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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Differences between Western and Asian perspective

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis focused differences in intercultural communication from Western and Asian perspective. The goal of this thesis was to find the differences and similarities in business communication between Western and Asian culture.

The theoretical part of this thesis was titled as intercultural communication. Definition of intercultural communication, culture's influence on perception, obstacles in intercultural communication and intercultural communication competences were covered in this part. A case study of Danish company in Japan, ECCO, was also examined in this part as well. All information were gathered from both published and electronic sources.

For empirical research part, qualitative research was used to study the in-depth of the thesis's goal. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with three working persons, who had extensive of experiences in dealing with people from different cultures. A graduated students with many experiences in studying and working in international environment was also selected for the interview.

According to the research results, it could be seen that there were differences as well as similarities perspective on intercultural communication between Western and Asian culture. The research also indicated the challenges people from both cultures faced while working with others. The challenges included different working styles, different level of language, and usage of non-verbal communication. These challenges could create miscommunication and misinterpretation in intercultural communication from the interviewees' perspective. The ways of overcoming these challenges were also included in the research results. It was necessary to have patience and good observation while communicating across cultures. Accepting the differences and looking for similarities would help create a basis of understanding for effective communication. Furthermore, based on observation, communication and behavior should be adjusted and adapted depending on the situation. Moreover, aiming for clarity when communicating would allow people to avoid misunderstanding as well.

ABSTRACT
CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

International business activities always involve communication. As the globalization is rapidly increasing, all business activities, such as exchanging information, negotiating etc., are based on the ability to communicate with people from different culture. That's why it is important, especially for managers, to be aware of the differences in values and beliefs of other cultures.

In the world, the need of communication between people from different cultures has increased greatly. Language is definitely an obstacle to intercultural communication, but the greater obstacle is how to navigate around the cultural differences. It is estimated that from two-thirds to three-fourths of our communication are nonverbal and behaviors (Novinger, 2011). Therefore, misunderstandings created by misperception and misinterpretation is always involved in communication across cultures. From the very beginning, people's perspectives are influenced by the culture they are born in. People learn which gestures are acceptable and which are not. From the way of addressing others, the eye contact to the daily manners, these are things to be remembered subconsciously rather than consciously. As people are used to their cultural norms, it becomes easy for them to negatively respond to different culture.

The author chose this thesis topic based on her personal interest in intercultural communication and personal experience. The thesis serves as a reference for people, who are and planning to engage in international business, to identify the differences in business culture between Asian and Western countries as well as to effectively communicate in international business situations.

In this thesis, the research of differences between Asian and Western perspective will be addressed. The main objective of this thesis is to study the different perspective of the intercultural communication between Asian and Western culture from the working person's point of view. The research also reveals the challenges of intercultural communication people encounter while working in international environment and possible solutions to overcome them.

The focus of the thesis is on intercultural communication, especially the behavior aspect. The experience and opinions of the interviewees will be emphasized. Rather than examining the intercultural communication of a specific company, the author interview several people from several different companies, who are working in Asia and Europe.

In this thesis, the research method applied is qualitative research. As the author intend to identify the differences in business behavior from the experience and point of view of the interviewees, qualitative research was used. For the theoretical framework, data is obtained from mainly electronic books and books. There are also some Internet sources as well. For the empirical part, data is primary data collected from structured interviews with 4 people from different companies. There are 2 persons living in Asia and 2 persons living in Europe. The primary data collection process is explained in later chapter.

Theoretical framework is about intercultural communication. The framework includes the definition of intercultural communication, culture's influence on people perspective, barriers of intercultural communication, intercultural communication competence, Eastern and Western perspective on communication. There is also a case study about Danish company, called ECCO, in Japan included in Eastern and Western perspective on communication part. The overview structure of the thesis is displayed in Figure 1.
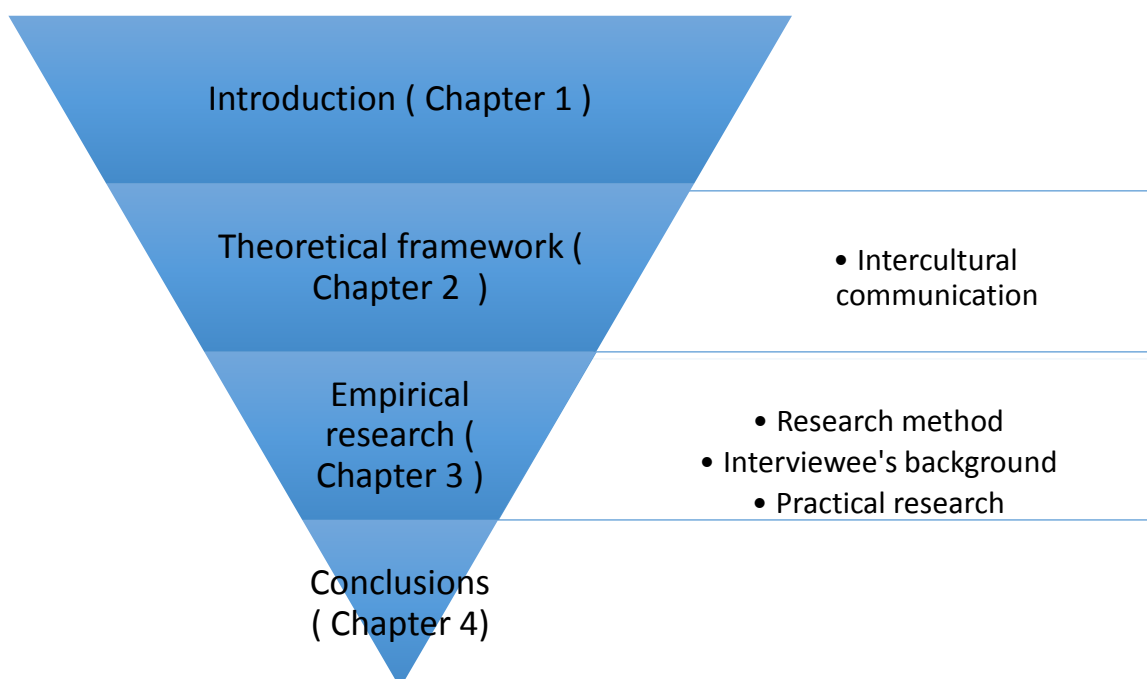
FIGURE 1. The structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of theoretical framework and empirical research, divided into totally 4 chapters. Chapter 2 titled as intercultural communication consists of the definition of intercultural

communication, culture's influence on people perspective, barriers of intercultural communication, intercultural communication competence, and Eastern and Western perspective on communication.

Chapter 3 is empirical research, which consists of data collection process, the interviewees' background information and contents of the interview. The interview's results and findings will also be discussed and examined in chapter 3. Final conclusions and evaluation of the thesis are also provided in chapter 4.

2   INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

"In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world, we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture." [Lippmann, 1922] (Clausen, 2006, 43)

Intercultural communication is often viewed as a complex and dynamic process. So as to understand it better, in this chapter, intercultural communication, culture's influence on people perspective, barriers of intercultural communication, communication theories of Eastern and Western business culture are introduced.

2.1   Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication study is to study and understand how people from different cultural background communicate with each other. Its purpose is to produce a guideline with which help people to communicate better. Studies in intercultural communication usually start from the differences between distinct cultural groups then study the interaction between these groups.

Communication and culture are important parts of intercultural communication. That's why, for the term 'intercultural communication' to be clearly understood, it is important to understand the meaning of the terms 'communication' and 'culture' as well.

2.1.1   Communication as a part of Intercultural Communication

"Communication is a dialogue, not a monologue" (Notes Desk, March 11 2009)

Communication is a process of conveying messages from one to another person through a channel. Kreitner and Carlene (2010) defined *"The communication process is a chain made up of identifiable links. Links in this process include sender, encoding, medium, decoding, receiver and feedback."*

In order to communication to process effectively, there are 5 elements: sender, message, channel/medium, receiver and feedback. In the process, there are 8 steps starting from the idea of the sender and ends with feedbacks of the receiver. For the first step, the sender will develop an idea to be sent. This step is also known as the planning step, where the sender plans the topic for communication. Next step is encoding, which means converting the idea into a perceivable form, for example report form, letter form etc. After finish encoding, the message can be presented in various ways, like oral, written or nonverbal. Afterwards, the sender will choose a medium or channel to transmit the message to the receiver. The following step is transmitting the message and the sender's duty also ends with this step. Next, the receiver will receive the message and start decoding it. At this level, for the communication to be effective, it is very important for both sender and receiver to have a common understanding or interest. And the final step is feedback. This step is essential for a communication as it ensures that the receiver has understood the message correctly.

