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Let's Talk: How Communication Apprehension and Intercultural Communication Affect Intercultural Conflicts and International Relations

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Communication apprehension or anxiety can cause strains on conversations and relationships. This is prevalent in intercultural communication because it can cause intercultural conflicts and strains on international relations. Communication plays such a large role in international relations, however, communicating interculturally can pose barriers. Different cultures communicate differently and when trying to communicate with those outside one's own culture, complications can arise. This apprehension in turn can lead to intercultural conflict. Difficulties communicating interculturally such as language barriers, differences in cultures norms (nonverbal misinterpretation), and preconceptions can lead to communication apprehension, and even intercultural conflict. This research aimed to examine how communication apprehension and intercultural communication affect intercultural conflicts and international relations. Research found communication theory that showed the relevance of communication apprehension and communication breakdowns in intercultural communication. It also looked at causes that contributed to intercultural communication

apprehension. Next, the research examined anecdotal attestations that revealed the extent that ineffective intercultural communication apprehension had on those in intercultural conversations or cross-cultural situations. Lastly, cases were reviewed in which poor intercultural communication resulted in international conflicts and poor international relations. The research found that links can be seen between strayed international relations and communication breakdowns caused by the aforementioned reasons.

Keywords and phrases: *communication apprehension, intercultural communication, intercultural conflict, international relations, communication studies, intercultural communication apprehension*

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Acknowledgments

Research

Originality

Inspiration to pursue this topic came from a lack of interdisciplinary research between international relations and communication studies. A potential connection between the two came about from taking a class in intercultural communication and a class in international relations during the same semester. Through intercultural communication, it was observed that miscommunications, differences in communication styles, and communication apprehension affected intercultural communication. It was also noted that the extent that communication and communication apprehension played in forming and maintaining relationships was significant. Without effective communication, relationships suffer. Through a communication background, this can be seen on a personal level. Through international relations, the importance of relationships between countries, and how conflicts could escalate was seen. The significance of effective communication on a large scale was observed. Political Science and Communication Studies, two seemingly unassociated disciplines are connected by invisible strings. This thesis project analyzed international conflicts and conflict

communication styles. This paper examines poor international relations or conflicts that could be linked back to communication breakdowns. It considers for the effects communication apprehension and intercultural communication have on intercultural conflicts and international relations.

Introduction

Communication apprehension or anxiety can commonly cause strains on conversations and relationships. It can affect any type of relationship: friendship, work relationship, or even the relationship between two countries. Communication apprehension is all the more prevalent in intercultural communication resulting in intercultural conflicts and even strains on international relations. One might not think that communication plays such a large role in international relations, however, communication is the basis for every relationship. Communication is a tool that can be used to escalate or deescalate conflict. Effective communication is vital to maintain good relations.

Communicating interculturally can pose barriers. Different cultures communicate differently and when trying to communicate with those outside one's own culture, complications can arise. Phrases and gestures can mean different things to different groups of people and can be taken in the wrong way. Every culture has norms that those outside that culture can be oblivious to. These factors can lead to communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. When a communication breakdown occurs, the conversation and even relationship can be halted. Because of this, apprehension can be present when communicating interculturally. When one may be scared to speak to someone

outside their own culture because of fear of misunderstanding, they may choose not to speak to them at all. Said communication breakdown or apprehension in turn can lead to intercultural conflict. Once the breakdown occurs and communication is halted, conflict often arises. When a party is misunderstood or apprehensive, both parties are affected, and the relationship is changed. It is difficult to get through conflicts without effective communication.

This can be seen on a personal level, but also on a large scale. When two countries communicate without considering the other's culture and communication style, conflict can rise or escalate. This international conflict can be hard to navigate without effective communication. While the conflict is on a national level, it all stems back to communication between two parties. Difficulties communicating interculturally such as language barriers, differences in cultures norms (nonverbal misinterpretation), and preconceptions can lead to communication apprehension, and even intercultural conflict. Thus, it is important to consider the effects of intercultural communication on intercultural conflict. Links can be seen between strayed international relations and communication conflicts. Intercultural communication can be improved. With education on communication and culture, there is potential for improvements within international relations.

