



## **Language and Meaning: How We Learn**

*Intercultural communication difficulties*

### **Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

Good morning everyone

### **Students as group**

Good morning

### **Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

The topic is our culture and communication. The message is more communication does not necessarily mean better communication.

So it doesn't mean that er the more you say, you know the more you get carried.

Not necessarily. It may be, but not necessarily. The key issue here is, what is effective communication and how ... how it is related to different cultures.

And these examples of miscommunication they're all linguistic. Meaning that some part of the language is not used correctly. So the messages are all very funny or doesn't mean anything. So I would like to see how well you can understand. And explain why they are miscommunicated.

Example number one is they say that Japanese garden is the mental home of the Japanese. You know that Japan is quite famous for their beautiful small gardens. So, and they take, you know, a lot of pride in their gardens, but then when they put this sentence as a kind of advertisement for the Japanese gardens what do you think?

Why it is not effective? And what is miscommunicated?

### **Male Student**

I think that you want to mean er the Japanese people want to see Japanese garden is a, may be spirit home of the Japanese. But the mental home is not, is not the right meaning.

### **Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

OK, you, you know, because er they say that er Japanese gardens are so beautiful, it's very important to the Japanese, so spiritually they think that it's their home, but do you know the meaning of mental home in English?

### **Male Student**

Mad person.

### **Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

Yeah, yeah mental home is the place, is the hospital for.....

### **Male Student**

For the peoples who's minds [other students talking underneath] something wrong with their minds.

### **Journeyman Xu**

Psychological problems

### **Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

OK, OK. So that's the mental home. So meaning that because the mental home is misused here, so it doesn't mean what the communicator would like to express.

### **Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

We sell dresses for street walking.

### **Journeyman Xu**

Street walking it's a person? It's a man?

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

No, not man, particularly because dresses in English, you know that generally it's a women's dresses are called dresses. OK. What they want is really they are selling high quality, kind of a casual, kind of garments but you know the expression of street walker.

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

What is a street walker?

**Zhou Qian**

Um, er, er does it mean a person walks through the road?

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

No, no really doesn't. It has very special implications. A street walker actually is a prostitute. Yes is a prostitute [Chinese word for prostitute] OK. So, so dresses for street walking that really is funny.

**Journeyman Xu**

Yes actually, it's, it's a person.

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

It is a person, but, but you, you don't use this kind of expression to advertise, you know, your garments and things like that.

**Male Student 1**

It's a big mistake.

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

Sometimes timing is also very, very important. The message that is communicated, you know, inappropriately may be misunderstood or be ambiguous. So just now at the very beginning I gave you quite a few of those miscommunicated messages.

**Journeyman Xu**

Excuse me, what is the meaning of er ...

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

Ambiguous? Meaning that er the meaning is not clear. It can have double meaning. So just now for instance er a lot of those funny things comes from misunderstanding or comes from double meaning, ambiguous. OK.

**Interviewer**

What are your views of the lesson you just saw there?

**Journeyman Xu**

Um, I think this, this course is a very er interesting and also useful for us to, you know, in the future, um, a professional life. I think career life, because er, er use this course we can just avoid some mistakes during the cultural, you know, communication process.

**Zhou Qian**

It's very important for me because, well er um, my major is international business and economics. So when I graduate from er, after, when I graduate from school I will do business with foreigners. So um learning their subjects, the English will help me, um, er know more knowledge, er, um, globally. It is also a challenge for me because some er language knowledge is um er, er, er, er, er, is difficult er, I mean um, there are may be some er difficult words that I can't understand and er, er and also the culture is er is another problem.

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

By teaching the course in English I think that we can get double benefit. Because er English language proficiency is very important for our students, because eventually their career will be

in the area of international business and economics. So a high level of English proficiency is very important for them. So after going through their, I mean fundamental basic kind of stages to study a subject in English actually can improve their language proficiency a lot. And secondly because a lot of the original text and ideas actually are produced in English so teaching these courses in English can also enable the students to get a better feeling of the subject content.

**Interviewer**

What doesn't work so well, what's, what do you find is er bad about trying to teach a subject through English?

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

Well it is not really bad but the difficulty is that if the teacher his English is not, you know, enough to use simple languages, to use the very simple language to explain things that's difficult. And when the students ask the professor questions he just repeat whatever he has prepared. And if the students' English is not good enough to really understand fully the content they may lose a little bit of learning about the subject content.

**Interviewer**

Does, does that mean that it actually helps to codeswitch between Chinese and English, and how, how do you do that yourself?

**Teacher – Huang Zhenhuo**

Ah, I would rather to use as much English as I can but when the students have really difficulty and it's very easy to explain it in very simple Chinese language I may use it, you know, once in a while. But the whole point of teaching the content, well the subject in English is itself, I mean, part of the reason why we do it this way. So we, we try not to use too much Chinese but when it is really a kind of facilitating then we don't object using a little bit of it in class.