The process of communication is displayed in figure 2.
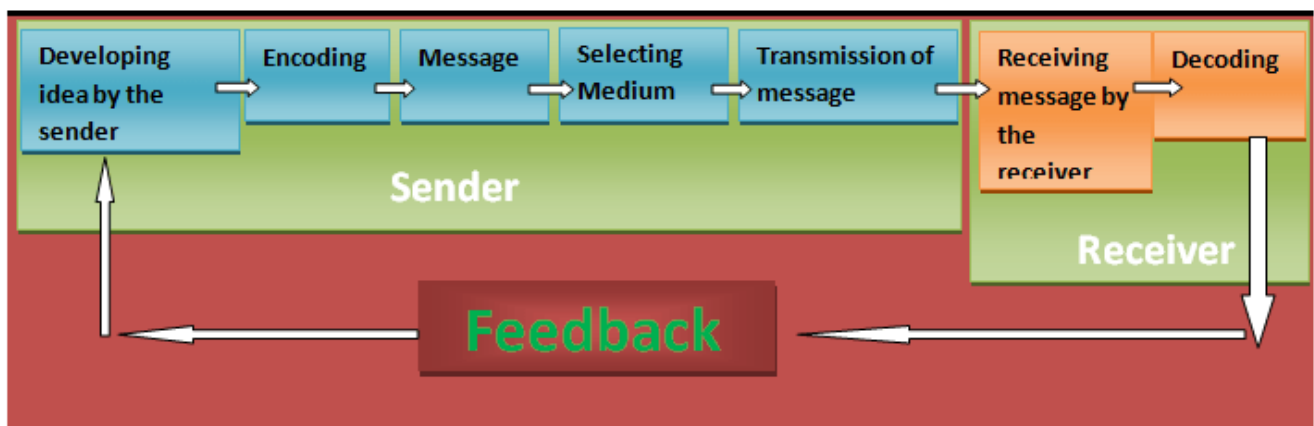
FIGURE 2. Communication Process

Communication includes both verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is the usage of words to create a message. In this case, words can be either written or spoken. Therefore, verbal communication includes both written language and spoken language. In order to communicate effectively, it is important to be able to use a language sufficiently, both in written and spoken form. Nowadays, the needs of multicultural people in business is growing rapidly, as it is inevitable to encounter people from different countries with no common verbal communication. And so the ability to use another language would increase the effectiveness in communication. However, to speak another language proficiently requires a lot of time and efforts.

In communication, non-verbal communication is a part of the process when one tries to convey a message or a meanings in his actions, whether the person is intended to or not. Non-verbal communication and verbal communication are actually linked together. If verbal communication means written language and spoken language, then non-verbal language is considered to be 'silent language'. People tend to use non-verbal communication with less awareness. The meanings of non-verbal communication is subtle and less precise, comparing to verbal communication. There are no particular rules or standards for non-verbal communication, since it varies from culture to culture. The function of non-verbal communication is to assist the meaning of verbal communication. It can be used in various ways: accent, complement, contradict, regulate, or substitute for verbal message. In intercultural communication, it is also important to learn non-verbal communication along with verbal communication, especially when it always accompany the spoken words.

2.1.2   Culture as a part of Intercultural Communication

In 1952, the American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn [1963] collected 156 definitions of the word 'culture' (Piller, 2011). Matsumoto [2008] defined culture as *"a meaning and information system that is transmitted across generation"*. According to Hofstede (2005), culture is defined as *"the collective programming of the mind [...]"*, which helps identifying one group from another. Barnett and Lee [2007] define culture as *" a group's shared collective meaning system through which the group's collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs and thoughts are understood"* (Leinonen, 2015). Maureen (2011) also stated that *"culture differ from one another because there is less contact between cultures than within them"*. From all of these definitions, culture is mostly view as *a system of beliefs, values and practices*, which enable people from the same culture background to solve a common problem. And if people communicate outside of their cultural group as much as within, there would not be 'culture' at all.

For a deeper understanding of culture, the author has choose to introduce Hofstede's 'onion diagram' (2005), which examines culture in different aspects. The diagram can be found in figure 3. According to the diagram, culture manifests itself in several ways: *symbols, heroes, rituals* and *values*.

Symbols consist of language, gestures, images or objects carrying a specific meaning, which are recognized by people from the same culture background. Dress code, slang words, flags, etc. are also belongs to this category. New symbols can be developed easily every year.

Heroes can be real or imaginary persons, who are highly respected in a culture, therefore can serve as a standard for social behaviors, for example, President Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam. *Rituals* are activities, which are considered to be essentials in the society, such as greetings, paying respects to others, or religious activities. As these activities are necessary, therefore, they are carried out on free – will. All three elements are labeled as practices.

The core of 'culture' is formed by *values*. They reflect the deepest level of a culture. *Values* are preferences or tendencies of people's feelings toward certain matters. *Values* are among the first things people learning at the early age. As they are acquired early, people are not always aware of them. Therefore, they cannot be discussed or observed. They can only be deduced by the way people act under certain circumstances. According to Rothlauf (2014), values represent *"widespread emotions, of which one is often not aware"*. Edward T. Hall (1959) also stated " *[…] culture controls behavior in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual"*.
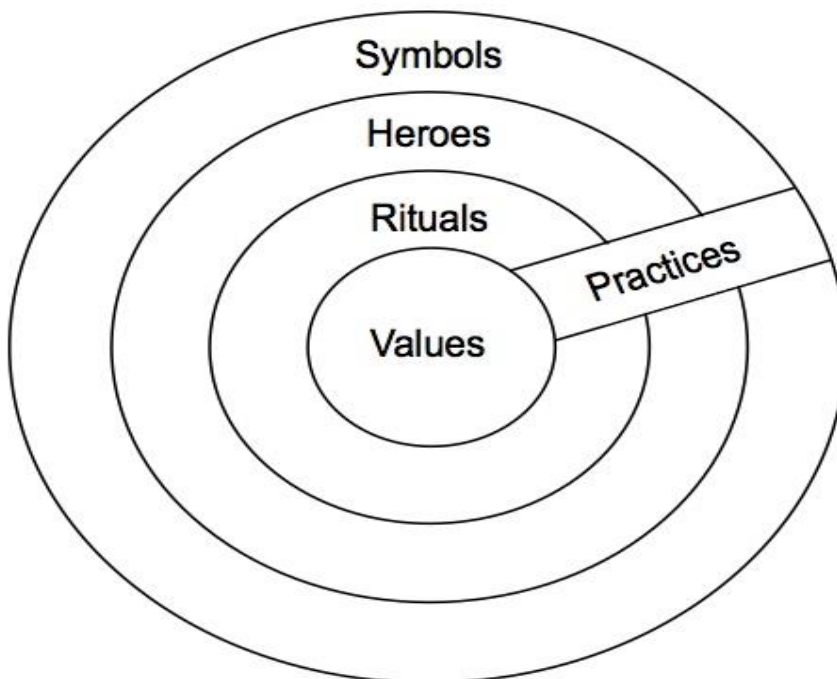

FIGURE 3. Hofstede's onion diagram (2005)

Even within a same cultural group, a person knows that himself is different from others. Moreover, at the present, there are cultures within cultures, which create a great diverse of culture in a cultural group. Therefore, the diversity within culture might as well exceed the differences between cultural groups. Cultures within cultures can be divided into two categories: subculture and co-culture.