Communication Theory

Communication apprehension or communication anxiety is often present in intercultural communication. When communicating cross-culturally, one must consider the difference in cultural norms. If both communicators are not aware of

the other's cultures, effective communication will not take place. Culture and language differences pose as barriers, as well as non verbals, and dialects within languages. If one is not familiar with the language and cultural norms of other cultures then preconceptions and stereotypes may be all the communicators know about the other's culture, when going into cross-cultural communication. These factors can cause communication apprehension. In theory, this apprehension will affect cultural interactions and international relations.

An article in the European Science Review, titled "Culture and Intercultural Communication in International Relations," sought to examine current communication trends and their effects on modern society. The author asserts that with rapidly changing cultures in society, the only way to manage and reduce international conflicts is through intercultural communication (Agil, 2017). Communication is the best tool to reduce intercultural communication.

An article in the British Journal of Political Science, titled "Cultural Distance and Interstate Conflicts," examines the link between cultural differences (stemming from language barriers, religion, and cross-cultural social values) and international conflicts. The article highlights the importance of communication not only in conflicts among nations, but also that those conflicts stem from cultural differences and misunderstandings. The article finds cultural distance caused by language barriers and religion, and cross-cultural social values are prevalent (Bove and Gokmen, 2017). Both these articles highlight that intercultural conflicts can both be improved if communication styles improve. Utilizing effective communication

The article "Report: Creating Anxiety: Setting the Stage for Intercultural Communication" discusses the underlying risk of conflict in circumstances of intercultural contact. It adds that communication can nurture intelligent direction on "cohesive society" or can increase "cultural dissimilarities" between members of various cultural groups (Gauthier, 2005). The articles find that cultural difference can be one of the largest indicators of possible conflict. This is not necessarily because of the cultural difference but the perception of them.

Communication apprehension is prevalent in intercultural communication. Communication breakdowns happen. This negatively affects the conversation and relationship. Many causes of intercultural communication apprehension or breakdowns stemming from it can be attributed to misconceptions.

Causes of Misconceptions

Communication apprehension can be caused by misconceptions or stereotypes. False information can be spread, and a harmful culture is perpetuated. Many different sources can contribute to this. Being aware of this and cautious of information that is consumed is vital. Communication education is important and knowing what sources to listen to is imperative.

Common stereotypes and misconceptions can stem from a variety of places, the media being one of them. The article "The CNN Effect: The Search for Communication Theory of International Relations" published in the journal *Political Communication* in 2005 analyzes the effect of media communication on international relations. The article took the form of a systematic investigative study on current political communication theories and literature. It looks into the

way news networks form personal beliefs (that can create intercultural communication apprehension) that shape outcomes in international relations (Gilboa, 2005). When the news is not improving the image of cultural diversity and the benefits of effective cross-cultural communication, it does not help but only hinders progress.

Stereotypes can also come from personal conversations or "jokes." The article "Aggressive and Affiliative Humor: Relationships to Aspects of Intercultural Communication" examines the ways in which humor can perpetuate stereotypes and hinder cross-cultural communication. The article states "Humor has long been a means of disparaging those who are different" (Miczo and Welter, 2006). Jokes are often made at the expense of minorities or those who are different. This affiliative humor has been shown to negatively affect intercultural communication apprehension. Some of the jokes stem from ethnocentrism, while some are not necessarily rooted in ethnocentrism, but still perpetuate a damaging culture. Jokes such as this form and contribute to unfair stereotypes. These stereotypes in turn can cause intercultural communication apprehension.

The way an organization is set up can contribute to communication breakdowns as well. If an organization is "Intercultural Communication: A Key Element in Global Strategies" notes that "most large-and medium-size businesses conduct operations globally" (Spinks, 1997) While they state, "communication crossing national boundaries—international communication—is not necessarily different from any other communication activity" (Spinks, 1997),

intercultural communication is. Different cultural factors such as language and cultural norms can hinder progress within companies.

Likewise, to the way certain companies are structured, educational systems can also contribute to cultural distance. "The legacy of Cold War anti-racism: a Genealogy of Cultural Distance in the Internationalisation of Higher Education" examines this issue. The article finds that "cultural distance" has been structured into international education (Indelicato and Pražić, 2019). Because those who are studying internationally are affected by culture shock and have a "skills deficit" yet there are no resources to combat this. While this is not necessarily intentional, it perpetuates cultural distance.

