

A Semiotic Explication of Communicative Conflicts in Cross-cultural Settings between Koreans and Americans

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The main idea of this paper starts from the Saussurian frame of the semiotic axes - the syntagmatic vs. paradigmatic axes. This frame provides us a methodological insight into two thematic types of semiotic performances at the cognitive level. The discussion of this paper extends the concepts of the semiotic axes to the cultural variables in which the cognitive practice of one axis is preferred to that of the other axis. This paper explores cross-cultural communication between Koreans and Americans by locating Korean culture at a “paradigmatic axis oriented communication culture [paradigmatic praxis],” and American culture at a “syntagmatic axis oriented communication culture [syntagmatic praxis].”

Keywords: Communication Style, Semiotics, Korean Communication, American Communication, Cross-Cultural Communication

1. In Search of the “Communication Styles” of a Culture

1) Communication Styles

The concept of styles presume a stability or consolidation of a culture whereas culture is always changing and is an ongoing process. The styles of a culture govern cultural and social interaction and shape the boundary of a culture. Thus, styles that differentiate one culture from another and identify a cultural boundary should be understood as the integration of cultural rules, codes, customs, etc. which are, from a dynamic point of view, still struggling to be patterned. Therefore, a search for the communication style of a culture means identifying pat-

terned or typified ways of communicating. In this sense, styles mean behavioral and symbolic attributes, and they function to express the ways of life within the cultural and structural relations.

The author of *Ethnography of Communication*, Saville-Troike (1989) points out that many ethnographic researches on various ethnic, cultural, and subcultural groups show that what is required to be a competent member of a society is to learn the communication codes of the society from the perspective of 'speech community.' Thus, an effort to search for a communicative praxis (habitual practices = styles) of a cultural group is to identify the "internal substance" of the cultural group.

In other words, regardless of its size a "cultural" group is a speech community which possesses the communication styles that are differentiated from those of other communities. Thus, an individual's "communicative competence" may be evaluated by how well the person "appropriately" practices and exhibits his/her knowledge of communicative rules, codes, and *habitus* in that society or culture.

Therefore, in searching for the communication styles of a culture, a communication style should be taken as the integration of cultural rules, codes, habits etc., which are practiced enough to be outlined and patterned in everyday communication. Also, the search should entail the cultural group's internal ideology and intentionality that are embedded and practiced either consciously or unconsciously in everyday communication practices.

2) Problematic of Cross-cultural Communication Theories

Over the last two decades, as the world entered the age of the global village, the studies of cross-cultural communication concerning various specific contexts has been expanded immensely. There seems to be two academic trends in this period. First, there has been more active research on cross-cultural communication in those countries where cross-cultural interactions occur more frequently. That is, multiracial nations composed of various races such as America, Canada, and the UK have promoted research motivation in cross-cultural communication. Second, there have been more context-specific studies than general theoretical ones. For example, it is not difficult to find cross-cultural communication papers and/or discussions on the marketing strategy of multinational industries or international business negotiations.

However, some scholars point out that there has been no particular theoretical paradigm or touchstone theory around which cross-culture communication researchers organize their efforts (various context-specific studies). That is, there has been a lack of serious effort to develop a macroscopic theory that organizes or integrates the context-specific research output or a microscopic theory that provides some bases for explaining the fundamental factors governing those specific phenomena of cross-cultural communication. It is partly due to the characteristics of cross-cultural communication as an applied field, which tends to be overly concerned with the practical and pragmatic aspects.

But from a perspective of structuralism, there should be an internal grammar (or deep structure) that organizes and governs the social phenomena at the surface level. And, the “deep structure” (called “generative grammar” in linguistics) that endlessly generates sentences provides us a critical insight into understanding and explaining the specific linguistic phenomena at the surface level. Likewise, in the field of cross-cultural communication, we need some exploration to search for a possible “deep structure” that might organize and govern context-specific cross-cultural phenomena.