Subculture is similar to culture, as it is formed by a group of people with distinctive values, norms and rules for behaviors. However, subculture exists within a dominant culture. Brislin [1988] argued that social class can be the basis for a subculture (Jandt, 2013, 12). Social class can be defined as the position within the society based on income, education, occupation etc. It is said that people from different social class usually have different standards and values. For example, working-class parents and middle-class parents would emphasize different values while raising child [Melvin Kohn, 1977] (Jandt, 2013, 12). For middle-class parents, they would emphasize more on self-control, intellectual curiosity and consideration for others. On the other hand, working-class parents usually emphasize more on obedience, neatness, and good manners. However, it is impossible to assume that this is the case with all family. By assuming that social classes have different values, it can create a barrier within the dominant cultural group. Another basis for subculture is ethnicity. According to Zenner [1996], the term 'ethnicity' can be defined as *"a group of people of the same descent and heritage who share a common and distinctive culture passed on through generations"* (Jandt, 2013, 12). For example, in US, there are many ethnic groups, such as Italian-American, which refers to people born in America with Italian descent. However, most of people from there groups don't like using the terms Italian-Americans, Asian-American etc.

Co-culture is argued to be the same as subculture. However, that is not the case. As subculture exists within a dominant culture, co-culture is believed to exist along side with other culture. Therefore, these cultures need to combine their rules and standards altogether so as to create another set of values and rules for people from both cultures to understand. However, mutual understandings for different cultures to co-exist is not easily established. For example, American Indians can considered to be a case of co-culture or subculture as within America, there different laws based on different regions and states. From this example, it is important to remember that both terms 'subculture' and 'co-culture' are not entirely accurate. Each of us may have one or more subcultural identities based on social class and ethnicity.

2.1.3 Definition of Intercultural Communication

Lustig and Koester (2006, 46) defined *"intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings."*. However, each culture has its way of interpreting message or information. The way of communicating is also different from one culture to another. The differences in communication between cultures are mostly related to cultural patterns, verbal and nonverbal codes, relationships standards and roles, and social perceptions. When the degree of differences between cultures becomes relatively large, it would lead to misinterpretation and dissimilar expectations about how to communicate competently. Therefore, the information exchanging process is much more difficult in intercultural communication. In other words, intercultural communication is a process in which people from different cultural background try to interact and create a shared understanding so as to achieve their personal goals as well as creating relationship with others.

2.2 Culture's influence on perception

According to Jandt (2013, 62), human perception is a three-step process, which consists of *selection, organization, and interpretation*. And all three steps are easily influenced by culture. In this chapter, the author will examine the influence of culture on these three aspects and culture's influence through the culture context. The three-step perception process is displayed in figure 4.
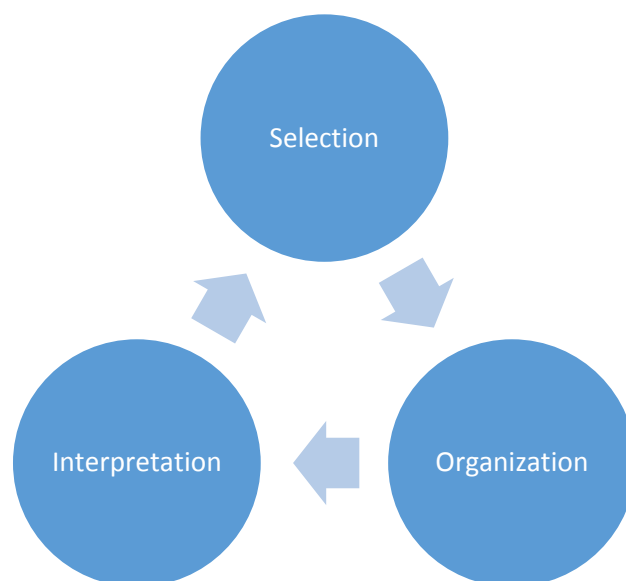

FIGURE 4. Three-step perception process

2.2.1 Selection

Selection is the first step in the perception process. Jandt (2013, 62) wrote that *"within our psychological limitations, you are exposed to more stimuli than you could possibly manage"*. It is said that when people are paying attention or have interest in something, they automatically sense it out of competing stimuli. For example, at the busy airport, even though there are many competing stimuli, like noise etc., people are still likely to be able to pick out our name being called in an announcement.

This is something that people learnt from the childhood. Without knowing, they have learnt to select familiar stimuli from their culture out of others from the environment. For example, from the native language, people learn how it sounds like and how it is pronounced. So people from different cultural can find it hard to understand or learn new language, which have different rules from their first language. Jandt (2013, 63) had introduced an example of speech differences between English and Japanese to support this theory. In his example, he stated that certain aspects of Japanese are difficult for English speaker to perceive or notice the differences, such as short-duration vowels or long-duration vowels. It is also the same for Japanese to perceive certain English words as well.

2.2.2 Organization

After selecting out the information, the next step is to organize those information in a perceivable way. Like when looking at an object, people tends to see it as a whole rather than individual components. Therefore, people have the tendency to categorize things that have some attributes in common as a group. On that basis, people's understanding of things influences the speakers' perception, or how a message is encoded and stored. *"Language provides the symbol to group perceptions of any kind together"*, Jandt (2013, 64) stated. Harry Hoijer [1954] also believed that language is *"a way of directing the perception of its speakers and it promotes for them habitual modes of analyzing experience into significant categories."* (Jandt, 2013, 65)

Mutsimi Imae and Dedre Gentner's study about grouping objects together [1994]. In this study, they ask two groups of American and Japanese as participants (Jandt, 2013, 65). Firstly, they showed both group an object called *dax*, which is a pyramid made of cork. Then two objects were shown, which are

a plastic pyramid and a different shape made of cork. As the result, the American encoded what they saw as an object, meanwhile, the Japanese encoded what they saw as a material.

2.2.3   Interpretation

The third stage is interpretation. The same situation, action or gesture can all be interpreted differently by different people. In this stage, culture also has great effect on how people interpret things. As people are constantly in contact with others from the same culture background, an ideal of 'normal' starts to form without knowing. This can also be known as stereotype. Each culture has its own stereotype about different culture. People make judgment to their age, social status, educational background, and so one. It is difficult for a person to explain why he/she is making such judgment as the cues used to make these decisions are subtle.

To see how greatly people's interpretation is influenced by culture background, Jandt (2013, 66-67) had used an example of how animals are treated in different culture, in this case the dogs. Dogs are considered to be companion to human for a long time in some cultures but food in some other cultures. For example, in Chinese old tradition, dogs were considered to be a kind of food, which are good for circulating blood. However, nowadays, that is not the case anymore. Even in Vietnam, dogs used to be considered to be a delicacy. But from 2 years ago, it is officially forbidden to kill and use dogs as food since it is animal cruelty. Or Jewish, Muslim are forbidden to eat pork because pig is considered to be unclean and therefore prohibited in their bible , meanwhile, others view pork as a normal ingredient for their meals.

From all of these examples, culture plays an important part of how people interpret things around them. Jandt (2013, 69) stated that *"it is those differing categorizations that can so often impede communication"*, especially when the group only believes in its perception and classifies others as wrong.

2.2.4   High versus low context

Perception can also be influenced by whether that culture is high context or low context. High and low context culture concept is introduced by Edward T. Hall (Myron, Jolene, 2006, 110). High context

culture is culture in which its surrounding environment is already a self – evidence and does not need to be explicitly said. Meanwhile, in low context culture, all the information and message are delivered by verbal communication. In some studies conducted by Miyamoto, Nisbett, & Masuda [2006] between European Americans and Japanese (Jandt, 2013, 69), its results argue that Europeans focus more on the object independently, whereas Asians pay attention more on the context. In low context culture, verbal messages are tend to be more details and specific. Therefore, verbal abilities are highly appreciated in low context culture. In contrast, in high context culture, the messages are already presented in the physical context or internalized in the person. High context culture is more sensitive towards nonverbal messages and likely to be view as a group rather than an individual.

For example, in Chinese culture, there is the concept of "face". "Face" in this case doesn't mean a part of body, instead it actually means reputation of a person. Chinese culture is considered to be high context culture. Therefore, their communication tends to be more indirect and more likely to use intermediaries. In business, one person doesn't just represent himself but actually represent the whole group. That's why using intermediaries would eliminate the chance of losing face. Meanwhile, in America, people prefer direct communication and self-face maintenance since they are concerned about privacy.

2.3   Barriers of intercultural communication

Every culture has its set of rules and standards about behaviors. So it is impossible for anyone to learn a culture perfectly. All actions are bound to be wrong in some cultures or offending in someone's view. Communication between culture are likely to be less effective because of the violation of culture's norms. In fact, people would never know if they are expected to follow another culture's norms or behave normally according to their culture. There are many barriers to communicate across cultural, which are preventing effective communication. According to LaRay M. Barna [1997], there are six barriers in intercultural communication: *anxiety, assuming similarity instead of difference, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, language and non-verbal misinterpretation.* (Jandt, 2013, 81).