Communication theory establishes that communication apprehension is prevalent in intercultural communication. It also shows how communication breakdowns can affect conversations and relationships. With effective communication education and cultural understanding, intercultural communication can be navigated.

Anecdotal Attestation

The effects of communication apprehension on cultural interactions are not just theoretical. They can be seen in real interactions. Intercultural communication breakdowns and apprehension affect personal relationships. Navigating intercultural relationships can be difficult, but communication education can help.

The study "When Different 'Codes' Meet: Communication Styles and Conflict in Intercultural Academic Meetings" focuses on conflict situations in

bilingual academic meetings to investigate the communication styles used by Chinese and American university faculty. The findings revealed that, due to the conflicting priorities in meeting protocol and behaviors in Taiwanese and American cultures, tension is experienced by faculty members of both cultures. What it means to have a meeting and how members address various issues does vary from culture to culture (Lü, 2018). This tension arose from a lack of understanding the culture of the other and how they communicate. Americans are typically outright and say what they mean even if it may be offensive. Many Asian cultures are more passive. They leave a lot unsaid but that is the understanding. In the office setting having two conflicting styles of communication can be difficult. It is even more difficult when neither side is well educated on the communication style of the other.

The qualitative study "Seeking to Understand the Impact of Collaboration on Intercultural Communication Apprehension" centered around international student participants who came from a variety of countries, studying in countries where the majority of domestic students were white. The author evaluates anxiety and intercultural communication in a classroom setting with foreign students. The author examined the effect of collaboration on intercultural communication apprehension. This is a mixed methods study (utilizing qualitative and quantitative data). Domestic and international undergraduates, as well as a control group, had their levels of intercultural communication apprehension measured. Interview data from the study revealed the potential for collaboration to reduce intercultural communication apprehension. If both parties worked to

understand the way the other communicated better, apprehension and breakdowns would occur less. The study also found in-group bias and lack of motivation to act as barriers in reducing intercultural communication apprehension (Jacobi, 2020). What prevents effective communication from happening cross-culturally is in-group biases. This can be reduced by getting comfortable talking to the "out" group.

"Cultural Differences, Stereotypes and Communication Needs in Intercultural Communication in a Global Multicultural Environment" examines the personal opinions of Chinese employees working in a multicultural environment on the relationship between cultural diversity and the efficacy of their communication (Gut et al., 2017). The employees noted cultural differences were considered to hinder their performance and often to be a source of dissatisfaction.

"Barriers and Bridges" discusses the author's move to the U.S. from Germany and how a simple question asking him the language he would like to be treated in his practice marked a transformative moment in his understanding of language barriers and how they affect parent-provider communication. He notes that being asked the question gave him a comforting message that it was all right to have limited language skills. Previously, he had been anxious and apprehensive in conversations as he was fearful of misspeaking. Once he realized that those around him understood it was difficult speaking in a new language all the time, he began to relax (Langer, 2016). When he was asked his

preferred language, he realized that those around him were working to understand him and his culture.

Communication apprehension is not just theoretical. Communication breakdowns happen often in intercultural interactions. Personal anecdotes of intercultural communication apprehension are not rare. Through understanding and education, communication misunderstandings can be limited. These same concepts apply to international relations. While it is on a larger level, communication is the basis for all relations.

International Relations

Conflicts stemming from communication breakdowns and apprehension are not just seen on an anecdotal level. Countries often have poor international relations because of poor communication. Conflicts arise and are extended because of ineffective communication. Communication is a key factor in improving international relations. The following case studies all link poor relations and conflict escalation back to communication.

In culturally diverse areas conflicts stemming from stereotypes and lack of understanding can be common. The article "Globalization in the Context of Multiculturalism and Ethnicity in the Western Balkans and Intercultural Communication" examines the communication styles in the Balkans (a very diverse area). By studying an area so diverse, the authors are able to focus on many factors that play a role in intercultural communication. The authors examined ethnicities, intercultural communication, and multiculturalism. They formed the argument that there might be a relationship between nationalism and

ethnic conflicts (Akova, 2021). This nationalism can be linked back to stereotypes and lack of understanding of other cultures. It was found that the area is plagued with ethnic conflicts because of a lack of understanding of other cultures and their communication styles. In an area as diverse as the Balkans, effective communication could greatly improve relations among the countries.

