

## FUNCTION OF CULTURAL SCHEMATA IN WRITTEN DISCOURSE BY KOREAN AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN MALAYSIA

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### Abstrak

With globalization, the growing development of Internet has increased each cultural area. Since the 2000s, the Korean cultural wave (Hallyu) has boomed up in East Asia and an increasing number of young people have enrolled in Korean language courses. With the increased access to the language, it has been noted that specific expressions in certain contexts could be interpreted differently by learners from other cultures. This can be problematic when such learners rely only on their linguistic skills to communicate with foreign interlocutors due to different points of view in multicultural societies. In the field of cross cultural pragmatics, several researchers analyzed the discourses among interlocutors from different cultures and have highlighted the importance of cultural schemata in multicultural and multilingual societies. This paper considers how culture influences communication in cross cultural pragmatics by investigating written discourses of Malaysian learners of Korean language as Foreign Language. It expounds upon how most difficulties, misunderstandings, and break offs in communication stem from differences among interlocutors with different cultural backgrounds.

Key words: communicative competence, cross-cultural pragmatics failure, cultural schema, intercultural communication, Korean as foreign language

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The abundance of human life and the growing development of internet in the 21st century have made the whole world into one cultural area by binding them together onto the internet. Correspondingly, the necessity to understand different cultures and enhancing foreign language competence has increased continuously and the value of foreign language has changed as well. Unlike the old days when learning a foreign language was a privilege of a few, foreign language competence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a requisite life skill for work, schools, or travelling. The recent development of SNS (social network service) has led the young people to be more open to contact and accept new cultures; hence making not only the world into one-day cultural area but it also has introduced other cultures into the SNS users' own countries.

Since the year 2000, a new cultural trend in East Asia is the influx of Korean culture. The success of Korean entertainment industry, which started with K-POP and Korean drama, has raised Korean cultural wave (*Hallyu*) among the youngsters in China, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and so forth, and it has caused a boom in Korean language learning. Malaysia is no exception and learning Korean language has become one of the favorite choices among Malaysian undergraduates for many years that lead them to enroll in Korean courses in their university as a proficiency course.

A study by Normaliza Abd Rahim *et al.* (2013) revealed that Korean cultural wave has also influenced Malaysian youth community, and this showed that the culture has made them interested in learning. Therefore, this paper considers the importance of cultural knowledge among interlocutors in multilingual society and investigates Cross-cultural pragmatic failure in the conversation owing to the cultural differences between interlocutors with different cultural backgrounds. For this purpose, 25 written discourses by Malaysian learners of Korean language as foreign language (KFL) are analyzed, and it is examined how specific expressions in a certain situation or context are accepted differently in each culture and the misunderstanding and communication breakoff may result.

### 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Communicative competence*

The main goal of learning languages is to communicate. Recently, communicative competence has gained interests from many researchers as various methods related to communication are studied diverged from sentence grammar (Hymes, 1972; Widdowson, 1978; Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia, 2001). Appearance of Hymes' communicative competence (1966), which was against Chomsky's linguistic competence (1965), aimed to investigate language use in actual language situation considering speech act, speech style, way of speaking components of speech in articulated speech situation (Kiesling & Paulston, 2012). Hereafter, one's effort to

examine “how humans use language to communicate” and to analyze “discourse as language in use” (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 1) have constantly been discussed in the area of pragmatics and discourse analysis until now.

Among various competences for the language performances to be achieved, discourse competence for interpreting properly and coherently in context and sociolinguistic competence development in order to interpret language according to social context have gained focus. In this globalization era, the importance of ‘intercultural communicative competence’, the integrated way of language learning and culture, is being emphasized that one should consider culture as complementary not as independent from language learning (Brown, 2007). Byram (1997) defined intercultural communicative competence as the ability to communicate and interact across linguistic and cultural borders appropriately and efficiently, and suggested model of intercultural communicative competence. There are four communicative competences: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and intercultural competence. Each of them lies on the intercultural communicative competence and they interact with each other.