2.3.1   Anxiety, assuming similarity instead of difference, ethnocentrism

The first barrier that everyone faces is *anxiety*. *Anxiety* is a feeling that most people felt in a completely new and different environment. They are nervous due to not knowing what they are expected to do during the communication transaction. Since people are feeling nervous, they might not be totally focus on the communication process. As the result, the common mistakes or appearing awkward to others are likely to be made when people are anxious. For example, when Asians are studying abroad for the first time, most of them become extremely nervous about their English skills. And this could lead to common mistakes in accent or pronounce.

Beside the first barrier, *assuming similarity instead of difference* is also a barrier when communicating across culture. In a new culture, it is natural for people to assume that it is okay for them to behave the same way as in their culture. However, this assumption makes people forget the important differences. In result, this could lead to miscommunication. Each culture is distinguish and unique. For example, display of emotions is different from culture to culture. Under certain circumstances, some cultures might seem to be lacking of emotions, comparing to other cultures. Moreover, the situation is also the same if people only assume difference instead of similarity. This could make people become unaware of the common things between culture. That's why it is better for people to assume nothing and ask questions.

Ethnocentrism is the third barrier that effects intercultural communication. It means to *"negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one's own culture"* (Jandt, 2013, 83). This barrier is also mentioned in section 2.2.3. For example, in some religions, people believe that only their religion is right and others is wrong. Every culture has its rules and standards. That's why it is impossible to apply the same standards of one's culture to others. This barrier has negative effects on intercultural communication. *Ethnocentrism* leads to restriction and limitation of obtaining knowledge and values of other cultures.

2.3.2   Stereotypes and prejudice

Stereotypes and *prejudice* are both challenges to intercultural communication. Both terms are referring to making judgments about a person based on a group's common values. *Stereotypes* is a broad term and can be used for either negative or positive judgment about individuals. Meanwhile, *prejudice* usually refers to unjust behaviors and hostility towards a group, race, religion or sexual orientation.

" What we see, the most readily available image, is what we expect to see.", Jandt (2013, 86) stated. *Stereotypes* are one's expectation about someone or something based on the basis knowledge about it. With the way human perceive things, people can easily reject any information that is not related to their expectation. For example, in a correcting grammar exercise, when people are asked to correct 'finish' into 'finnish', most of them would overlook this mistake in spelling as they are not expecting this kind of mistake. *Stereotypes* are used by every culture but it can impede communication. Most people gain the information about stereotypes from movies, news and maybe from other people's perspective. Those information cause people to assume a widely belief is true when the information might not be true or apply to every single individual. Therefore, they also have a negative effect on the individual stereotyped as well. The mentioned individual can be distracted or misjudge because of those stereotypes. However, not all stereotypes are negative judgments.

Prejudice usually refers to irrational dislike based solely on the individual's belief. The highly prejudiced persons are identified to have an authoritarian personality. They tend to overgeneralize things. They are not likely to change their attitudes or beliefs, even when they face new and conflicting information. *Prejudice* exists in all cultures around the world. For example, people's hostility towards black people. Even when the world is changing, there are still many people view black men as bad guy. Or some people's dislike towards the GLBT community. *Prejudice* prevents an effective communication since the person might completely reject the new information that doesn't suit their standards or beliefs.

2.3.3 Language

"Language is a set of symbols shared by a community to communicate meaning and experience." (Jandt, 2013, 161). For people with the same cultural background, same native language, it is expected for them to understand the meanings better as their ways of thinking are similar. However, in intercultural communication, people from different cultural groups tend to misinterpret each other's meanings. Therefore, language is an obvious obstacle to intercultural communication. Even when cultures use the same language, there are still differences, such as vocabulary differences.

There is no way to translate a language perfectly. For translation problems, Sechrest, Fay and Zaidi [1972] five possible problems: lack of vocabulary equivalence, idiomatic equivalence, grammatical syntactical equivalence, experiential equivalence, and conceptual equivalence (Jandt, 2013, 141). The

first problem is lacking of vocabulary equivalence. Languages from different cultures often lacks words that can be translate directly word by word. For example, when translating English to Vietnamese, a word in English can be translated into a few words in Vietnamese, so sometimes the meaning might be misunderstood depending on the translator's interpretation. Next problem is the idioms in language. There are many idioms that can be easily misunderstood. For example, in English, 'break a leg' means good luck in performing tradition, but the listener might misunderstood that the speaker is tell him to break a leg literally. In translation, one idiom in this language can be understood or translated in a completely different way. So it is hard to learn a new language, especially its idioms. The third problem is grammatical equivalence. This problem simply means that the grammar in each languages is different from each other. In order to understand a sentence or the meaning of words, it is important to learn a language's grammar. The fourth problem is experiential equivalence, which means a certain word have meaning in this language but not in other languages. In these cases, translators usually find another words that have meanings similar to that words. The last problem is conceptual equivalence. This problem exists when one word can be translate directly to another language but the perception of the meanings might not be the same.

Beside the translation problems, another problem is the spread of a language, or also known as unequal communication. As the world is globalizing, an universal language is necessary. However, the increasing usage of a second language can be considered as culture invasion. It is believed that the spreading of a language to daily use also means the spreading influence of the native culture of that language. For example, English is estimated to be used by one fifth to one fourth of the world's population. There are 12 countries with English as official language. And more than 56 countries have English as a compulsory subject.

2.3.4 Non-verbal misinterpretation

Effective intercultural communication is a mix of both verbal and non-verbal communication. During an international business negotiation, non-verbal behaviors can help getting the message across to foreign partners better than verbal behaviors. However, there is also a risk of misinterpretation and cause confusion for the partners. Most people know that languages are different from each others, but they are less likely to aware that non-verbal messages are different as well. Non-verbal communications are also unique and distinguish from culture to culture. Therefore, the meaning of non-verbal communications also vary from different culture. And those differences are what create

confusion and misunderstanding in intercultural communication. As result, non-verbal misinterpretation could create unfortunate misunderstanding and miscommunication, especially when non-verbal behaviors' meanings don't match verbal behaviors. Non-verbal misinterpretation is another huge barrier to overcome in intercultural communication.

2.4   Intercultural communication competences

Intercultural communication competence means the ability to aware of risks of misunderstanding through differences in speech, behaviors, and body language. It also means the willingness to modify the person's speech and behaviors accordingly to the situation. Intercultural communication competences involves ethical behaviors as

- Respecting for people from other cultures.
- Being non-judgmental towards members of other cultures.
- Taking turns appropriately in intercultural conversations.
- Being empathy towards members of other cultures.

According to Eerdmans [2003], intercultural communication competence includes linguistic and interactional competence (Maude, 2011). Jandt (2013) had classified intercultural communication competence into four skill areas: *personality strength, communication skills, psychological adjustment*, and *cultural awareness.*

Personality strength are personal traits that affect intercultural communication. These personal traits are *self-concept, self-disclosure, self-monitoring* and *social relaxation*. *Self-concept* refers to the way how a person view oneself. *Self-disclosure* means the willingness to reveal information about oneself to the partner. *Self-monitoring* is using social information to modify self-presentation and behaviors to fit the situation. *Social relaxation* simply means the ability to communicate comfortably and revealing little anxiety. Therefore, an effective intercultural communicators must present themselves well and initiate positive image through their self-awareness. It is also important for the person to show their friendly personality in intercultural conversations as well.

Communication skills include both verbal and non-verbal skills. According to Jandt (2013), intercultural communication skills require message skills, behavioral flexibility, interaction

management and social skills. *Message skills* mean understanding and using a language efficiently to communicate and feedback as well. *Behavioral flexibility* refers to selecting a suitable behavior in different situations. *Interaction management* emphasizes on a person's ability to interact in a conversation, such as initiating a conversation, attentiveness or responsiveness etc. *Social skills* consists of empathy and identity maintenance. Empathy in a conversation means that individual is able to put himself in other's shoe to think and feel alike. Identity maintenance is understanding the partner's identity so as to communicate in an appropriate way. In other words, the ability to communicate with diverse people in different situations is an important component in effective intercultural communication.