Especially, from a microscopic view of the collisions and conflicts among the different “communication styles,” we need to make some effort to re-specify the research output, starting from the 1980’s, at the early stage of cross-cultural communication studies in which many scholars have focused on the East-West, inter-racial or inter-ethnic (e.g., black-white, Korean-American, etc.) groups, or inter-civilization (e.g., Christian-Confucian-Islam). Furthermore, we need to link the summary of the cultural communication styles from a microscopic review to the various “context-specific” studies throughout the 1990’s and 2000’s. The process of this respecification and integration work will not be simple or easy, and will require designing and building some theoretical frames. From a such perspective, the discussion in this paper challenges us to respecify the Saussurian model of semiotic axes as “a deep structure” that generates two types of “cultural communication styles.” Throughout this paper, we will try to theoretically build and compare two types of “cultural communication styles” on the basis of the semiotic axes and empirically present the conflicts of Korean and American cross-cultural communication as the collision of

two different types of cultural communication styles.

3) Cross-cultural Communication from a Semiotic Viewpoint

The subject of semiotics is the study of signs, which include in nature symbols and languages. Sign is defined as “something that stands for something else.” The human world (the world perceived by humans) is basically composed of signs and the universe, to the extent that human beings think and talk through signs. Human thought is a series of signs in the sense that humans think in signs, express meaning (another form of signs) with signs, and talk through signs. Communication is an exchange of messages which are composed of signs. Although the most preferred sign system tends to be language, other sign systems such as dance, music, pictures, and design not only have their own structure and grammar but also function to carry some detail and aesthetic meanings that language cannot carry out.

Communicating a message is made through the process of selection and combination of signs in which social and cultural codes play the role of grammar. Social and cultural codes here means values, customs, *habitus*, regulations, laws, myth, etc. as the “deep structure” that organizes, governs, and generates the social and cultural phenomena on the surface. Thus, we can argue that what makes one social or cultural boundary different from others is this “deep structure, code system” that presents outlines of the social and cultural phenomena.

That is, in a culture there exists a code system shared by the members of the culture, and the code system forms the rules of “the game” in social interactions and communication. Thus, the sphere of a culture includes a cultural code system that governs various sub-code systems such as political, economic, social, and cultural systems. Cross-cultural conflicts and collisions tend to arise from the incompatibility between two cultures that have respectively different code systems (See Table 1).

From a speech communication aspect, a cultural sphere with its own cultural code system also entails a “speech community” with its own communication code systems in terms of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic systems. That is to say, two different cultures mean two different communication styles. From an early stage of education, an individual begins to acquire “these code systems of communication”

which are required practice to become a competent communicator in that culture. In short, a culture is a “semiotic community” and an individual’s communicative competence is his/her ability to decode and use the cultural signs (messages).

Therefore, when we accept the viewpoints that a culture is a collection of signs and communication is practiced within the semiotic code system, we encounter two propositions. First, cross-cultural communication is the collision of different semiospheres (the world of signs). For instance, Korean-American cross-cultural communication is the collision of the semiospheres (including language, tradition, values, customs, myth, ideology, etc.) of Korean culture and that of American culture. Second, cross-cultural communication presupposes the conflicts between two different code systems. As shown in Table 1, since “Culture A” as a “semiotic community” has its own code systems distinguished from another culture, “Culture B,” a cross-cultural contact here is taking a risk with respect to “the problematic of compatibility” of two different cultural codes and two different communication styles.

Table 1. Problematics of the Comparability Between Two Cultures (Different Semiospheres and Code Systems)

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| Social Codes customs, norms, laws, etc. | Semiosphere | Cultural Codes premises, myth, ideology | The Problematic of Compatibility: | Social Codes customs, norms, laws, etc. | Semiosphere | Cultural Codes premises, myth, ideology | |
| Semiosphere | Code System of Culture A | Semiosphere | | <i>Semiosphere</i> | Code System of Culture B | Semiosphere | |
| Political Codes power, upper-lower classe, superior-inferior | Semiosphere | Economic Codes currency, exchange, rewards | | <i>Semiosphere</i> | Political Codes power, upper-lower classe, superior-inferior | <i>Semiosphere</i> | Economic Codes currency, exchange, rewards |

2. Semiotic Paradigm for Communication Styles: the Saussurian Model of Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Axes

In explaining the associative relations in language, Saussurians, following Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the founder of semiology, present two types of structural relations - syntagmatic and paradigmatic. A paradigmatic relation arises among linguistic signs that share comparatively equal values and functions in a certain context. Therefore, the possibility of “substitution” is a judgemental scale for paradigmatic relation. That is, the paradigmatic relation of two substances presupposes “equivalence.” On the other hand, a syntagmatic relation arises in a sequence or combination of signs. The following Table 2 shows the Saussurian model of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in speech.

