslim woman from Mindanao and a teenage Filipino urban dweller, although both can speak Filipino and are both Filipinos, might have a different understanding of the world and a distinct set of communication behaviors.

Nevertheless, the concepts presented in this section are attempts by Filipino scholars to distinguish our unique way of communicating on the basis of our history, culture, psyche, and language as a people. Hence the use of the term "Filipino Communicative Behaviors" rather than "Communicative Behaviors of Filipinos" to refer to these concepts. The former refers to communication based on Filipino experiences, culture, mentality, and orientations, while the latter classifies communicative behaviors based solely on nationality. Jose Lacson from the UP College of Mass Communication coined the term Filipino Communicative Behavior (FCB) in 2005 to refer to "concepts of awareness, knowledge, attitude, values, beliefs, opinions, tendencies, predispositions, practices and perceptions relating to communication behavior of Filipinos" (p. 2). Although he did not enumerate specific Filipino communicative behaviors, his work provided observations that could lead to developing theories about our unique ways of communicating.

Activity 3

Read "Mindsets of the Filipino: A Research Agenda for Filipino Communicative Behavior," Lacson's professorial lecture, and reflect on the mindsets he enumerated. Answer the following study questions:

1. Do you agree with Lacson's observations? Which parts do you agree with and which parts do you disagree with?
2. Can you think of specific examples in which the mindsets describe by Lacson apply?
3. Do you think that these mindsets are innately Filipino? Or are they the result of socio-historical and cultural influences? Explain.

Be ready to share your reflections with your classmates in a small group discussion to be done in class. You could be asked to record your group discussion.

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For Lacson, mindsets are pre-determinants to communicative behavior and stem from a people's traditions, values and belief systems, and the shared experience of a social and natural environment. He observed that there are mindsets that are relevant to Filipino Communicative Behavior, as follows:

1. *Deprivation-Deservation Syndrome* - This refers to people's thinking that they deserve something because they are deprived of something. A manifestation of this are the concepts of *sayang* and *libre;* Filpinos don't want to pass up opportunities, especially things that are available for free.

2. *The Kulang sa Pansin (deprivation of attention/understanding) Syndrome and the Quest for Ownership and Credit Seeking* —This refers to the need for recognition, attention, and being or feeling understood. Concepts related to this include wanting to get credit, the crab-mentality (resenting the success of others because it reflects on us), and *panglalamang* (putting one over the other).

3. *Convenience Approach to Living* on — This refers to the inclination towards the most convenient and easiest way to get things done and achieve goals. It includes asking other persons to do tasks on one's behalf, which explains why fixers abound in our system.

4. *Sense of Humor* — This mindset enables people to cope with hardships in life and gives them relief from hard work. It is an indication of a pragmatic worldview where there is hopefulness but also an awareness of limitations and some things being beyond one's control.

5. *The Concept of Accountability* — This has to do with the tendency to evade accountability through *palusot* and by blaming others for their mistakes.

Lacson provides a "matrix of contexts and perspectives, illustrating the multiple layers of thinking which precedes and determines communicative behavior" (p. 10).

3.0   Filipino Communication Habits *(Mga Kagawiang Pangkomunikasyon ng Filipino)*
Melba Padilla Maggay studied the cross-cultural flow of communication among Filipinos in order to understand and illustrate our unique ways of communication. She looked into native words in various Philippine languages and studied different cultural records and practices of Filipinos. Her work was heavily influenced by Sikolohiyang Pilipino, particularly Zeus Salazar's concepts of "loob" and "labas" and Dr. Virgilio Enriquez's scholarship on "kapwa."

Activity 4

Read the first chapter, "Mga katutubong pamamaraan ng interpersonal na komunikasyon," of Melba Maggay's *Pahiwatig: Kagawiang pangkomunikasyon ng Filipino* published in 2002 by Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Answer the following study questions based on what you read:
1. Which of the 10 indigenous Filipino ways of interpersonal communication that Maggay discusses do you find yourself and/or people you know engaging in a lot?
2. What are the motivations for these interpersonal communication behaviors? What are the drawbacks or the problems that arise from this way of communicating?