Psychological adjustment means the ability to handle the 'culture shock'. 'Culture shock' usually happens when a person is moving to a new culture, where they might experience stress and unpleasant responses. In new environment, the feelings of 'culture shock' can turn into frustration, stress and alienation etc. The common causes of 'culture shock' are disturbing cultural practices, difficult living conditions, absence of family and friends. However, looking from a different perspective, entering a new cultural environment would give individuals a great opportunity to learn and grow both professionally and emotionally. Moreover, they can learn more about their culture's strength and weakness through living and working in a different cultural environment. Therefore, an competent communicator must be able to maintain oneself and adjust to new environments.

Last but not least, cultural awareness is essential for communicating effectively with people from different cultures. Chen and Starosta [1996] defined intercultural communication competence as *"the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and to execute appropriately effective communication behaviors that recognize the interactants' multiple identities in a specific environments"* (Jandt, 2013). According to the definition, in intercultural conversation, communicators have to interact effectively so as to gain respect and their goals.

Nowadays, the technology is growing rapidly. That's why knowledge about using different communication channels, for example emails, computers etc., has also become a necessary requirement for effective intercultural communication. Intercultural communication competence requires knowledge, motivation to learn and ability to adjust accordingly to the situation.
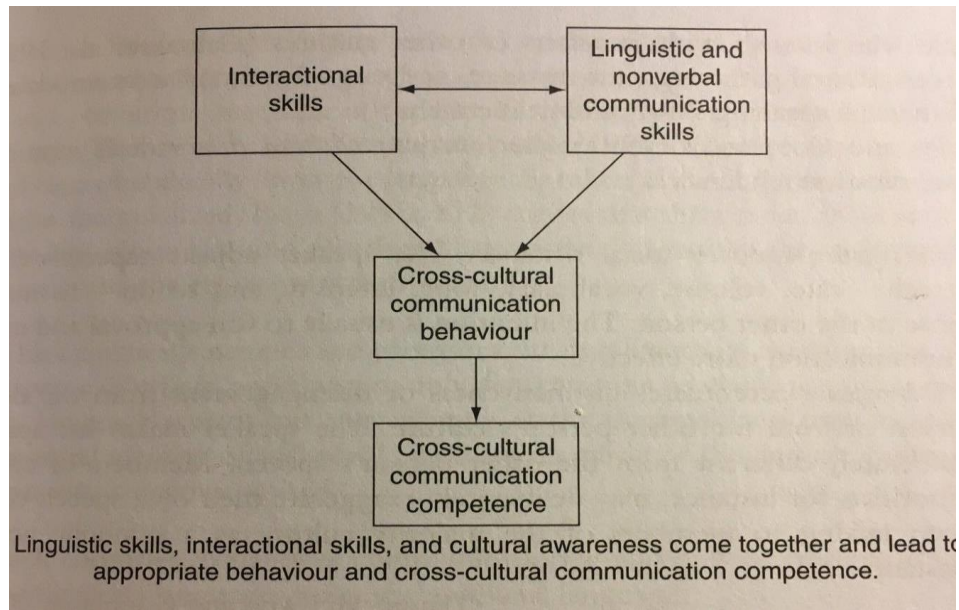
Linguistic skills, interactional skills, and cultural awareness come together and lead to appropriate behaviour and cross-cultural communication competence.

FIGURE 5. Intercultural communication competence (Maude, 2011, 75)

2.5 Eastern and Western perspective on communication

While working in an international environment, knowledge about the impacts of cultural differences is one of the keys to success. Regardless of working fields, the differences are directly influences people and the profitability of international business. Eastern and Western both has different way of viewing communication in business culture. To study their perspectives, the author chooses Japan and Denmark as the representative countries.

For Western countries, in this case Denmark, Japan is a very potential market in Asia. There is a fact that Japan is one of the largest economy in Asia region. In particular, the wealth among consumers allows Japanese to afford luxury brands. In other word, Japan is like an oasis for luxury brands. Moreover, Japanese actually appreciate and prefer Western products and brands. As for Denmark particularly, Japanese has always appreciate simplicity, which can be seen clearly from their lifestyle and their philosophy of Zen Buddhism. With a clean and simple design, Danish products resonate remarkably well with the Japanese. According to Clausen (2006, 34), for some Japanese, Scandinavian and Denmark has an image of 'slow life'. This image attracts a lot of attention from Japanese, as they lives quite a busy life. Moreover, 'slow life' comes in pair with simplicity. Therefore, a vision of a simple Scandinavian way of life become very appealing to Japanese market. This fact was mentioned

by employees from the Scandinavian Tourist Board, Rosendahl and ECCO. In order to study the Danish business strategy in Japan, the author has selected ECCO Shoes as her case study.

2.5.1 ECCO Shoes in Japan

ECCO was founded by Karl-Heinz Toosbuy in Southern of Denmark, Jutland, in 1963. ECCO produces twelve millions pairs of shoes a year and 1.2 million pairs are sold in Japan (Clausen, 2006, 204). ECCO Shoes has been represented by a Japanese manufacturer, called Achilles Corporation, since 1982 (Clausen, 2006, 27). Japanese market is the third largest market for ECCO Shoes. In 2003, ECCO has renewed its contract with Achilles for another 10 years. ECCO's headquarters are located in Bredebro and Tonder in Jutland, the western part of Denmark. The company goal is to create a global brand. Therefore, in 2002, ECCO established an Asian Pacific office in Hong Kong. This office develops annual business plan as well as acts as communication mediatory between Japan and ECCO's headquarters.

GRAPH 1. ECCO Shoes logo

"ECCO is a company characterized by an entrepreneurial spirit, open communication, and a relatively flat organizational structure" (Clausen, 2006, 204). On the other hand, Achilles is a traditional Japanese company with complex decision-making process. These two companies have different ways of thinking and doing business, especially when both of them are deeply influence by their native culture. Therefore, to enhance their cultural competencies and communication, employees from both companies have been exchanged as trainees to learn from one another. Achilles's production and marketing are for textile and leather shoes. As ECCO's product is leather shoe, the Japanese company has decided to create a separate division for marketing and sales of this products, called ECCO Sales. However, differences in organizational forms, business practices, cultural values and language have influenced the partnership between two companies. Therefore, each side has decided to take the initiate to make changes so as to enhance the collaboration across culture.

The first challenge that ECCO and Achilles face is the organizational form. In most Japanese companies, it is very important to follow hierarchical order when making decisions. In other word, decisions need consent from several people rather than one specific individual. If there are new ideas or projects, they would have to go through several layers of organization before it could be implemented. In foreign companies' perspective, this process is very time consuming. They believe that it would be more effective and time saving by negotiating directly. Meanwhile, the Japanese would rather take times and reduce the risks through detail planning. This is actually a good virtue of Japanese, but it also have a negative side. In Japanese tradition vertical organization system, flexibility, creativity and sense of individual responsibility are not promoted. Subsequently, people aren't able to show their potential fully. Even though, ECCO sales team in Japan is slowly adapting to work practices of ECCO main headquarters, two companies still function and behave quite differently.

Beside organizational form, ECCO and Achilles also have differences in meeting styles and relationship building. In her study, Clausen (2006, 219) states that ECCO managers evaluate the meeting's results based on the number of business decisions. In contrast, the Japanese managers' evaluation is based on the status of people attended the meeting. For them, the meeting is a channel to reinforce their partnership. During a meeting, Japanese staffs are mostly just listen and occasionally comment when they are asked to. For the Danish staffs, who are always participating actively in the meeting, this kind of silence would take time for them to get used to. Moreover, for the Danish, participation in the meeting is less formal, and the argument is much more important than the status of the speaker. And when there is a meeting, no matter how small it is, the president would come with a number of staff to formally greet their foreign partner. This is a custom for them to show the respect to ECCO as their partner. It can be clearly seen that building a good relationship is very important for the Japanese. Therefore, it's critical for ECCO's top managers to make formal visit, especially when they take new position. This formal meeting may not related to business, but it is very important to build a good relationship and earn mutual trust with Achilles. In her study, Clausen (2006, 221) also mentioned that in Japan, people don't usually change their position regularly, meanwhile, changing position is very normal for the Danish. This is also a difference between Japanese business practice and Danish business practice.