If we observe closely the process of speaking, we find the speaker in

Table 2. Saussure's Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Relations

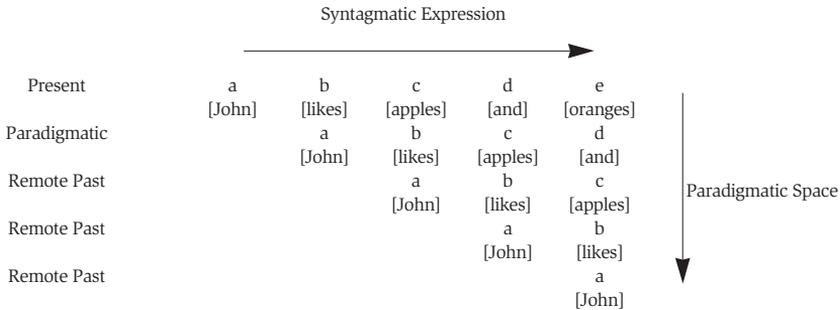
| | | | |
|---|--|-------|-----------|
| Speech | John | loves | Susan. |
| | Syntagmatic relation (axis of combination) | | |
| Paradigmatic relation (axis of selection) | John | loves | Susan. |
| | He | loves | he |
| | My friend | | that girl |

his/her cognitive level continues to make an effort to “select” words conveying his/her meaning best. Words of “speech spoken” has been, in fact, selected by the speaker from a set of the words (signs) with equivalence and substitution. This selection process may occur to the speaker at his/her conscious or unconscious level. At any rate, it is the paradigmatic relation that holds the set of words together as a range of selections. And, it is the syntagmatic relation that loops the final selected words in sequence and produces a sentence.

Now, when we locate the syntagmatic relation on the horizontal axis and the paradigmatic relation on the vertical axis, we meet Table 3 the so called “Prague prism” that illustrates the signification process of speech.

As a Saussurian, Jakobson (1971: 243) refines the two axes into two basic modes of arrangement for communicative (and/or linguistic)

Table 3. Syntagmatic Presentation of Expression and Paradigmatic Accumulation of Meaning (Prague Prism)



behavior: ① the axis of “selection”, and ② the axis of “combination” (Jakobson 1971: 243). Jakobson defines “selection” and “combination” as follows:

Selection: A selection between alternatives implies the possibility of substituting one for the other, equivalent to the former in one respect and different from it in another. Actually, selection and *substitution* are two faces of the same operation.

Combination: Any sign is made up of constituent signs and/or occurs only in combination with other signs. This means that any linguistic unit at one and the same time serves as a context for simpler units and/or finds its own context in a more complex linguistic unit. Hence any actual grouping of linguistic units binds them into a superior unit: combination and *contexture* are two faces of the same operation (ibid.).

Futhermore, Jakobson (1971: 239-159) lead his discussion of two semiotic axes, paradigmatic and syntagmatic, to the metaphoric and metonymic poles. A metaphor is the illumination of one part of experience by another. It is a similarity or comparison without an ‘as’ or ‘like’, an analogy created by substituting word for word, image for

image, or sign for sign (Wilden 1987). Jakobson argues that a metaphor is a paradigmatic “substitution” in the “substitution set” (1971: 251) that is constituted with “similarity.” Similarity refers to the quality that makes up the *whole-to-whole relation* among the terms of a substitution set.

On the other hand, metonymy is the evocation of the whole by a connection. It consists in using for the name of a thing or relationship an attribute, a suggested sense, or something closely related, such as effect for cause, function for structure and so on, the imputed relationship being that of contiguity (Wilden 1987: 198). In Jakobson’s perspective, it is “contiguity” that holds the “connection” from parts to the whole, and allows the condition of “the evocation of the whole” by a part.

