

Indianism and Its Complexities in Globalization

Asha Singh

Professor of Business Communication, ISTTM Business School

Abstract: *India is a country where we find a creative blend of cultures, religions, diversity, traditions, religious beliefs, hierarchy, races and languages. The rich cultural heritage of India dates back at least 5,000 years influences the way Indians behave and communicate. For successful business relations across India and with Indians, it is important to understand the Indian culture, its traditions and regional influences and how these factors influence the language and style of communication of an Indian. This paper aims to highlight some of the characteristic features of the people of India, their style of verbal and nonverbal communication, the way they behave with respect to factors of non-verbal communication like space, time, colour, smell and body language. It also tries to study the strong regional influence on the way they speak English, a style which is so distinct and unique and which is so popularly known as Indianism.*

Keywords: Indian English

Oxford Dictionary defines Indianism as “A word or idiom characteristic of Indian English”.

In simple language Indianism refers to the peculiar way in which some of the Indians speak English, predominantly because of their mother tongue influence. The language thus spoken has come to be known as Indian English which contains words, phrases or sentences which appear as if they are literally translated from a specific Indian regional language to English.

Since Globalization has led to the world doing business on a global scenario, boundaries and distances make little or no difference. With a population of over a billion and growing, India is rapidly expanding its global footprints and the presence of Indians doing businesses in different parts of the globe or placed in numerous MNCs is conspicuous. Business on a global platform implies effective global communication and Indians need to match their speaking skills with global entrepreneurs and employees. This is where trouble starts. Indian English or Indianism sometimes becomes difficult to comprehend by the native speakers of English and most often than not becomes the object of ridicule.

Culture plays a predominant part in intercultural communication. One such country whose people are largely influenced by its culture, is India, where we find a creative blend of cultures, religions, diversity, traditions, religious beliefs, hierarchy, races and languages. The rich cultural heritage of the country that dates back at least 5,000 years still influences the way Indians behave and communicate. For successful business relations across India and with Indians, it is important to understand the Indian culture, its traditions and regional influences and how these factors influence the language and style of communication of an Indian.

"...the single greatest barrier to business success is the one erected by culture." Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall-Why Cross Cultural Awareness?

This paper aims to highlight some of the characteristic features of the people of India, their style of verbal and

nonverbal communication, the way they behave with respect to factors of non-verbal communication like space, time, colour, smell and body language. It also tries to study the strong regional influence on the way they speak English, a style which is so distinct and unique and which is so popularly known as Indianism.

Within the context of the globalized business or organization, intercultural communication looks at how people communicate (verbally and non-verbally), manage, work together, approach deadlines, negotiate, meet, greet, build relationships, etcetera- “Intercultural Communication and Globalization” *David Rumsey*. Globalization has paved a way for cross cultural communication which removes misinterpretations, improves productivity, efficiency and promotes harmonious work environment both within and outside the company and enriches both people’s business as well as their personal life.

Does global communication mean that we understand each other any better? Are we really becoming more alike? Though globalization has to a large extent been instrumental in bringing people physically closer, yet they seem to be at a distance owing to the differences in their respective traditions and cultures. Global business has brought nations together but has failed to remove language barriers. Lack of empathy and understanding has led to miscommunication and misunderstanding amongst cultures. While making an attempt to understand the underlying reasons for cross culture communication barriers, it is important to understand the culture and background of people- the two major factors that influence the communication process. Effective intercultural communication is possible when people coming from varied backgrounds understand and respect the cultures of others. “Culture is communication, communication is culture” (Hall).