### *Value of Culture in language learning*

As the importance of culture is being discussed in language education, culture is therefore considered as the fifth language skill following listening, speaking, reading and writing in the recent learned circle of language education. According to Tomalin (2008), the diverse reasons of globalization make it important to introduce culture as the fifth skill of language learning, and he puts an emphasis on including cultural knowledge, values, behavior, and cultural skills in order to install students with the mindset and techniques to use language to accept difference, to be flexible and tolerant of ways in doing things using the target language culture.

The reason that culture education is important in language learning is that language itself is the product of culture. Park (2002) created 8 subcategories of Korean culture to be educated, and it shows how closely the language in use and culture are related to each other.

**Table 1. Subcategories of Korean culture**

<b>Subcategories of Korean culture</b>	<b>Cultural examples</b>
moral culture	Values, ethnicity, world view, religious view
language culture	letters, forms, syntax, semantics, honorification
popular art culture	pop songs, popular dance, pop art, and popular movies:
advanced art culture	highbrow music, advanced dance, fine art, and luxury movies and plays
living culture	food, clothing and shelter, and leisure
system culture	political system, economic system, social media culture, and education system
academic system	cultural science, social science, natural science, and applied science
industrial technology culture	Agriculture, forestry, networking business, service industry

**Adapted from Park (2012)**

As the table shows, subcategories of culture reveal that people perform language act in accordance with cultural categorization. From these subcategories we may find that language is related to all the parts of our daily culture and those are in indispensable relationship with each other. Ku (2015) has found that KFL learners show tendency to enjoy Korean popular culture more when they feel it is closely related to their own culture. KFL learners’ exposure to Korean pop culture such as Korean TV dramas has positive influence in learning.

Related to culture importance in learning foreign language, Ku (2013) conducted the survey to female marriage migrants in Korea to verify the efficiency of culture education. The result of the survey showed by forty female migrants revealed that, 50% of the respondents said that their goal of learning Korean language is to adapt themselves to Korean life and Korean culture; 25% of the respondents said that it is to have a conversation with Korean people. It is revealed that the most necessary cultural skills for adapting to Korean life are as follows: how to cook Korean dishes (48%), table setting (25%), separate garbage collection (20%), how to do laundry (19%).

The urgent necessity is related to everyday life and they suffer from the difficulties derived from those cultural differences. Shin (2013, p. 43-44) argues for the necessity of culture education in language education as it reflects values, lifestyle, and behavior patterns of social members of the country. He explains that sociopragmatic failure is caused by discrepancy between the speaker’s and listener’s cultural background and their way of thinking while pramalinguistic failure is considered only in context. Things that are taboo or disrespectful are different from each culture. Prejudice against the relative culture is also a major component of miscommunication. These are the reasons that different responses exist to boasting or complimenting oneself.

### *Presupposition in Cross-cultural pragmatics*

Considering culture as an essential part of our language, cultural awareness as background knowledge in communication has been increased in a multilingual society. However, the cultural differences often lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding, communication breakoff, inappropriate response, cross-cultural miscommunication, and difficulties in communication. Yule (1996) explains that the

problems happen due to the lack of presupposition knowledge, the cultural schemata, which should have been shared by the speaker and listener/ reader and writer before they speak.

For members of the same culture, the assumption of shared scripts allows much to be communicated that is not said. However, for members of different cultures, such an assumption can lead to a great deal of miscommunication (p. 87). According to Yule (1996), “**a schema** (plural, schemata) is a pre-existing knowledge structure in memory. If there is a fixed, static pattern to the schema, it is sometimes called **a frame**, which is shared by everyone within a social group would be something like a prototypical version” (pp. 85-87). These are important ability to analyze discourse to be interpreted, especially to find out the speaker’s or writer’s unsaid or unwritten meanings in discourse. This pre-existing knowledge structure functions like pre-supposition concept in Pragmatics. Failure of forming cultural schema in contexts, will lead to misinterpretation during communication.