3. The communication behaviors that Maggay describes can be observed in oral and face-to-face interpersonal interactions. Are there manifestations of these in written and online communication behaviors of Filipinos, for example on social media? Cite examples.

4. Maggay characterizes these behaviors as indigenous Filipino ways of interpersonal communication. What do you think of this characterization? Are these communication behaviors innate to Filipinos? What socio-historical and other factors would account for these ways of communicating?

5. How do the concepts proposed by Maggay compare to and relate with the Filipino communication behaviors described by Lacson?

To recap, from her research Maggay identified the following indigenous Filipino ways of interpersonal communication:

1. *Pagpapahiwatig* — getting a message across in an indirect manner, especially when the message is sensitive, embarrassing, or potentially offensive. *Pahiwatig* could be verbal (*parinig* or *padaplis*), non-verbal (use of silence or other non-verbal codes, like squinting of the eyes, raising of the eyebrows, etc.), or a combination of the two (as can be observed in *paglalambing* and *pagtatampo*).

2. *Mensaheng may tagapamagitan* — communication through a third party who serves as a bridge, in order to avoid conflict. Related concepts are *pahatid, parating, pasabi, pabilin*, and *paabot.*

3. *Pagbubunyag* — bringing what is inside out to someone (*panloob* to *panlabas).* Related words include *ipagtapat* (disclosing to a trusted person), *ihinga* (disclosing anxieties, secrets, and other internal discomfort for relief), *ilabas* (revealing information to the public or the authority), and *ilahad* (reporting an organized narrative to another who is not necessarily a confidant).

4. *Pagpapakitang-giliw* — putting on a pleasant and gracious demeanor to create a good impression (*pabalat-bunga, pakitang-tao, palabas,* and *dating*).

5. *Paglalantad ng sarili* — showing off or displaying haughtiness when presenting oneself (*pakitang-gilas, porma, garbo, bongga, bidahan)* or relating to others (*bola).* Often this behavior elicits derision from other Filipinos.

6. *Tuwirang pagsasagutan* — argumentation in formal and public events (*balitaktakan*, *pagtatalo, taltalan, talastasan).* Although this communication practice is confrontational, speakers are still careful with their word choice, the flow of conversation is laden with detours and segues, and direct disagreements are prefaced with apologetic disclaimers.

7. *Pagsisiwalat ng mga pansariling impormasyon* — revelation of private information to the public, reflecting lack of the concept of privacy and a blurring of the line that separates information for a trusted circle (*pang-atin)* and for the public (*pang-kanila).* Related concepts include *ipangalandakan*, *itsismis, ibandila, ipagladlaran,* and *ipagbukambibig.*

8. *Pakikipag-sosyalan* — engaging in social interaction, group conversation, and intimate conversations, such as *kwentuhan*, *huntahan, daldalan,* and *dakdakdan.*

9. *Pagbibigay ng balita* reported or announcing news — This includes *ipahayag, ibalita, ipaalam, ipaabot, ipatalastas,* and *magbigay ng babala.*

10. *Katutubong retorika* — indigenous rhetorical forms or discourses, such as *balagtasan, balitaw, putungan, ambahan, oggayam* and *bugtungan.*

According to Maggay, although it is true that implicit communication (*mapagpahiwatig na pagpapahayag*) is prevalent in Filipino culture (high-context), there are contexts that require direct and explicit communication (low-context), such as when there is a high degree of social distance between speaker and listener, and when the other person is an Outsider rather

than One-of-Us. Table 1 presents a classification of Filipino Communication Behaviors based on their directness and indirectness. According to Maggay, the use of Direct and Indirect Communication Behaviors is heavily influenced by the social distance between communicators. Filipinos communicate more indirectly with Outsiders (*Ibang-Tao*) than with people who share the same culture with them (*Di Ibang-Tao*). This behavior allows Filipinos to avoid offending and creating bad impressions among strangers. Similarly, Filipinos communicate with someone of a higher rank more formally and directly than with someone with a lower social position.