Holenstein summarizes Jakobson’s discussion of syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes as in Table 4. In Table 4, the paradigmatic axis is

Table 4. Holenstein’s Summary of Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Axes

| <i>Paradigmatic Axis</i> (Axis of Metaphor) | <i>Syntagmatic Axis</i> (Axis of Metonymy) |
|---|--|
| Communicative Practice of Selection | Communicative Practice of Combination |
| Semiotic Operation Based on Similarity | Semiotic Operation Based on Contiguity |
| ‘Either-or’ Function, Consistency | ‘Both-and’ Function, Sequence |
| Connotative, <i>in absentia</i> | Denotative, <i>in presentia</i> |
| <i>langue</i> , Code | <i>Parole</i> , Message |
| Static | Dynamic |

presented as the space of semiotic selection on the basis of similarity. The selection process follows the logic of selecting, “either-or.” From a view of the syntagmatic axis, this selecting process is not shown and is *in absentia*. And, in the binary dimension of code and message, the paradigmatic axis becomes the “frame of reference (code)” and static grammar for dynamic expression on the syntagmatic axis. In contrast, the syntagmatic axis is presented as the temporal line of semiotic combination. The combination follows the logic of binding, “both-and.” And, the syntagmatic axis is the axis of expression and *in presentia*.

Since speech is presented on this syntagmatic axis, it is dynamic compared to the paradigmatic axis.

As we reviewed thus far, from Saussure to Jakobson, these semiotic axes (syntagmatic and paradigmatic) are mostly discussed as an analytical frame of language. However, a Canadian semiologist, A. Wilden (1987), points out that the “semiotic performances” occurring on the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic axes are clearly the communicative praxis (habitual practice) and show two different styles of communicative performance. Wilden summarizes the thematic styles of the communication phenomena on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes as in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5, Wilden extends the Saussurian model of syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes to the generative frame of two different

Table 5. Modalities and Communication Styles of the Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Axes (A. Wilden 1987)

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>① Paradigmatic Axis (Vertical axis) Selection · Substitution Similarity, axis of the path (gain) Langue, Grammar Axis of the Code Metaphor Condensation, simultaneity Harmony</p> | <p>② Syntagmatic Axis (Horizontal axis) Combination · Contexture Contiguity, axis of the loop (gain) Parole, Speech Axis of the Message Metonymy Displacement Melody</p> |
|---|---|

styles of semiotic performance and communication. Although in both language and communication practice, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes are interactively operated, each axis presents distinctive features (modalities) of semiotic performances. At this point, we can

argue that communication practices on the vertical line of the paradigmatic axis and communication practices on the horizontal line of the syntagmatic axis produce two different styles of communication.

3. The Praxis of Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Communication Styles

1) The Praxis of Paradigmatic Communication Styles: Korean Concepts of *Chong* (情) and *Han* (恨)

In this discussion, we will challenge the use of those different styles of communication on the basis of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes as the schema of two types of “cultural” communication styles: ① paradigmatic oriented communication culture (paradigmatic communication style), and ② syntagmatic oriented communication culture (syntagmatic communication style). However, it is important to keep the notion that the linguistic operation of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes are interactive and complementary. That is, it is rather dangerous to interpret exclusively paradigmatic communication and syntagmatic communication styles.

In other words, what we are interested in is on which axis of communication practices are more weighted by a specific culture. Throughout our discussion in this section, we presuppose that Korean culture belongs to the “paradigmatic communication styles” and attempt to analyze two distinctive cultural features of *Chong* and *Han*. These two terms are, as many Korean sociologists point out, very difficult concepts to explain to people from other cultures, especially those from Western cultures, even though they are key points to understanding human communication in Korea. Having said that, *Chong* may be explained as “emotional attachment” which can be further classified into various kinds of *Chong* depending on the degree of depth, and *Han* as “a static rancor that comes from condensed and unresolved *Chong*.”

Chong and *Han* appear in various types of traditional and modern social interactions among Koreans. But, *Chong* and *Han* have also been typical subjects of poetry and songs on love between men and women. Traditionally ‘love’ between a man and woman was described as a

sentimental and static transaction in Korea. It should be distinguished from the rational aspect such as “I will treat you the way you treat me” or “I would not leave you unless you leave me first.” Also, in a transactional point of view, the paradoxical and passive love like “I would leave you since I love you so much” should be distinguished from a dynamic and active love like “I will do my best to make you love me.” This is to say, Korean ways of loving tend to be similar to the characteristics of the modalities of the paradigmatic axis (Table 5). Kim (1994: 330) describes Korean culture of *Chǒng* and the way of loving as follows:

Korean way of life is well reflected in the following lyric: “Due to *Chǒng*, I sent away my lover and due to that *Chǒng* I can’t forget him.” How irrational and even absurd we are! Letting go of one’s lover without trying to hold on, and spending one’s whole life in regret and missing the lover is the Korean way of separation. However, the energy to overcome the irrationality and absurdity is ironically, the very same *Chǒng*.