Mey (2007) describes the misunderstandings which resulted from the failure to share pragmatic presupposition between interlocutors from different cultures with an example of appreciations and apologies between native English speakers and Japanese. One shop in Japan offered 50 paper cups to their VIP customers for free. Contrary to our expectation, this Japanese customer said “excuse me (sumimaseng)” instead of “Thanks a lot.” In a glance, “Sumimaseng” would sound apologetic, but it is a polysemy that means thank you, excuse me, or I’d like to ask you a favor. Japanese people use the same expression both in appreciation and apology. This kind of insufficient background knowledge toward a certain culture may arise some confusion, difficulties and misunderstanding among interlocutors.

Yule (1996) explains the following situation as lack of cultural schemata. An Australian factory supervisor tells a Vietnamese worker that “You have five days off. What are you going to do?” in advance to Easter holiday, but the Vietnamese worker thinks that he is being laid off rather than having a holiday. He pointed out that it is the most important aspect of cross cultural pragmatics when a specific expression in a certain context is taken differently owing to the cultural differences. This is one of the main difficulties we should confront. A conversation breakoff or awkwardness is often found.

Lee (2013) took a case of misunderstanding owing to cultural differences with “I am so sorry. We have only bread. Is it okay to have bread instead of rice?” A Korean lady, who offers bread instead of rice, expresses her apology to the other. Some Westerners, who are not familiar with the Korean view point of bread and whose staple food is bread especially French, would be puzzled when they hear this. In Korean culture, the value of rice is superior to bread. Bread is offered when they cannot afford rice. The bread in this situation is not luxurious patisserie but plain bread, which feed about twenty to thirty people with 1kilogram of flour. It is considered as the minimum means of subsistence. Therefore, she asserts that in this case, it is important to read cultural code of Koreans and their way of living to avoid miscommunication.

Han (2006) examined communication problems in the conversation between native English speakers of KFL learners and native Korean speakers. She figured out that 7.2% of communication problem is from grammatical mistakes and 92.8% of the problem is from pragmatic failure. This implies that cross-cultural pragmatic failure is more problematic than grammatical mistakes in Korean language communication. On the other hand, Baek (2002) interviewed six students who went to the US, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, England, and Finland as an exchange student for about seven months to one and a half years. She investigated the influence of the cultural differences on actual communication among different ethnic groups and discovered that misunderstandings, confusions, inappropriate responses and breakoff in communication are mainly from the lack of cultural background knowledge, values, religion, lifestyle, and communication behavior, not the lack of linguistic knowledge.

### ■3.0 MATERIALS AND METHOD

The data for this paper were obtained from 50 Malay adult learners of Korean as a foreign language, who completed 100 hour lessons in Korean language classes in a Malaysian public university. Students who have good Korean writing skills were chosen after reviewing their compositions. Both female and male students whose age range is from 20 to 24 years old are chosen for this study. Major ethnic groups in this study are Malay (Muslim) and Chinese Malaysian (Buddhist) who had no experience of learning any foreign language before learning Korean. This study investigates three different cultures: Malay, China and Korea.

One type of written material designed for this study consists of writing a 5 minute situational dialogue for drama script in pairs. Students were asked to write with more than 500 words about their greeting culture, food culture, gift culture, and pop culture, and compare cultural differences with each other. 25 writing samples from 50 Malaysian KFL learners were chosen out of 43 writings in Korean classes as proficiency course in a Malaysian public university. Data was selected based on contents of drama script, which contains the cases of miscommunication, misunderstanding, communication breakoff, inappropriate response, cross-cultural miscommunication, and difficulties in communication.

The process of data collection for 25 subjects was held over two semesters. Qualitative methodology is used for this study following Yule (1996)’s cross-cultural pragmatics theory. Yule (1996) provides us with the basic categories of background knowledge, cultural schemata, coherence in discourse, and importance of presupposition in cross-culture pragmatics.

### ■4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this paper, given the fact that most Malaysian KFL learners are beginners, misunderstandings, confusions, inappropriate responses and breakoff in communication in multi-lingual society are inspected within the range of greeting culture, food culture, gift culture and pop culture. The discussions are closely connected to the necessities of life and which are taught in novice level of language classes.

