Research Article

PROBLEMS OF LINGUA FRANCA COMMUNICATION AND A WAY TO SOLVE THEM

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ABSTRACT

Due to the globalization of the world, communication becomes more of a problem of linguistics than of technology and distance. Individuals have a chance to instantly communicate with a person in another part of the world, however, there is another limitation that poses a threat to a beneficial and successful communication between individuals – linguistics. Based on David Hume's definition of human nature, it is very important for a person to be able to understand the psychological background of the individual one tries to communicate through lingua franca in order to minimize miscommunication.

INTRODUCTION

This essay is about using English as a lingua franca, where the aim is to define the problematic aspect of it and then propose a way to solve it. Firstly, this article will discuss different ways of defining and describing lingua franca communication with different problems that occur during the process. The existing research will be provided in this article with the results and knowledge that it created. This article will also discuss different approaches to studying and analyzing lingua franca communication. The central problem of this issue is miscommunication, where the discussion of the explanations proposed by different researchers will be provided. Finally, this article will provide concluding remarks regarding the new approach that could potentially solve the miscommunication occurring in lingua franca communication.

According to Seidlhofer (2004) there are two central definitions of lingua franca. One is formulated by Firth (1996) and states that a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication. The other is formulated by House (1999) and states that ELF interactions are defined as interactions between members of two or more different lingua-cultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue.

According to Meierkord (2000) there has been two main approaches of studying and analyzing lingua franca conversation. The first approach involves individuals with European background and the other is more international. Both approaches studied the ways individuals tried to achieve the goal of their conversation. This study shows that lingua franca communication is cooperative, where individuals try to work for achieving the goal of their conversation. They try to build common ground in terms of the understanding of different terms they are employing, which creates a very positive foundation with which they work on achieving the positive result of their negotiation (Meierkord, 2000). However, there is a problem of miscommunication among the individuals using lingua franca for communication.

Kaur (2011) states that there has been a lack of commonality among the definitions of what miscommunication means. She differentiates between 'misunderstanding' and 'non-understanding'. She proposes the definition put forward by Bremer et al (1996), where the authors state that when one cannot make sense of what another person tries to say, it is called non-understanding and when the interpretation of said and heard differs from each other, this is called miscommunication.Mauranen (2006) states that miscommunication can occur in every type of communication, however, lingua franca communication is more susceptible than any other. The reason is that the speakers have not perfected

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the use of the language through creating the 'sharedness' – where they communicate with the same subconscious, having the same cultural and linguistic knowledge of the language in use. Another assumption that she mentions is that miscommunication might not be happening between the speakers as, due to their limitations, they would use simple terms to express their ideas, which would make the understanding simpler than it is proposed by other authors.

Meierkord (2000) differenciates between different kinds of lingua franca communication – native-non native, via a professional or non-professional interpreter. The author states that individuals communicate through English as a lingua franca through the lense of their cultural background, where they use the ways and means of expressing themselves as they would use if communicating in their mother tongues. The author also states that when individuals learn English language, they have to learn them either in American or British way. This enables them to get a sense of these cultures and incorporate this information during the communication. This complicates the conversations as they are loaded with the information and specifities of not only one but several cultural characteristics. This makes lingua franca communication very difficult where individuals have to adapt to the unexpected circumstances they might encounted and try to understand not only the cultural backhround of the speaker, but the cultural background of the type of English language one might be using (Knapp 1991). Accoring to Koole and Thije (1994), this results in the speakers creating a set of unwritten rules of communication, which the author calls – 'culture constructed in cultural contract'. It might also be called lingua franca culture, which entails different linguistic characteristics. Meierkord (2000) also states that this process also incorporates the understanding of the different stages of language learning that a speaker is at during lingua franca communication.

Koblizkova (2018) carried out a research that involved German, English and Czech students. The aim of this research was to identify implications that the communication between them could potentially have. Firstly, all three parties were analyzed based on their differences in the way they managed conversation through multiple choice discourse completion tasks that involved – the issue of a face, implicitness/ explicitness, positive/negative politeness, and relational and transactional language functions. This process also showed how their motivations differed from each other. All the parties showed similarities in trying to keep the conversation through making relational choices, but English group tried more than their counterparts, which sometimes resulted in miscommunication. Their action differed when presenting what they considered as true. German and Czech groups presented what they thought was true without thinking/minding the effect it could have on their public status. On the other hand, English group only made explicit statements when they thought it would affect their public status if they acted otherwise. Koblizkova states that one of the problems of the usage of English as a lingua franca is that it does not offer a base for different groups to better understand their true motivations and desires. By only providing the means of communicating verbal messages, it leaves a huge gap in the comprehension aspect of the motives.

