International Communication: Commonalities and Savoirs to Bridge the Communication Gap

How shall I talk of the sea to the frog,
If it has never left his pond?
How shall I talk of the frost of the bird of the summerland,
If it has never left the land of its birth?
How shall I talk of life with sage,
If he is prisoner of his doctrine?

Chung Tsu – 4th Century BCE (A Central Concern, 2000)

This passage written thousands of years ago conveys some of the complexities of intercultural communication. It metaphorically describes how difficult it can be for people with different perceptions and frames of reference to understand each other.

In this global business world, it is important for business to find commonalities. As country boundaries blur, one can easily find worldwide brands and logos everywhere. While a consistent logo and message is important for product and name recognition among consumers, businesses must also consider if meanings are altered by translation, language, and culture.

Intercultural Awareness

Whether an employee is giving a presentation or creating a logo, intercultural competence and awareness will help the message to be effective. Intercultural competence is the degree to which a person is culturally aware of differences. Intercultural awareness (IA) is the "cognitive aspect of intercultural communication competence" that helps individuals understand one another (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2005). IA involves attitudes and behaviors.

In 1993, Bennett established the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, a six-step process that describes the cognitive process that an individual goes through when interacting with other cultures (Bennett, 1993).

1. Ethnocentrism: the idea that one's culture is superior to others
2. Defensiveness: the perception of cultural differences as negative or threatening
3. Minimization of perceived differences: the belief that differences among cultures are minimal
4. Acceptance: the belief that cultural differences can either be positive or negative
5. Adaptation: the desire to change and adapt to another's culture
6. Adoption and integration: the behavior of adopting another's culture

The Great Global Divide: Crossing the Cultural Bridge with Model Behavior

To build intercultural awareness, knowledge of savoirs is important. In French, the word savoir means to know. Savoirs are the cultural references and foundational
knowledge of a culture. The following intercultural competence model shows four savoires (Byram & Zarate, 1997):

**Savoir apprendre** means to know what to learn, seeking to understand another's culture. If a person understands another culture, he or she is more likely to interpret messages accurately.

**Savoirs** are a knowledge and awareness of message meanings, values, and sociolinguistic knowledge in a specific cultural context. For example, in Latin America, it is important to ask about family before engaging in business negotiations or discussions.

**Savoir être** is concerned with understanding where culture and identity intersect and the social attitudes and perceptions associated with that particular culture.

**Savoir-faire** is knowledge about how to do or make something; it integrates the first three concepts into real-time interactions.

**Communication and Culture**

It is important to know word translations and know what words mean, but it is equally important to know how to respond to various cultures and situations. For example, dialects and norms change from region to region and adapting to these norms is critical. Learning to deal with reactions from native speakers in respective regions will help business and relationships.

These are just a few of the intercultural awareness theories and models that exist to help members of a global world understand cultural differences and similarities for more successful intercultural communication strategies.

**References**