### Greeting culture

Common greetings of the country are the first expression that any foreign language learners learn. Appropriate greetings establish an amicable relationship and are exchanged with the purpose of forming friendship. On the other hands, the failure of greetings arouses awkwardness, silence or unpleasant results such as disrespect. It may lead to difficulties from the beginning of human relationships. The gestures of greetings as well are different from each culture that some frequently arouse uncomfortable feelings and embarrassment. In certain European country, we may easily see different genders holding each others' waist between male and female and kiss cheek to cheek for the greeting. However, such delight becomes displeasure in some countries.

**Table 2. Communication failure case 1**

	Korean	English translation
S9	A: 안녕, 아저씨. 밥 먹었어? B: [...] 하하	A: Hi, uncle. Did you eat? B: [...] haha (smile)

S9 shows the embarrassment caused by improper greetings between two different cultural background speakers. A was invited to her Korean friend's house, and greeted her friend's father with "Annyeong Uncle, Bap muguhssuh?" with friendly attitude. However, the father laughed instead of replying and showed embarrassment. In some western movies, we may see a five year old boy say to his grandfather "Hi, Mike, what's up?". However, this friendly way of talking in western country becomes very impolite toward elders in other culture. In Korea, the younger person do not call the older by their names and the they should always express politeness to elders in language by saying "Annyeonghaseyo (hello, polite form)" instead of "Annyeong (hi, impolite form)" and "Siksa-hashutsseoyo?" instead of "Bap muguhssuh?".

Koreans select different ways of speaking by situations and listeners, they consider the language use for formal or informal; for elders or youngsters. Kim (2016) elaborates that honorification of Korean language is for the purpose to show the speaker's respect to the listener and it is represented through the use of different suffix. He explains that it may be difficult for a foreigner who is not familiar with Korean culture to understand that the greetings differ from the listener's ages. He adds that politeness to the listener is more important than accuracy of language to maintain good human relationships therefore, if you fail it, pragmatic failure may arise.

### Food Culture

Malaysia consists of multi-ethnic groups such as Malay, Chinese and Indian etc. Each ethnic group has different cultures. A breakoff owing to different cultural backgrounds in a conversation between a Malay and a Korean student is inspected as follows.

**Table 3. Communication failure case 2**

	Korean	English translation
S3	지혜: 릴리 씨, 이 한국 라면, <i>불닭 볶음면</i> 먹어 보세요. 정말 매워요. 먹으면 스트레스가 없어져요. 아이다: 아, 그래요? 그런데 할랄이 아니잖아요. 지혜: [...] 할랄이요?	Ji-hye: Aida, please try this <i>Fried Spicy chicken Korean ramen noodle</i> . It's really spicy. It will get rid of your stress! Aida : Oh, yeah? But it's not <i>Halal</i> . Ji-hye : [...] <i>Halal</i> ?

S3 is the dialogue between Ji-hye, an exchange student from Korea and Aida, a university student in Malaysia. Ji-hye introduced a Korean food but Aida said she could not eat it because it is not *Halal*. The problem in this case lies on Ji-hye's lack of background knowledge. Ji-hye knew that Muslims do not eat pork and alcohols but she did not have the knowledge about *Halal* certification system whereby Muslims eat meat only from animals slaughtered by following Muslim law. The dialogue breaks off because Ji-hye is from Korea where *Halal* is unfamiliar and because they do not share common ground. The lack of cultural schemata resulted in conversation breakoff.

In Korean culture, the male adults often say, "Goodbye. Let's have some Samgyeop-sal (Pork) and Soju (alcohol) later". This is an expression of interest towards the counterpart inviting to a closer relationship. In Korea, beef is very expensive and not so much affordable to common people, but pork is a different story. Soju, a type of Korean alcohol, is also considered as a reasonable alcohol for the common people. People usually share their secrets over alcohol with their blurred mind, and sizzling barbeque would ease their mind.

