Facework and Successful Communication in Intercultural Email, Text, and Facebook

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Session Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Articulate the concept of face in direct and indirect communication strategies.

- Analyze face and politeness in examples of technologically mediated intercultural communication.

- Apply findings from research on mediated intercultural communication to your own professional interactions.
What is face?

Face is:

- The successful presentation of self and one’s identity
- Your own and others’ social self-worth
- Created, maintained, gained, lost, threatened, negotiated
What is facework?

- Asking oneself, “will I or others lose (or gain) face, if I act in a certain way?”

- Making ongoing decisions, consciously or unconsciously, about how to behave.
Why focus on facework in tech mediated communication?

- Technologically mediated communication is widely used across all aspects of our lives.

**Examples:**
- Chat at work with colleagues in Boston and Beijing offices, or within one’s office
- text or email to communicate with housemates or neighbors
- skype in job interviews or maintain long distance relationships
- snapchat to ask someone on a date
Why focus on facework in tech mediated communication?

- Some face to face communication strategies remain the same.
  - Negotiate interpersonal relationships
  - Consider possible individual and cultural differences across language, generation, gender, status, ethnicity
Why focus on facework in tech mediated communication?

- Some communication strategies shift.
  - Control tone
  - Manage expectations around response time

- Some strategies are no longer available.
  - Use or read nonverbal cues
  - Monitor attention and feedback
Importance of the social situation

Example of face-to-face communication

Northeastern United States

Boston

NAFSA Annual Conference

this session
Importance of the social situation

Example of mediated communication

International Educational Organization

Boston Office

Beijing Office

chat
Situation:
You are feeling cold in a conference room and you would like your colleague to turn down the AC.

Solution:
What would you like to achieve?
• Physical comfort in the room
• A satisfying relationship with colleagues
Indirectness ↔ Directness

Options:

- Do nothing.
- Shiver and say “brrrrr.”
- “It feels a bit chilly in here.” (softly spoken to self)
- “When you get a chance, would you mind turning down the AC?”
- “Brilliant and helpful colleague, could you turn down the AC?”
- “Please, turn down the AC.”
Directness and Indirectness in Mediated Communication

Instructions:

1. Form small groups.

2. Read the messages given to your group.

3. Work together to answer the questions provided.

4. Appoint one person from your group to share your findings with the larger group.
Questions for Analysis and Discussion

1. How do the medium of communication, the purpose for the exchange, and the relationship between the participants affect the level of directness of the communication?

2. How do the words or written language signal directness/indirectness?

3. How do the writers convey what is usually communicated non-verbally?

4. How could you communicate these messages with varying degrees of politeness?
Join us for Thanksgiving!
(facebook invitation)

Message from International Student Organization to students:

Hello everyone. We hope that you will join us on this festive day and eat some traditional Thanksgiving food and be surrounded by good friends. Good food and good company, who can say "no" to that? We hope to see you there!

The invitation included an option to select “yes” or “no” to indicate whether or not recipients would be attending, and a space for an optional comment.

Replies from international students:

Reply: yes
Comment: I will definitely be there, I am very excited for this. Do you guys want me to bring something? (from a female student from Kenya)

Reply: no
Comment: I’m really sorry. I would love to be there, but I have been invited to my roommate’s family dinner. Hope you guys have fun. (from a female student from Korea)

Some students who received the invitation replied “yes” or “no” but did not comment.

Some students who received the invitation did not reply.
Can u help?
(text message via smart phones)

Message Exchange:

Nelson: Carla, can u help Saturday nite?

Carla: Hi, who are you? I lost my phone and don’t have you listed

Nelson: It’s Nelson

Carla: Y, I can help

Nelson: Tux shirt, thx

Carla: C u sat
I want to study abroad, but…
(email exchange)

Shaina:
Hello.
I really want to go abroad!!! I have always wanted to and I know that my grades are too low, but I would like to be given the opportunity. Is there a way I could be an exception, if I promise to get my grades up before the deadline?
Shaina

After receiving the message, Emma consulted with her supervisor who told her that students often make this request but there are no exceptions to the rule. The supervisor told Emma to give the student a sense of hope and optimism (that if she can get her grades up she can apply in the future).

Emma:
Dear Shaina,
Thank you for your interest in studying abroad. Unfortunately, the minimum GPA requirement is a 2.7. However, I encourage you to try to get your grades up and re-apply in the future.
Best,
Emma
Masters students in Intercultural Communication Course analyze their mediated communications in
- Written reflections
- Interviews
- Focus groups
Research Findings

- Awareness of social situation and personal characteristics
- Deliberate choice of medium of communication
- Blurring sense of time (synchronous/asynchronous)
- Shifts in directness/indirectness and formality
- Compensation for lack of nonverbal clues
What situational and personal characteristics are relevant to an interaction?

- Join us for Thanksgiving (facebook invitation)
  - Members of an international community

- Can u help? (text exchange)
  - Nationality and gender not relevant

- I want to study abroad, but (email exchange)
  - Roles as student and gatekeeper
Deliberate choice of medium of communication

- Join us for Thanksgiving (facebook invitation)
  - Reach a broad number of people easily

- Can u help? (text exchange)
  - Brief, to the point

- I want to study abroad, but (email exchange)
  - Official medium of communication within the university

- Other examples
  - Use of mediated communication to save face
  - Use of multiple mediums within one conversation
Blurring sense of time (synchronous/asynchronous)

- These examples are asynchronous.

- Other examples
  
  - Experience asynchronous communication as if it’s happening in the present
  
  - Varying expectations for appropriate response time. Example from facebook invitation:
    
    NEED TO KNOW WHO IS COMING!
    Hey Kiddos…final call for rsvp! I need to know who is definitely coming so Kerry can give the restaurant a final count and I can order the cake. If you have not already responded please do or …NO CAKE FOR YOU!
    
    SMOOCHES-
    Terry
Shifts in directness/indirectness and formality

- Join us for Thanksgiving (facebook invitation)
  - Yes and no responses included explanation
  - No response is indirect “no”

- Can u help? (text exchange)
  - Direct questions and responses

- I want to study abroad, but (email exchange)
  - Shaina is explicit in enthusiasm and acknowledging grades, less direct when asking for an exception
  - Emma uses a direct reply, without matching emotion

- Other examples
  - Shifts over course of exchange
Compensation for lack of nonverbal clues

- Join us for Thanksgiving (facebook invitation)
  - Friendly words and exclamation point

- Can u help? (text exchange)
  - ?

- I want to study abroad, but (email exchange)
  - !!!
    - Emotional language: (I really want, I’ve always wanted, I promise)
Compensation for lack of nonverbal clues

Is there more hyperbole/exaggeration in mediated communication?

- Thanks!!! 😊

- “VERY ANGRY…VERY UPSET…why am I paying $5,000 for my daughter to go to Spain? To LOOK at the monuments FROM THE OUTSIDE??”

- A: “It looks like you are setting the price.”
  B: “I’m aaaaaaaaaaasking.”
  A: “Yeah!!!! By impooooooooosing.”
Discussion

- Have you ever experienced a misunderstanding or conflict during email, text, or Facebook correspondence?

What about these mediums escalated or helped resolve the conflict?

What would you do next time?
In this session, we have:

- Reviewed the concept of face.
- Applied facework strategies, using directness/indirectness, to examples of technologically mediated intercultural communication.
- Related presenters’ research findings to session participants’ observations of their own professional interactions.
Take away:

- In your very next professional email, text, or facebook communication, what are you going to think about before clicking “send”?
THANK YOU!!!!!
Select References

Select References