It is imperative that in global business situations, businessmen acquire effective intercultural communication skills. “The one world market has forced businesses to think global, act local, and integrate. Intercultural communication serves a vital role in that it can forestall miscommunication, prevent misunderstandings and avert mistakes.” -*The Importance of Intercultural Communication in the Global World- Hinner, M.B.* Communication is an interactive

Volume 7 Issue 1, January 2018

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

process. It involves words as well as nonverbal messages. When people communicate with each other it is very important that the person spoken to listens, understands and interprets the same things what the speaker intends to communicate, that he listens well, and understands the words and meanings behind the spoken words, and that he responds to the speaker and that his responses show that he has understood. At the same time it is also important that the speaker understands the responses of the listener. The whole process of communication hence establishes a trust between both the speaker and the listener and this trust paves the way for what we call as effective communication. Communication, both verbal and nonverbal depends on many factors, the important ones being the context, the individual perceptions, cultural background, individual personality and the place he comes from. Communication can be effective when people irrespective of the variances communicate and understand one another. Miscommunication happens not because of difference in culture but because of problems of human behaviour, when people are belligerent, arrogant, prejudiced, insensitive or biased. Problems also arise when people view their culture as normal and the ways of other cultures as bad, wrong or peculiar. This is called "Ethnocentrism" and this can be harmful to effective communication across cultures. Communication becomes ineffective when the communicators have *varied goals or interests, and have different ways of seeing the world*. Hence it is important to become sensitive to other cultures and to rise above the culturally imbued ways of viewing the world. This is possible by learning more about people and by being mindful of the differences. Once the culturally determined viewpoint of those who are communicating is understood, the perception of the given message changes.

Research indicates that national culture still plays a significant role in the workplace communication which is strongly affected by culture. Improving one's ability to communicate effectively across cultures can be done by recognizing cultural differences and then overcoming one's own ethnocentrism. Ability to communicate effectively across cultures is important today because of the contributing forces of two rapidly important factors in the working environment- *Globalization and Cultural Diversity*.

In a global business situation, verbal communication as well as non-verbal communication is important as it is one of the key aspects of communication especially in a high-context culture. Edward T. Hall was the first person to coin the term "contexting." High context culture is when people rely heavily on non-verbal and subtle situational cues in communication, many things are left unsaid, letting the culture explain. Most of the knowledge of a culture is conveyed through not by what a person says but by what the person does not communicate. A complex message can be conveyed effectively in high context cultures by the use of nonverbal cues and signs. On the other hand cultures that rely heavily on *words* to convey meaning in communication are Low Context Cultures. Here the messages are clear and words carry most of the information in communication.

Let us examine in detail the behaviour of Indians with respect to nonverbal and verbal communication. "The most

important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said."~ Peter F. Drucker. It has been observed that Indians, in spite of following the queen's English, face with a lot of difficulties while they communicate with people from different parts of the globe. We find a peculiarity in the way they frame their sentences, the way they pronounce words in their non-verbal cues, body language, postures and gestures. These peculiarities in the verbal and non-verbal communication are due to the fact that they come from regions with vast cultural diversity which has a major influence on the way they communicate, making their nonverbal cues difficult to comprehend.

Among the most markedly varying dimensions of intercultural communication is nonverbal behavior. Nonverbal communication may be broken down into the following areas:

Kinesics - the study of the way in which certain body movements and gestures serve as a form of non-verbal communication.

Proxemics - Proxemics is the study of how humans use space when communicating.

Chromatics - The study of how colours play a role in non-verbal

Chronemics - Chronemics is the study of the role of time in communication.

Olfactics - Olfactics is study how smell or odour and how they are perceived in nonverbal communication

Haptics - Haptic communication is a form of nonverbal communication and the way by which people and animals communicate via touching. Touch is the most effective means to communicate feelings and emotions

Occulesics - is the study of eye movement, eye behavior, gaze, and eye-related nonverbal communication.

Kinesics - body language: "The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said."~ Peter F. Drucker

Generally, most people don't mean what they say. There is a contrast between what people say and what they actually mean. According to research the impact of what you say is 7%, how you say it, i.e. voice modulation, tone and so on is 38% and the remaining 55% is body language.

Kinesics is the study of communication through body movements. It's a term developed by behaviorists to refer to the way various human gestures reflect feelings and attitudes. It is the study of body motion in relation to communication. We make more than 700,000 body motions, it is impossible to categorize them all. Being aware of the body movement and position is a key ingredient in sending messages.