It is often expected for participants to get closer with each other through the conversation in such a relaxed ambience. Unfortunately, the expression of invitation to a closer relationship in Korea could have caused unexpected interpretation and unpleasant offense through prohibited phrases such as suggesting pork and alcohol in Muslim countries. Communication difficulties are sometimes caused by different religions and some expressions related to some foods need careful attention. Hindus do not eat beef because cows are taken as one of their thousands of gods.

### Gift Culture

Brown & Yule (1983) noted "different cultural backgrounds can result in different schemata for the description of witnessed events" (p. 248). There are different symbolic meanings on different objects following different values in each country; some are related to superstitious and negative way of thinking. The following example shows a serious misunderstanding owing to different symbolic meanings on an object.

Table 4. Communication failure case 3

S14	Abby: 생일 축하해요. 여기 생일 선물 받아요. Tian chee : 고맙습니다! 어머, 그런데 이거 시계예요? 제가 죽었으면 좋겠어요? Abby: 네? 아니요.	Abby : Happy Birthday. Here is my birthday present. Tian chee: Thank you! By the way, is this watch? Do you want me to die? Abby : What??? Of course not.
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Abby, a Malaysian student was invited to a birthday party of a Chinese student in Malaysia. Abby has witnessed that Tian Chee has had a hard time without a watch and saved some money for months to buy her a watch, but to Abby's astonishment, Tian Chee was offended. "Are you telling me to die?" This was her response to Abby's heartfelt birthday present! Abby has never dreamt that a watch would mean, "Time's up! It's time to die" in China. The fact that some people hate the number four because it is homonymous with Chinese character 死, which means death. It is easy to find misunderstandings from different cultures as above.

In Korea, they use the letter F instead of the number four for 4<sup>th</sup> floor in a building, and avoid the numbers 4444 for their car license plate to avoid accident. They prefer the number 7 instead in a wish for a good luck. There are many symbolic expressions related to superstitious beliefs in Korea. A boyfriend or a girlfriend does not buy shoes as a gift for the other in a worry that their girlfriend or boyfriend might run away with the very shoes and break up. People offer traditional sticky candies to an applicant to an entrance exam for a college or a company in the hope that they get accepted from the college or the job. This is a traditional custom or belief where it is hoped that applicants can be stucked to the university or company and never get fallen off from there, which means success.

### Popular Culture

Table 5. Communication failure case 4

	Korean	English translation
S20	씨티: 아..빅뱅이다! 말레이시아에 빅뱅이 온데요! 잉잉: 그래요? 빅뱅은 이미 수천년 전에 왔는데요.	Siti: Ah, Big Bang! <i>Big Bang</i> is coming to Malaysia! Ing ing : Really? <i>Big Bang</i> is already here thousands of years ago.

Korean Hallyu culture has spread out to world thanks to internet, and K-POP culture has become a common ground among the youth. It is required for the interlocutors to have cross cultural presupposition in order to be successful in a conversation. It would be an appropriate application of the cultural schemata on the "Big Bang" context. The literal meaning of Big Bang (Merriam-webster, n.d.) is "the cosmic explosion that marked the beginning of the universe", but Big Bang in this context is used as the name of a popular Korean pop group. For a conversation to be successful, the listener/ reader has to induce the presupposition of the speaker/ writer to interpret meanings properly, hence K-POP fans expect the group members to be handsome and excellent and verify the implication they have had in their group name, which would bring up a big sensation in the pop music field. A conversation breaks off when the presupposition knowledge lacks. The rapid diffusion of social network throughout the world has enlarged the scope of presupposition knowledge from that of their own culture to that of other culture for speakers and listeners to share.

### 5.0 CONCLUSION

In this paper, some communication difficulties found among novice Korean language learners in a different daily life cultural situation have been examined. This study has highlighted the importance of integrating cultural education in foreign language learning, as it is most efficient when language and culture are closely presented together to the learners. It is necessary to respect the differences of each culture, and communication is successful only when it is retained. Whatever language it may be, language education aims at successful communication. However, this will only be possible when the integral education of language and culture is taught since language meanings in contexts vary depending on situations. Students' discourse competence, sociocultural competence, cross-cultural competence would improve when strong cultural knowledge is formed. That is how we may avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding among people in the world.

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