

Communicative Competence in ESL and Metaphoric Competence

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Abstract

The relationships among cognitive preference, communication abilities and metaphoric competence are examined, and then the findings from experimental research are discussed from the viewpoint of communicative ability. The research subjects were Korean, Chinese and Japanese university or college students, and therefore some findings are related to cultural differences. However, other findings on individual differences give rise to ideas on have implications for teaching methodologies to enrich communication abilities.

Keywords: communicative competence; metaphoric competence

Introduction

The purpose of foreign language learning is to communicate easily with the speakers of the target language. This study considers two aspects of language acquisition and use considered to be related to communicative competence.

Since limitations in knowledge both of the target language and the culture create barriers, compensatory strategies such as word coinage and paraphrasing are necessary (Bialystok, 1990). Hoffman (1983:37) argued that both word coinage and paraphrase can require metaphoric intelligence and Littlemore (2001) considered that the ability to recognise and understand metaphor makes a positive contribution to communicative competence. Additionally, a number of researchers have predicted a relationship between cognitive abilities and the acquisition of linguistic competence in a second language. (Littlemore, 2001 and others).

Therefore, this study examines the relationship of metaphoric competence to communicative competence and cognitive preference at an individual level and at a cultural level by use of data collected in Korea, China and Japan. The relationship between metaphoric competence and communicative abilities and strategies within several subcategories was examined.

Data Collection

Inquiries comprised identification of cognitive preference, metaphor tests and communicative performance tests. The subjects completed a questionnaire on their cognitive preference for either auditory or visual information. The metaphor tests consisted of four parts; recognition, interpretation, creativity and interpretation in context. The

first three test components were originally developed and administered by Littlemore (1998) and permission was kindly given for their use in this study. For interpretation, the subjects were given eight decontextualised metaphoric sentences. The number of interpretations of each sentence is used as the basis of assessment. The methodology for scoring originality of metaphor production is also adopted from Littlemore (2001). Since the metaphor sentences in the interpretation test were decontextualised, the participants had to analyze the meaning using only the linguistic information provided. The metaphors for this component were either original or taken from comic strips.

Communication performance was assessed by individual interview in Japan and China.

Results and Discussion

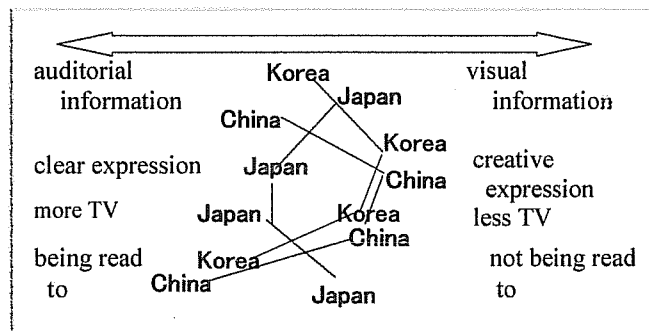


Figure 1: Cognitive preference in Korea, China and Japan.

All factors considered were subjected to correlation tests. The results are tabulated below.

Table 1: Correlation among paired data

Data Pairs	Metaphor			Communication			Inter-correlations		
	I	IC	C	GV	NCS	NCS	CP	CP	MI
Japan	0.3	0.00	0.56	0.66	0.10	-0.14	-0.36	-0.22	-0.26
China	0.31	0.21	0.79	0.53	0.28	-0.22	-0.17	0.28	0.44
Korea	0.32	0.02	0.38	-	-	-	0.16	-	-

interpretation(I), creativity(C), interpretation in context(IC), verbal/non verbal communication skills(VCS/NCS), grammar/vocabulary cognitive preference(CP), metaphoric intelligence(MI), communicative competence(CC)

Discussion

Cognitive preference test Comparison of cognitive preference and other factors such as childhood experience, among data from the cultural groups (Figure 1) indicates similar trends for participants from Korea and China and a reverse trend for Japanese participants.

Metaphoric competence tests As shown in Table 1, metaphor creativity is slightly but significantly related to interpretation. For China and Japan, high correlation between creativity and interpretation in context implies a relationship between the two skills. The process of creating meaning requires both the ability to interpret and to create language in context. This implies that those who have high ability to create and interpret language in context may have high communicative abilities.

Communication competence tests The results show a relationship between the score for conversational/ discourse and both communicative competence and verbal communicative strategies. There was no correlation between grammar and vocabulary, or verbal communicative strategies and non-verbal communicative strategies.

Cross Correlations and Comparisons A high score for cognitive preference implies a strong orientation towards visual information and this correlates negatively with both metaphoric intelligence and communicative competence. The data for China suggests that there is a link between communicative competence and metaphoric intelligence. However this is not born out by the Japanese data. The relationships are clearly demonstrated by Figure 2.

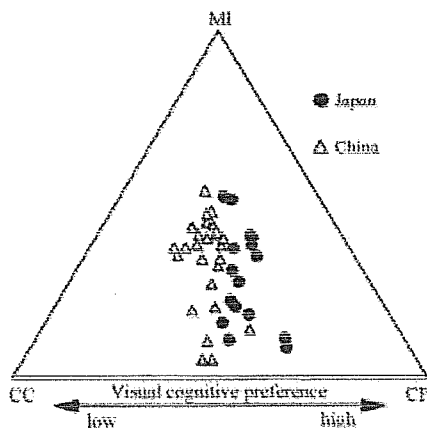


Figure 2: Relationships among metaphoric intelligence, communicative competence and cognitive preference

Subjects with a strong visual cognitive preference had less communication competence and, in general, scored lower on the metaphor intelligence tests.

The aim of this study is to examine the hypothesis that there are correlations among cognitive preference, metaphoric competence and communicative competence. This hypothesis is supported only by results of experimental work done in China. The findings from study are; Positive correlations were identified between: (1) metaphoric creativity and ability to interpret metaphors. (2) metaphoric creativity and verbal communicative strategies (data from China only). (3) conversational/discourse ability and communicative competence/verbal communicative strategies. (4) grammatical ability /vocabulary and verbal communicative strategies. (data from China only). Metaphoric intelligence and communicative competence correlated negatively with a preference for visual information. In this study, both grammatical ability and vocabulary, and verbal communication strategies were found to be unrelated to non-verbal communicative strategies Cross-cultural differences regarding to cognitive preference are found in a comparison of the results from Korea, China and Japan. Both individual and cross-cultural cognitive preferences may influence metaphoric competence or and communicative competence. The implication is that strengthening grammar and expanding vocabulary and/or developing metaphoric competence may lead to strong verbal communication skills.

Conclusion

Some findings from analysis of individual data in this study imply that metaphoric competence is a determinant of communicative proficiency. Also conversational ability correlates with verbal, but not non-verbal communication skills. The results of this preliminary study are suggestive of an approach to develop students' communication abilities. by enhancing vocabulary and introducing conceptual metaphors. Variants of this approach should be explored and tested to see what impact they have on students' abilities.

Acknowledgments

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