Table 1. Direct and Indirect Filipino Communication Behaviors

Tuwiran (Direct)	Di-Tuwiran (Indirect)
Pagbubunyag	Pagpapahiwatig
Paglalantad ng sarili	Tagapamagitan
Tuwirang pagsasagutan	Pagpapakitang-tao
Pagsisiwalat ng mga pansariling impormasyon	
Pakikipag-sosyalan	
Pagbibigay ng balita	
Katutubong retorika	

This is the reason why we Filipinos oftentimes display timidity and shyness during first encounters. But as soon as we become familiar and comfortable with one another, we tend to shift from indirect to more direct communication behaviors. However, because of various foreign influences and the pervasiveness of both broadcast and new media, these behaviors are now being challenged. One need only log in to any social media platform and read the comments below news posts to see how discussions between total strangers end up with more differences than agreements.

Activity 5

If you recorded your group discussion in Activity 3, review the recording and identify the communicative behaviors exhibited by members of the group during the discussion. Use the following questions as a guide in your analysis:

1. What are the most common communication habits and what are the least common?

2. How does context account for these behaviors? Characterize the group dynamics in terms of whether it was high-context or low-context.

3. What are the consequences of the communication habits or behaviors you observed in this particular case? For example, how did these behaviors impact on whether and to what extent your group managed to cover a lot of ground in your discussion, or go beyond the surface (i.e. the impact on the quality of the discussion)? What was the impact on the degree of participation in the discussion of the different group members?

Write a one-page synthesis of your observations and analysis.

Alternatively, observe a TV interview or forum on a public issue (or review a recording of it) and identify the communicative behaviors present and analyze the interaction using the same questions listed above. Write a one-page synthesis of your observations and analysis.

Conclusion

The lessons discussed above shed light not only on how we can better communicate with fellow Filipinos, but also on how our culture and values are deeply entrenched in the ways we interact and communicate with other people. By analyzing our communication behaviors, we also highlight the things that make us Filipino, underscore the depth of our interpersonal relationships, and identify practices that must be improved. It may be said that it was easy for our colonizers to take over and establish a new socio-political order in our communities because of our hospitality and aversion to confrontation. During the colonial era, protest and resis-

tance were furtive and stealthy, and these behavior and mentality may have transcended time and become part of our culture. Maggay concludes, "*Ang pagkakasanay sa pailalim na paghihimagsik noong panahon ng kolonisasyon ay maaring siyang pinanggalingan ng pagkasuwail natin sa kasalukuyan. Madalas tayong magtangkang lumusot at ikutan ang batas, at nang maisahan ang mga autoridad at maykapangyarihan.*" Today, studying Filipino communication behaviors can enable us to analyze and critique how we as a people and how our leaders articulate and negotiate our national interests in diplomatic talks with foreign countries like China, Kuwait, and the United States.

While culture is dynamic, we should be critical of the kind of changes that are taking place and the influences that make these changes possible. For instance, the issues of globalization have never been so relevant as they are today. We are witness to the Filipino diaspora in different places in the world and to the strong presence of foreign cultures in the Philippines. Media, too, play a very important role in shaping our sense of national identity as many of us are avid fans of foreign pop culture and are consumers of mostly foreign content and products. The advent of new media, specifically social media, has also greatly changed the way we behave and express ourselves.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that culture and communication are interrelated. Each influences the other. Our ways of communicating reflect our culture and values, and at the same time our interaction and communication shape our culture. Communication, therefore, is not just an act of talking *about* the world, but also a process of creating our identity and our realities.

Summative Assessment

The class will be divided into five groups. Each group will be assigned to observe and identify manifestations of low- and high-context communication in the following situations:

   a. family

b. workplace

c. classroom

d. public space (marketplace, park, transportation, etc)

e. televised talk show

You may observe Filipinos talking to fellow Filipinos, and/or Filipinos talking to foreigners.

Use the following guide questions for your analysis:

1. What Filipino communication behaviors/mindsets did you observe?

2. What do you think is the difference, if any, in communication among Filipinos and in communication between Filipinos and foreigners?

3. Based on your observation, do you think that communication between Filipinos is also a form of intercultural communication? How?

4. Do you think the behaviors displayed by Filipinos which you observed reflect Filipino culture and values? Why do you say so?

Write a one-page synthesis of your observations and analysis. Each group will present in class the synthesis of your observation and analysis.

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