The article "Sino-Russian Intercultural Communication Research: Literature Review" focuses on the relationship between two counties: China and Russia. The authors assert that the two countries have strained relations because of intercultural communication issues that stem from different languages, cultural distance, and prejudices (Vasilyeva and Lebedeva, 2020). This exemplifies what the aforementioned communication theories had established. With proper understanding of other cultural norms, the scope of prejudices and cultural distance could be limited.

"Sino-French Partnership Casts Light on Dealing with Culture and Conflict in International Joint Ventures" argues that conflicts that arise between international "teams" often are attributed to mistakes that stem from national or cultural differences. The authors find that it does not rely on "country-specific differences, but the perceptions of these cultural differences are part of a psycho-sociological process of identification with a national group that systematically leads to conflict" (Anglès, 2015). This is an important finding as it further establishes that perception plays a larger role than actual cultural differences. A clear understanding of other cultures and communication styles will limit the extent of prejudice that plays in perception. If two countries can understand their

differences and are educated on the cultural norms of the other, they can communicate through their differences. The differences in culture are not an issue but simply the perception of other cultures.

The article "Values and Communication Apprehension as Antecedents of Conflict Styles in Intercultural Conflicts: A Study in Germany and Russia" linked conflicts back to intercultural communication apprehension. Utilizing the sociocultural and historical context of Germany and Russia, the authors found intercultural communication apprehension (stemming from personal values and communication styles) play a role in conflict style selection. This often results in escalation of conflict (Batkhina, 2020). With proper understanding of other cultures' communication culture, conflicts could be deescalated. The study goes on to claim that studying these antecedents of conflict styles in intercultural conflicts can help understand the nature of international relations and even help prevent and resolve these conflicts.

"The Role of Cross-Cultural Factors in Integrative Conflict Resolution and Crisis Communication: The Hainan Incident" observes the Hainan negotiation between China and the United States to examine the effects of Chinese culture on the conflict. It was found that miscommunication and lack of communication. were the reason a conflict resolution was not found sooner. The two countries have different cultural backgrounds and communication styles which can both make it harder to communicate and raise levels of communication apprehension (Yi-Hui Huang and Bedford, 2009). Different conflict management styles escalated tension between the two counties. China typically has a more passive

communication style in which not a lot is out right but should be understood. Conversely, the United States is outright and bold in communication.

Differences in crisis communication styles between the two countries prevented them from dealing with the issue in the most effective way possible. The rhetorical struggle between countries and cultures caused unnecessary conflicts to arise and continue. This example offers a cause in which conflict could not have been avoided outright but could still be solved quicker if effective communication was used. If communication education and communication styles are more widespread and understood, it could improve international relations and reduce tension among different cultures.

There is a direct link between communication and international relations. Through conflict style management and negotiations, communication plays a huge role. How a country communicates influences how they choose to manage conflict and how they negotiate. When two countries fail to consider the background of the other country, unnecessary conflict is often present. New conflicts can arise such as in an area like the Balkans. Other examples have shown how failure to consider differences in conflict selection style only increases tension and escalates conflict. Poor intercultural communication can cause negotiations to stall and take an unnecessary amount of time to resolve. Improving intercultural communication awareness and skills can help improve international relations. If two parties are educated on the culture of the other, there are less likely to be misunderstandings and apprehension.

Improving Communication Education

Through communication theory, anecdotal attestations, and international relations it is clear that there are issues within the state of intercultural communication. However, improving intercultural communication can seem daunting. Improving communication education can be done. There are different strategies for going about doing so.

The article "Developing Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence Through Online Learning" realized the importance of intercultural competence in a world that is quickly globalizing. With issues of communication apprehension and ineffective cross-cultural communication, the authors asserted that there are clear steps that can improve issues hindering intercultural competence. The first solution the authors offered was "increasing interest in interculturalism by spreading information in an educational institution's online environment" (Litvinova et al, 2021). In a world surrounded by technology, the authors stated it was an effective medium to utilize to improve education. Similarly, the second solution the authors offered was "providing additional online materials" (Litvinova et al, 2021). They also felt that a more traditional path of teachers' aiding the development of intercultural competence was beneficial. Lastly, they noted that participating in intercultural events or exchange programs would be helpful. The best way to get over the apprehension, once a basic communication education is understood, is simply putting oneself in those situations until one slowly feels more comfortable.