Another on-going challenge for ECCO and Achilles is language. For both companies, this is the biggest challenge in their communication. During a joint meeting, their discussion would need to go through a translator, which could take up a lot of time. According to managing director Michael Hauge

Sorensen (Clausen, 2006, 221), the situation is frustrated for him as he cannot communicate with his Japanese colleague without the interpreter. And this fact become a great hindrance in creating a good relationship between the Danish staff and Japanese staff. Even though, most Danish can speak English, but it is not the same case with the Japanese. Teruaki Nagashima also stated in Clausen's study (2006, 221) that the translation is not always perfect and it is necessary to develop bilingual staff so as to communicate directly with their partner. Moreover, English communication skill in Japan is not as good as some other developed countries. Consequently, there is communication gap between ECCO and Achilles. Therefore, in order to enhance their communication and cultural interaction, ECCO and Achilles have developed a programme to train their young employees. As mention before, young employees will be exchange as trainees to learn from each other and then come back to share knowledge with their colleagues.

Even though there are still some challenges in communication and cultural practices, the presence of Hong Kong office has stabilized and improved the situation for both ECCO and Achilles. ECCO communication system can be found in figure 6. ECCO establishes Hong Kong office so as to develop a business platform of ECCO in Asia. By doing so, ECCO can develop the markets of Asia even further.
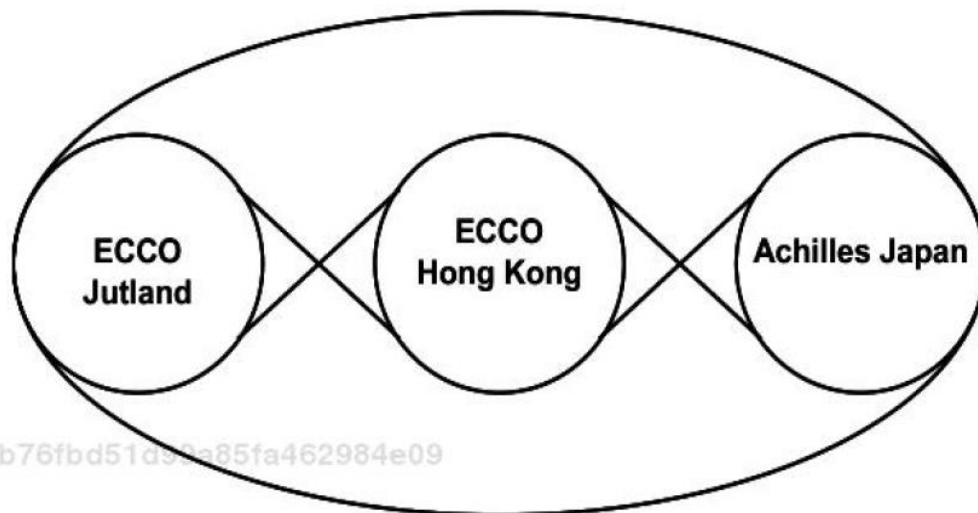

FIGURE 6. ECCO communication diagram: Bredebro in Jutland, Hong Kong and Tokyo (Clausen, 2006, 227)

2.5.2   ECCO's global communication strategy

According to Clausen (2006, 231), most companies of ECCO have its own strategies to match the local markets. In Japan case, the business plans and strategies are generated and supervised by Hong Kong office. However, the communication between the headquarter and the partner still need a lot of work from both sides. This face is even truer, especially when ECCO is trying to become a global brand. However, a global image can be quite confusing to the Japanese division, according to President Shizuya Yamanaka (Clausen, 2006, 232). As the Japanese's perception and their way of thinking are different, therefore, many images that ECCO wanted to create can be misinterpreted. The first challenge is difference in language. The fact is that Danish and Japanese are completely different from each other. Therefore, if ECCO wants to apply the same campaign in Europe to Japan, it would not be much success as the message would not be understood the same way. For example, ECCO's product, called 'The Shark', has been sold with a record number in Europe with a poster saying 'Shark Attack'. However, with the same product, the sale in Japan is not positive as the message on the poster doesn't really make any sense to the Japanese (Clausen, 2006, 232). It would be very difficult for ECCO to apply one single strategy in every market unless they starts in the markets all around the world at the same time. Therefore, it is necessary for ECCO to take in the history and cultural differences of each market to make the right business plan. So the headquarters also encourage each region to make its own decision in some cases. According to Michael Hauge Sorensen, annual regional meeting has helped the representative of each region to discover their common ground (Clausen, 2006, 233). In Japan case, they have also discover that they are not so different from other countries in the same region. This fact has a big influence on the future of ECCO's global strategy.

For quite a while, Achilles doesn't really understand the ECCO's idea because of differences in culture and language. They want to promote ECCO's products with the image of Danish product with simple design and comfortable footwear. As mentioned before, the idea of a slow and simple Scandinavian life is very attracted to the Japanese. That's why ECCO's slogan *"ECCO is so comfortable that you feel like jumping"* in 2002 is very popular in Japan. According to an image survey conducted in 2004, ECCO's products are popular and likeable among the older customers (Clausen, 2006, 234). Moreover, in ECCO headquarters, the new generation of workers want to change the 'good for your foot' image to appeal with the younger generations and to create a new image that can be the potential trend. However, in Japanese unit perspective, the image of comfortable footwear is the core image of ECCO products in Japan. And so in 2005, the company introduces the global brand strategy *"Shoes design to move you"*. This plan is well accepted by Japanese unit, as it also contains the core image of

ECCO. In addition to ECCO's strategy, they wanted to use costly local actors for the advertisement. And so Michael Hauge Sorensen agrees with the plan as long as ECCO logo and its image is still following the global brand strategy (Clausen, 2006, 234).

While working with Japanese, ECCO has realized that it is quite a challenge to change the direction of a Japanese company. The reason is partly because of the inconsistent communication from ECCO headquarters in certain circumstances. Therefore, consistency in message and business strategy is the most important thing for an effective partnership for both ECCO and Achilles. Unfortunately, according to Clausen, there has been a tendency for people entering new position to change the strategies. Consequently, it becomes hard for Japanese unit to keep track with the strategies. Even within the Japan market, it is also a challenge for ECCO Sales to change the strategies, especially when many of their customers are experienced wholesalers, who still uses the old promotion strategy. In conclusion for ECCO, to work well with their Japanese partner, patience is the key, as their partner would need time to understand the message and take action.

ECCO headquarters understand the fact that Japanese companies operate differently and the market is also different. So it is necessary to make adaptation in strategies and way of doing business to match their partner, Achilles. However, truthfully, Japan is not that different, according to Jens Aarup Mikkelsen (Clausen, 2006, 235). As ECCO is heading toward of becoming a global brand, a global strategy is needed. Fortunately, following the example of many global brands in Japan, there are quite many markets that are similar to Japan. In Japan, the strategies would only require a little adjustment, otherwise, it is not that different.

3   EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

For this chapter, the author will introduce her research method, the selection and background information of interviewees. The research on differences between Western and Eastern perspective on intercultural communication will also be included in this chapter. Due to the limited relationship network, the author can only interview candidates from her home country and her friends, who are staying in Europe as representative for Eastern and Western culture.

3.1 Research method

The qualitative research method refers to *"an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world"* [Van Maanen, 1979] (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, 2001, 65). There are many research problems that unfold during the process of researching. So qualitative method, which is a combination of rational and intuitive way of approaching information, is the most suitable method. The collected data are usually concerned with things that really happen as people experience them. Moreover, qualitative research method includes a logical process of establishing a theoretical framework based on previous studies, but it doesn't restrict the development of a research (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, 2001, 66). Therefore, it allows researchers to study the matter in different and unique perspective. Qualitative research method allow the researchers to answer question 'why' and 'how' of a subject. The purpose of this thesis is to study the different in intercultural communication between Western and Eastern perspective, that's why the author choose this research method. In qualitative research, there are different research methods to do the research: interviews, observation, case study and analysis of text. The author has used interview as her research method in order to study the in-depth of the subject.

The information is collected using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interview is the most common research method used in qualitative research. More importantly, by using this method, the author can compare and analyze the differences between interviewees' opinions and perspectives. This method also provides the interviewees opportunities to discuss freely on the topics, therefore, interesting facts and new perspectives can be discovered through the interviews. Semi-structured interview also allows the interviewer to adjust the interview questions according to the interviewee. Therefore, it is much easier for the author to discuss with the interviewees about the topics. Additional questions can also be added during the interview to explore the subject further.