On the other hand, House (1999) states that during lingua franca conversations, individuals do not focus on the culture as they try their best to communicate the desired ideas. This is called 'the Culture Irrelevance Hypothesis', where it is almost impossible for speakers to concentrate on the cultural background of another individual while doing their best to deliver the message. However, Kaur (2011) thinks that knowledge of the cultural background aids the understanding between individuals using lingua franca for communication.

Mauranen (2012) widens the discussion of the aspects of lingua franca and brings in more practical issues where she states that speakers focus on the message and motivation more than the mistakes one makes during the conversation. Instead of correcting the misuse or misspelling of a speaker, one tries to understand the true meaning of another's message (Mauranen, 2012). According to Widdowson (1983), native speakers choose this strategy as well. For them, it is more important to understand what one means rather than correcting him/her along the way. Guido (2008) states that this is not the case in all the contexts. This is true especially in the context of migration, where individuals are not as cooperative as in other contexts, which makes a conversation more difficult. When individuals try to communicate, the other person does not try to make the meaning out of the word he/she says, one tries to focus on the words spoken by another person and try to act on it. This, as Guido (2008) states, results in misinterpretation and miscommunication between the speakers. According to Mauranen (2012), in order to solve the problem of miscommunication, it is more important to focus on the intention of the speaker than on the mistakes one makes during the communication.

According to Widdowson (1979), English as a lingua franca is not used in the way that is taught to the individuals. The author states that it is used in the way it is authenticated by the individuals. As the language learning is a process of getting familiar with the words, expressions and ideas, making them more personal in order to acquire them, this results in a person making the use of English as a lingua franca part of oneself – an expression of oneself. This includes the grammatical and cultural underpinnings of the person who uses English as a lingua franca (Guido and Seidlhofer, 2014). According to Seidlhofer (2013), individuals who use English as a lingua franca can be examples of innovative and creative users of English language, trying to express their views and ideas through their own means, providing different ways of expressing a similar view or idea.

Schmitz (2017) approaches this issue through political science, in particular, he tries to explain this phenomenon through Marxist lenses. He states that by learning English and using it as lingua franca, individuals empower themselves, which is part of the Marxist thought. This process makes them express their individuality and difference on a global scale, where they do not sound or speak like 'standard Americans from the mid-West'. There are different levels of language learning. One is the near-native-speaker level, where one aqcuires the language to the level that is almost at the native speaker's level. Second is language aqcusition only for the purposes of communicating one's ideas and desires. When one acquires a language at the native speaker's level, one starts to think in the same way as the native people of this language, which allows the speaker to

communicate without any difficulty. One manages to think and do things in the same way as these people. One develops an ability to behave and reason in the same way as these people. With the same theory, the second type of language acquisition does not allow the speaker to yield the same ability. It only allows one to think/do things and reason with one's native language, and only communicate ideas and desires in another language – language as a lingua franca usage.

In order to be able to fully communicate with another person with English as a lingua franca, one has to understand the cultural background of an individual one tries to communicate. However, this is impossible without proper training and preparation. With tourism developing and people travelling in more places than before, it is almost impossible to conduct teaching at this level. There is also a question of desire among the people who travel. This should be taught at schools, where the intended outcome would be to have individuals in different countries who have a basic knowledge of what kind of cultures there are in the world – with allowing to have a direct experience with them through exchange programs. Another way is to introduce different cultural products of different countries – films, books, etc. As the world becomes more global and individuals have an opportunity to achieve success on a global scale, communication is key. Thus, it has to be tackled constructively.David Hume stated that human nature depends on the knowledge one has – a person is what he/she knows. Based on this description of human nature, it is of utmost importance to incorporate teaching of global culture when teaching English language. Not only what their history is, but how to speak and communicate with other people. This would necessitate the incorporation of anthropology in English language teaching, where the level of depth can be decided by the level of English one tries to learn. More advanced English language learning could involve more in-depth anthropological teachings.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this article discussed the theme of lingua franca, where it tried to propose a potential solution to the problem of miscommunication that occurs during the process. Due to the globalization of the world, communication becomes more of a problem of linguistics than of technology and distance. Individuals have a chance to instantly communicate with a person in another part of the world, however, there is another limitation that poses a threat to a beneficial and successful communication between individuals – linguistics. Based on David Hume's definition of human nature, it is very important for a person to be able to understand the psychological background of the individual one tries to communicate through lingua franca in order to minimize miscommunication. In order to achieve this, new approach should be incorporated at schools where students, while learning a lingua franca, also learn the characteristics of different cultures, peoples and behaviors around the world. This means a holistic incorporation of anthropology in the learning process. This could be achieved through teaching English language using anthropological findings and knowledge of different cultures and peoples.

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