The need for cultural communication competence is important as many institutions are getting more diverse. The article "Intercultural Communication in Multicultural Education Space" states "educational migration and academic mobility have turned national universities into multi-ethnic and multilingual educational institutions" (Voevoda, 2020). In an educational environment, the authors stated that featuring academic practices of intercultural communication was beneficial for both students and staff alike. Communication is as vital a subject as anything else in a globally adapting world.

The article "National identity in International Education: Revisiting Problems of Intercultural Communication in the Global World" realized the effectiveness of both the aforementioned methods. The authors argued that "Apart from the need to develop new principles and techniques for cross-cultural studies, … the importance of providing practical information and advice in various forms - the Internet, guidebooks, induction courses to help" (Pavlovskaya, 2021). The article examined a multicultural university featuring Russian faculty teaching Chinese students. They felt it was not only important for the minority to receive aid to become more culturally competent, but that integrating the majority into the culture of the minority as well. It is important for everyone to improve communication skills to become more culturally competent. With a combination of traditional teaching methods, utilizing the internet, and participating in cross cultural events, the authors feel this attainable.

Improving communication skills to limit intercultural communication apprehension and effectively communicate cross culturally is possible. Through

typical education strategies, students can develop a basis on how to communicate interculturally. Through the utilization of the internet to distribute materials, much of the professional world can access a basic understanding. By getting experience in situations that may cause apprehension, it will slowly help lessen apprehension.

Within international relations, it is important to not only be aware of cultural differences in communication but to be considerate of the other party. Knowing that communication can be difficult when two vastly different cultures are communicating, concessions must be made. Rather than letting intercultural communication be a hindrance, it could serve as a tool to reach the best solution.

Conclusion

Communication theory exhibits that the presence of communication apprehension hinders relationships. It shows how a relationship can be affected by poor communication and how conversation is halted when a communication breakdown occurs. This is especially prevalent in cross culture communication. It can be seen on different levels. A simple conversation between two people can be affected. A group of people can be affected (such as in a classroom setting). Most notably, it can be seen in international relations.

Many factors perpetuate stereotypes that lead to communication apprehension and poorly affect cross cultural relationships. Misinformation from the media can feed into stereotypes. Humor can also be used as a tool to perpetuate a harmful culture. Whether it is intentional or not, there are

occasionally structural issues within institutions that cause cultural distance. With communication and cultural education, the scope of these factors can be limited.

Communication apprehension and misconceptions can be seen on an anecdotal level. Cross cultural communication can be difficult and cause tension. This spans to a larger level and can affect international relations. When countries fail to take the other party's communication and cultural background into consideration, it is extremely difficult to work through conflicts.

Utilizing effective communication methods can improve relationships at all levels. If one is educated on other cultures, they are more likely to engage in cross-cultural communication. If a country considers the background and communication style of the other country in an international dispute, it will deescalate conflict rather than add to it. It is difficult to communicate and solve issues when the parties involved are scared to communicate or cannot communicate effectively.

Through traditional educational means, a basic level of cultural competence can be reached. By using the internet, a more widespread audience can become privy to communication education. Experience in multicultural environments can help one feel more comfortable speaking cross-culturally. The more often a practice is done, the easier it gets. Cultural communication education is achievable.

Communication apprehension or communication breakdowns may not seem of importance on their own. However, the presence of communication apprehension and ineffective communication on intercultural communication can

have large consequences. The implications that are held stem far beyond research. It can cause and escalate intercultural conflicts. It can even lead to frayed international relations, as past events have shown. If communication education and communication styles are more widespread and understood, it can improve international relations and reduce tension among different cultures. The link between communication theory and international relations shows the importance of better communication education. This can also be seen on a personal level. Being educated on different cultures and communication styles takes the fear and misconceptions out of intercultural communication. It opens up cross-cultural communication to be something to look forward to and to learn from. Communication is a tool that can be used to improve personal relationships as well as international relations.

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