The interview is conducted through Skype, Whatsapp and in person. The language used for interview is English. The interviewees are contacted officially by emails and the discussion topics are sent before hand. The interviews are recorded with the interviewees' permission and additional notes are taken. The entire process is conducted in November 2016, for totally almost 2 hours.

3.2   Interviewees' background

There are four persons, who agreed to take part in this research. They are the representative of different cultures. For the thesis purpose, the author has chosen the interviewees based on their experience in dealing with different cultures. The general information of the interviewees can be found in table 1.

TABLE 1. Interviewees' information

	Nationality	Company	Company's fields of work	Position	Experience
Interviewee 1	Vietnamese	USA company in Hanoi	Media and communication consultant	Office manager	8 years
Interviewee 2	Finnish, living in Spain	Open her own business in Spain	Internship consultant for students	Customer relationship manager	6 years
Interviewee 3	Vietnamese, living in Finland at the moment	Graduated student at Centria University of Applied Science	Part-time jobs	Different works	5 years
Interviewee 4	Vietnamese	French company in Ho Chi Minh	Sport equipment and clothing	Quality control manager	Start to work from May 2016

There are 3 persons, who are working at managerial level in different fields, such as media consultancy, sporting goods retailer and internship consultancy. One interviewee is not working at the time but she has been staying in Finland for quite a time. Interviewee 1 is the author's acquaintance in

Vietnam, who have been working with different cultures daily. Interviewee 2 is the author's mentor during her internship period in Spain. Both interviewee 3 and 4 are the author's friends, who have experience in working and living in foreign countries.

Interviewee 1 is a Vietnamese, who are working for an USA media consultant company. The company's headquarter is in USA, but it has various branches in different regions around the world. The Asia region includes offices in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam. The interviewee 1 has been working for this company for 8 years in Vietnam. Before working for this company, she used to work for a Vietnamese law firm for quite a long time as well. Therefore, she can help the company to operate accordingly to the Vietnam's law. She said that their office main activities are consultancy and communication planning. She communicates with her colleagues from other countries through emails and teleconference. She also mentioned during the interview that she didn't have the chance to go abroad and experience different cultures directly. But while working for the US company, she has gained a lot of experiences of dealing with people from different cultures within Asia region. She can use English fluently beside her native language, Vietnamese.

Interviewee 2 is a Finnish, who is working and living in Spain. She has been running her own internship consultant company in Spain for more than 6 years. She has been working as the customer relationship manager of the company. Therefore, she has been dealing with people from different cultures almost everyday. Her main tasks are contacting with partner universities to send the lists of available internship for students as well as managing the workforce in the office. She speaks Finnish, English and Spanish, but she uses mainly English in her office to communicate with the colleagues.

Interviewee 3 is a Vietnamese graduated student, who has been working and living in Finland for 5 years. She had studied in an international environment, with many opportunities to meet and exchange information with people from different cultures. While studying, she also took the chances to work and experience the Finnish culture at the same time. Moreover, she also has the chance to work in Vietnam as an English teacher before coming to Finland. So she is familiar with both cultures working style. She can speak Vietnamese, English and Finnish quite fluently as she uses it while working part-time jobs.

Interviewee 4 is a Vietnamese, who is currently working as a quality control manager for a French company in Vietnam. Before that, he studied in France for 3 years and studied in a very international environment as well. Even though he has only been working for almost 7 months, but he has

experienced a lot of cultural differences while working with his French boss and colleagues. He has his own team, which consists of both French and Vietnamese colleagues. So he has encountered quite many challenges to balance the team as a manager and a team leader. He can communicate in Vietnamese, and mostly English in his company. But sometimes, he can also use French to speak with his boss as well.

3.3   Practical research

According to the interviews' content, the author has grouped the information following these three topics: obstacles in intercultural communication, language, and non-verbal communication. In this part, the author's personal analysis is also included.

3.3.1   Obstacles in intercultural communication

Firstly, all interviewees mention that intercultural communication is now becoming a very important working skill for people, especially for those who would like to work in international environment. According to interviewee 1, even though intercultural communication is important, but there isn't many chances for Vietnamese to learn and experience a different culture. Especially for students, who only study and live within Vietnam, it is harder for them to interact with people from other cultures. On the other hand, interview 3 and 4 argue that younger generation has more chances to access to different cultures through social media and internet. But the disadvantage of this access channel is that the information might not be entirely accurate. Therefore, it can create a false impression of different cultures for the reader. As for interviewee 2, she thinks that Eastern people often experience culture shock while staying in Europe. For example, she explains that one of her interns, who comes from India, feels quite shock when he is asked to clean up after himself during lunch break. The differences between cultures can be quite a shock to people in a new environment. It can lead to misunderstanding as well as miscommunication unless it is well explained.

Interviewee 1 also mentions that the generation gap can also be a big obstacle in intercultural communication. Nowadays, in Vietnam, the students have more chances to go abroad to study, which allow they to be more active and open toward a different culture. But comparing to the older generation, it is quite a challenge for them to learn and adapt to a new culture. Subsequently, it is more

difficult for them to communicate with people from different cultures. The older generation usually find it harder to understand another cultural behavior as they are not used to it. And so in business, even though they may have various experiences but they aren't active as the younger generation when it comes to adapting to new things. Interviewee 2 also supports this opinion, but she thinks that Westerners are more open compare to Asian people. Therefore, they can be more acceptable when it comes to new things despite the generation. In interviewee 3's opinion, the Westerner can be very open to new things but only when they understand them. For her, the Finnish can be reserve at first but after getting to know each other, they are very friendly and nice.

From all the interview, it is mentioned that creating a good relationship is important in any culture. However, interview 1 argues that as the culture is different, it is very difficult to explain and persuade a foreign partner from different regions, especially about the working style. For example, interview 1 mentions that it is hard for her to explain Vietnamese culture of giving gifts to her American boss. The fact is that in Vietnam, in order for the business to run smoothly, it is important to create a good relationship with the authority. And so it is a common tradition for Vietnamese to give gifts to person in higher position as a way to start a relationship or a way of expressing gratitude. But for interview 2, she explains that this action can be considered as bribing, which is illegal in her culture. She says that in Western culture, the relationship between the employer and the employees are completely equal. That's why it can be considered to be bad to give gifts and presents. From interviewee 3's point of view, the action is not bad but have to depend on the occasion or situation as well. On the other hand, interviewee 4 also mentions that his relationship with his French boss used to be a challenge for at first, as he doesn't know how to treat him. Even within his team, there are times when he struggle to communicate with his colleagues, as they have different ways of thinking. So most of the times, he would have to ensure that they understand their tasks.

All interviewees agree that the best way to overcome these difficulties is being patient. Interviewee 1 and 2 agrees that patience is crucial factor in negotiating or persuasion. Since the culture is different, explanation for certain things or actions is important. But not everyone is open to those differences, that's why it is important that the person can take time to explain and help the other person to understand. Beside patience, interviewee 3 also adds that a friendly attitude help the person to open up to foreign things. Interviewee 4 says that observation is also necessary to improve the communication with people from different cultures. Since there might not always be opportunities to ask directly about things, therefore, observation would help you avoid misinterpreting the situation.

3.3.2 Language

Language is definitely an obvious obstacle for intercultural communication. All of them have faced challenge in communicating in a different language. For example, interviewee 1 uses written English daily to communicate with her foreign colleague and customers as her main work is to communicate through email. And so it is also quite a challenge for her to do presentation in English. In fact, in Vietnam, this is quite a challenge for people to speak English even though their writing skill is good. Interviewee 1 also mentions that even in the same region, the level of English is already quite different. Therefore, sometimes she aren't able to convey the entire message or purpose of a project to her foreign colleagues. Consequently, it is also harder to persuade them to agree on a project. Interviewee 4 also mentions the different level of English between countries. He explains that not everyone is supposed to be good and fluent at English. That's why it is important to aim for clarity while communicating across cultures.

In another aspect, interviewee 3 believes that English helps people communicate and connect with each other better, especially when you don't know the other person's native language. But she thinks that the effort of trying to speak the language would definitely leave a good impression on the partner. Interviewee 2 also agrees that it is not entirely necessary to understand the native language of other person, but it is important that you know at least some simple phrases such as 'hello' and 'thank you'. She also has to face language challenge when she first came to Spain as it is not her native language. But the effort to learn and practice a third language already contribute a lot to a good first impression, especially in working life.