Indians and Kinesics: The most popular body language of an Indian is through his head popularly called as "the Indian Head Wobble". The way many Indians nod their head is often described as the 'Indian head wobble' or 'Indian head bobble'. For people living outside India, it is not a widely understood body gesture. The term, head wobbling is a motion which is very confusing. It that is somewhere in between the up-and-down nod, and the sideways head shaking. Most non-Indians do not understand what it means,

if it is a yes or a no. Sometimes it is done silently, and no word is spoken and this is when this expression becomes even more confusing to Americans and Europeans. It can mean an as an affirmation or agreement. It can also mean "I hear you" or "Ok". This is similar to an Englishman saying "right." In general, this nodding means something like: "Yes, I agree with you!" "Yes, I understand what you mean!" "Yes, I understand how you feel!" "Yes, I get your viewpoint!" and so on... When someone wobbles his head for long it means it is better understanding or more in agreement. A quick wobble means or a simple yes or general agreement. The listener really understands well if the head wobble goes on for a few extra rotations. When the head wobble often accompanies a smile it displays friendliness and warmth, and it means a simple "yes", without an element of surprise. It is neither "Oh, Yes, nor 'no'. It is hard for Indians to say "no". When an Indian answers, "I will try," he or she generally means "no." This is considered a polite "no".

Gestures: Like all other cultures Indians too have distinct gestures and hand movements which convey different meanings. In India it is considered rude and disrespectful to pointing someone with a single finger or two fingers. Indians point with their chin, whole hand or thumb.

Feet are considered by Indians as the lowest part of the body and are considered unclean and dirty, therefore pointing feet towards person is wrong. Stepping on someone's foot albeit accidentally is considered offensive and apologies are offered immediately. Doing anything with a left hand is considered a wrong body language by Indians who believe in eating and breaking their bread with their right hand which is difficult for non-Indians

When gestures are accompanied by words they are called illustrators, and when gestures aren't used with any words or sounds they are emblems. These gestures have a meaning of their own. The 'fight or flight' gesture in India, is an emblem and done by sliding one hand over the wrist, indicating the use of a bangle. This gesture if done to a man demeans his manhood and provokes him to a fight. Another distinctly Indian gesture is the suicide gesture. This is done by the palms facing the body then throwing them outward implying the meaning of throwing yourself off of a bridge in to a river. These two distinctly Indian gestures offer us a look at the uniqueness of Indian culture.

Indians and Proxemics (Space) Proxemics is the term coined by Professor Edward T. Hall. It is the study of how man uses of space and distance in communication. Like body language, we have space language. Research shows four types of space that exists in communication between people sharing different relationships.

The Intimate space: It can be anything from physical contact to 18 inches and which can exist only between people who are extremely close or share an intimate relationship.

Personal space: It is maintaining a distance between 18 inches to 4 feet, which is used by people who know each other quite well.

Social space: This is 4 feet to 12 feet which is used in social setups between acquaintances.

Public space is one which is 12 feet to the range of seeing and hearing and exists between people who are not familiar with one another.

Closeness is a major concern for Indians who generally value personal space. People from urban area and large cities may not find it offensive when someone stands close to them but for someone who is from a rural area, a little close may become "too close" and be a cause for discomfort. Therefore people from outside are best advised to avoid standing close to Indians and ensure that an arm's length space is allowed between people.

Indians and Chromatics (Colour)

Communication of messages through colors is chromatics. Every society uses chromatics and attaches a special significance to colours and the symbols or emotions they convey. Indians too communicate through colours and different colours convey a specific meaning. When in happiness or celebrations Indians wear bright coloured clothes but in mourning it is usually white. Also they do not participate wearing black in the celebrations of others as black they feel is the colour of gloom. Saffron is a colour with religious and spiritual connotation. Married Indian women adorn the traditional saffron or red vermilion along the parting of their hair which denotes that a woman is married in many Hindu communities, and ceasing to wear it usually implies widowhood.

The Indian Tricolour flag is the best example of the significance which the Indians attach to colours and the emotions they convey. The deep saffron colors shows courage and sacrifice. It is also symbol of Hinduism. The white color symbolism for peace, unity and truth and the green color shows the culture and fertility.

