Emotion communication and language socialisation

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In this paper, we wish to discuss ways in which cross-cultural pragmatics research can contribute to a language socialisation perspective in second language teaching and learning.

Language socialisation views the centrality of language practices in the process of acquiring the competence to become a member of the community (Leung, 2004) as paramount to enculturation and acculturation. As such it offers a very broad framework for language acquisition researchers who consider the very organisation of language use as “cultural”.

In this paper, we provide some background to our research project on the study of self-disclosure and negative emotion communication among three cultural groups, drawing on data collected in Anglo-Australian, French and Italian films. Our project involved the elaboration of a model of the cultural script of anger display in interactions involving male friends, and the observation and analysis of non-verbal responses based on a small corpus.

Results of this study support the view that although there are common sets of non-verbal features associated to listeners’ responses, there are also cultural optional variants. For example, the provision of a backchannel cue (vocalization, head nod or shake) appears to be common to all groups to signal the “entering” strategy, whereas smiling or touching are optional variants as they may be considered culturally inappropriate.

This study contributes to the constitution of social knowledge on emotion and adds to a growing body of data regarding the non-verbal expression of emotion within a cross-cultural perspective which can be of benefit to L2 learners and teachers.

References