For working person, English is at least the minimum requirements for working skill. All interviewees agree that English is needed for business communication, especially when the economic is being globalized. Interviewee 2, 3 and 4 think that it is also good to know a third language as well, even though it is not really necessary. But knowing a third language can become a great asset for employees, who are working in foreign countries. But interviewee 1 thinks that it is quite hard to learn a third language since there are not many chances for using it in real life. Moreover, in Vietnam, English is taught in schools as a second language. So most Vietnamese would just solely focus on improving their English skills rather than take times to learn another language. Meanwhile, according to interviewee 3, it is in her study program to learn Finnish and another optional language. She also

says that in order to work in Finland, learning Finnish is definitely a required skill to communicate with the native worker.

3.3.3 Non-verbal communication

The final topic is non-verbal communication. Regarding this topic, there are two different opinions from two cultures. In interviewee 1's opinion, non-verbal communication is not very important in the Vietnamese business culture. As in Vietnamese culture, the verbal communication is far more common than non-verbal communication. Interview 2 and 4 believe that non-verbal communication is very important in working life. For example, interview 4 has experienced being misunderstood because of his action. He says that his action was normal but from his partner's point of view it was uncomfortable.

As for interviewee 2, she has been working with students from different countries everyday. In her opinion, the Easterners appear to be shy, reserve and sometimes a little bit too polite, but they are all very hardworking. In her personal experience, she has never experience any bad things while dealing with people from different cultures. Meanwhile, interviewee 1 thinks that non-verbal communication makes her American boss look more confident at work. She admits that in many case, such as during presentation, it is important to have good body language and eye contact, which many Vietnamese employees are lack of. Training is needed but not everyone gets the chance to practice in real situation. Consequently, presentation skill doesn't really improve much. Interviewee 4 also mentions that before working for his current company, it is very important for employees to participate in the communication training. Since they are working daily with people from different countries, it is important to learn how to communicate clearly and avoid misunderstandings.

During the interview, each interviewees are asked whether they prefer listening in the meeting or participating actively. All of them agrees that sometimes it also depends on the situation requirements as well. But interviewee 1 and 3 say that they actually prefer listening to participating actively in them. And this is quite common in Vietnamese culture, since people are taught to answer only when they are asked. Interviewee 3 also adds that she would try to smile and keep the eye contact during the presentation. However, there have been situations where others find it strange and odd for her to smile during the entire presentation. In contrast, interviewee 2 says she would have to participate actively as a manager but she also takes time to listen to everyone opinions as well. As for interview 4, he would listen to everyone and make note. If he is required to make point or suggestion during the meeting, then he would participate in them actively.

3.3.4   Personal analysis

After all interviews, it can seen clearly that there are differences between Western and Asian perspective on intercultural communication topic. However, there seems to be more similarities between them, which is a very interesting fact.

In Asian business culture, intercultural communication is not a necessary skill, even though nowadays there are many international companies located in the region. They are not always open towards foreign cultures. On the other hand, in Western business culture, they are more accepting towards new things. But they still keep their working principle as the core while adjusting to fit the rules of other cultures. In other words, the Asian are not entirely as aware of different cultures as the Westerner. That's why most Asian would face culture shock or challenges while working or living in international environment.

The usage of language is also different between Asian and Western culture. In Asian business culture, most people believe that English is already good enough for them to communicate across culture. However, the fact is that not everyone speaks English and the level of English also varies from countries to countries. On the other hand, for Westerner, they also believe that English is necessary for international business, but learning a third language is also a good benefit as well. Moreover, while learning a new language, they can also learn about the native culture of that language as well. So it allows them to leave at least a good impression for the first meeting. Besides language, role of non-verbal communication is also different in two cultures.

In Asian culture, the non-verbal communication is quite limited. Most Asian people wouldn't use eye contact or gestures to communicate in daily life. And there are always a large personal space between them when communicating. However, in Western culture, it is completely opposite. But both people from these two cultures realize that the best way to communicate across culture is to be patient. Patience allows them to understand as well as explain the differences. Moreover, it is also important to observe the behavior of others, since there are some actions people does without knowing. It is also a good way to learn and adapt to new things. More importantly, both cultures aim for clarity while communicating across culture. However, not everyone would actually confirms things if he doesn't understand it. This is definitely a point that everyone should take in and improve. Miscommunication

can be avoid if the message is clear. So confirmation afterwards is also very important to ensure the clarity of the conversation.

It can also be concluded from all interviews that generation gap also plays a big part in intercultural communication. The younger generation have more opportunities to travel, study or work abroad, which makes it easier for them to accept and adapt to new cultures. On the other hand, the older generation, who doesn't have that opportunities, adapts to new things at their own pace. However, older generation definitely have more experience, which allows them to avoid common mistake and communicate more effectively. Fortunately, thanks to the advancing technology as well as globalization around the world, everyone now has a better chance to access to information about different cultures.

Nowadays, the similarities between culture is definitely increasing greatly. Therefore, trying to look for similarities rather than differences definitely help the person to create a good basis of understanding for effective intercultural communication. The author believes that this is a good sign since people can cooperate better, knowing their cultures are not so different. However, it is a fact that differences between cultures still exists. But accepting these differences allows people to learn the best from each other.

4   CONCLUSIONS

For this thesis, the author has chosen qualitative research and semi-structured interview as her research method. By using this research method, the author has reached her goal of studying the differences and similarities between two cultures based on the experience of the interviewees. Due to lack of time and resources, the author has chosen interviewees from Finland and Vietnam as representative for Western and Asian culture. Even though the author can interview more people, the four interviews are sufficient in studying the thesis's goal. But it is also important to note that these information are collected from the interviewees' personal experience. Therefore, other people might have different perspective and the results of the research might change as well.

It is a fact that Western and Asian business culture are different from each other, but if looking carefully, similarities can also be found between two cultures. There are many obstacles to communicate effectively across cultures. Between Western and Asian culture, they found the most challenging is difference in ways of thinking, which also means different working styles. From time to time, it is difficult to express an idea or project if the business partner can't understand the meaning or the reason behind them. Consequently it takes a lot of effort to convey the message, which leads to losing time and money in business. Besides that, language is also an obvious obstacles for both cultures. The obstacle of language is that the level of English varies from countries to countries. Moreover, non-verbal communication is also regarded as a challenge for both culture, especially when it is compare between people from expressive and inexpressive cultures. Both of these challenges can lead to other problems such as miscommunicating or misinterpretation. However, all interviewees, who have experiences in working with people from other cultures, agree that patience and observation will help people avoid the common mistake in intercultural communication. Showing interest in other cultures also allows people to leave a good impression, regardless of cultures. More importantly, understanding the differences and adapting to those will let people to communicate effectively as well as learn new things from other.

In summary, intercultural communication has changed compare to before as people have more access to the world. But the differences between cultures still exist and people need to aware of that fact. Gaining experience, accepting those differences and looking for similarities instead of differences create a good basis for effective communication across cultures.

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INTERVIEW PLAN

Topic 1: Introduction

- Introduce yourself. (Name, occupations, working history etc.)
- Please describe your usual tasks in working life.

Topic 2: Intercultural communication in Eastern and Western business culture

- How often do you work with people from different cultures?
- Do you encounter any difficulties while working with people from different cultures? Please describe these difficulties.
- What is your solutions for these difficulties?
- What is your opinions about intercultural communication in Eastern business culture?
- Is it a necessary part for working people to know?
- What about intercultural communication in Western business culture?

Topic 3: Language usage

- What languages are used when communicating with colleagues and customers?
- Is there any challenges in language that you face while working with foreign customers or colleagues?
- Do you think it is necessary to know more than 2 languages? Please explain your choice.
- What is your opinion about English being the dominant language?

Topic 4: Non-verbal communication

- Do you know what is non-verbal communication? How do you perceive them in your working life? For example, silence during a meeting, eye contact in a presentation etc.
- Do you think non-verbal communication is important in Eastern business culture? How about in Western business culture?
- Have you ever encounter any misunderstandings because of non-verbal communication? Please describe the situation.
- How do you improve your non-verbal communication competences?