Indians and Chronemics (Time)

People belonging to different cultures understand and use time differently. Time affects the way we behave, our attitudes and our communication. Some cultures value time and pay a lot of attention to it and for them efficient management of time is considered most essential. These people strive to meet deadlines, to be punctual, and to work as per schedule. Such cultures are called "monochromic culture". For these cultures "time is tangible" and viewed as a commodity which is precious where "time is money" or mis-utilization of time is seen as "time is wasted."

On the other hand we have some cultures who are more relaxed and are not time bound. They have no problem being "late" for an event if they are with family or friends because the relationship is what really matters. Such culture is called polychromic culture. These people are more focused on relationships, rather than watching the clock. India belongs to the polychromic type. The terms were used the first time by Edward hall In *The Silent Language* (1959), Edward T. Hall. Belonging to the polychromic culture it has been observed that often Indians are quite casual in keeping their time commitments. Time is generally not considered when planning and scheduling one's activities and the plans

and schedules are bound to get changed.

Indians and Haptics (Touch)

Indians prefer using their right hand to touch someone, pass money or pick up things. The left hand is considered unclean. Indians and most Asians consider touching someone's head as insensitive as they believe that the head houses the soul and a touch degrades it. Though in some cultures, touching of the arm or a peck on the cheek is common, Indians don't approve of any closeness or touching or handshakes between the opposite sexes. In fact there is no closeness at all with acquaintances. Touch is something very sacred and reserved for very close people or family. Eyebrows are raised when a western woman shakes her hand with a man in India similarly Indian women hesitate to shake hands with a man. Indians like most Asian cultures strongly disapprove Public Display of Affection (PDA) which they consider crude and offensive.

Indians and Olfactics (Odour)

In most Asian cultures people consider body odour as something not to be hidden but something that friends should experience. They believe that it is an act of friendship to "breathe the breath" of the person with whom they converse and to feel their presence when conversing. Natural body odour is something which the Indians find repulsive and hence put in great effort to smell fresh and clean, believe in frequent bathing, and often criticize those with strong body odours.

Indians and Oculistics- (Eye Contact)

For most cultures making a direct eye contact is a sign of disrespect but in most others cultures, refusing to make direct eye contact is a sign of disrespect. Indians think that to make eye contact with an authoritative figure is demeaning them and hence they show respect by lowering their eyes and talking to people who they consider higher in authority and designation.

Verbal communication: Language barrier- Indianism

One of the most linguistically diverse country in the world is India. Its 28 states, speak 22 different languages in over 1500 dialects. English is one of the official languages of India, but there are only a few who speak English as their first language. It is spoken as the second or third language, Indians are highly influenced by their regional languages, and when they speak in English they often directly translate sentences from their native tongue. The sentence structure they follow is Object, Verb and Subject rather than following the normal practice of using the structure -Subject Verb and Object. They also use an accent that is greatly influenced by their mother tongue. Numerous idiomatic forms taken from the Indian literary and vernacular language, also have made their way into Indian English. This becomes difficult for non-Indians to understand the language.

Key areas of English language as spoken by the Indians that are effected by the influence of regional language are pronunciation, tone, grammar, speech patterns, accents and intonation and vocabulary. It becomes difficult for any westerner to sometimes understand people who have such varied backgrounds and experience, and to understand the

meaning beyond the spoken word. The speaker may be trying to communicate something which may be misunderstood by the listener. This makes it all the more challenging for both the parties in a business situation to establish a trust and confidence, the business may get affected and hampered leading to conflict and discomfort in relationships. The personal and professional growth of an individual depends upon his ability to live comfortably in a "connected" world.

"The challenge is that even with all the good will in the world, miscommunication is likely to happen, especially when there are significant cultural differences between communicators. Mis-communication may lead to conflict, or aggravate conflict that already exists. We make, whether it is clear to us or not, quite different meaning of the world, our places in it, and our relationships with others. --Adriana Vintean, Effective "Cross- Cultural communication".