Devito (1988), in his book *Human Communication*, explains the development of human relationships in the following five steps: ① contact --> ② involvement --> ③ intimacy --> ④ deterioration --> ⑤ dissolution. And, an interesting part is when Devito explains that the dissolution stage is the “time during which individuals must look to the establishment of a new and different life.” This is the rather dynamic and displacement mode of the syntagmatic axis. On the other hand, “some people will continue to live psychologically with a relationship that has already been dissolved: they will frequent the old meeting places, reread old love letters, daydream about all the good times, and in general fail to extricate themselves from a relationship that has died everywhere except in their mind (Devito 1988: 191).” This later case is a communicative practice in the modalities of paradigmatic axis, “static” rather than “dynamic,” and “consistency” rather than “sequence.”

From an existential point of view, human beings exist on the intersection of “time” (now) and “space” (here). Human communication also occurs at the intersection, and the history of loving relationship

Table 6. The Generation of *Chǒng* (情) and *Han* (恨) on Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Axes

| ① → | | | | | | | |
|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Time 1 | Time 2 | Time 3 | Time 4 | Time 5 | Time 6 | Time 7 | Time / Space |
| contact | involvement | intimacy | attachment | separation | yearning (<i>chǒng</i>) | rancor (<i>Han</i>) | Space 7 (Time 7) |
| | contact | involvement | intimacy | attachment | separation | yearning (<i>chǒng</i>) | Space 6 (Time 6) |
| | | contact | involvement | intimacy | attachment | separation | Space 5 (Time 5) |
| | | | contact | involvement | intimacy | attachment | Space 4 (Time 4) |
| | | | | contact | involvement | intimacy | Space 3 (Time 3) |
| | | | | | contact | involvement | Space 2 (Time 2) |
| | | | | | | contact | Space 1 (Time 1) |

② ↓

① Process of syntagmatic relations (developing *Chǒng* and *Han*)

② Depth of paradigmatic relations (accumulation of history)

*Time1 → Time7: Changes of linear time period from “past-current-future.”

*Space1 → Space7: Accumulation of semantic space from “there”

Chǒng (情) = [contact + involvement + intimacy + attachment + separation + yearning]

Han (恨) = [contact + involvement + intimacy + attachment + separation + yearning + rancor]

between man and woman also proceeds on the point of intersection as shown in Table 6. Table 6 illustrates the process of changing relationship between two persons. The longer the history of the relationship is on the syntagmatic axis, the more memories exist in “the depth of paradigmatic axis.” In this sense, *Chǒng* is not just the result of an isolated stage but the accumulation of contact, involvement, intimacy, attachment, separation, and yearning stages. That is, *Chǒng* (time6) and *Han* (time7) are the production of the paradigmatic axis. Thus, a tear from *Han* is not a “simple” tear of “rancor” but a tear of contact, a tear of involvement, a tear of intimacy, a tear of deterioration, and a tear of

dissolution. In reverse, there is a ceremony of HanPulli (a shamanic rite for *Han*) in which a shaman attempts to enumerate a customer’s “condensed *Han*” through an incantatory narration. This narration is the expression process of paradigmatic meaning on the syntagmatic axis. An old Korean saying goes like this: “*Chǒng* is more powerful than love” since “love” disappears as the lover goes away but *Chǒng* (memories and attachment) live in one’s heart forever.

2) The Praxis of Syntagmatic Communication Styles: American Dinning Course vs. Korean Formal Meals (Table 7)

Syntagmatic communication styles include the modalities of the syntagmatic axis. As we have reviewed Jakobson and Wilden’s discussions earlier, at the syntagmatic axis, the semiotic performance of “combination” and “contexture” occurs on the basis of the “both-and” logic. As a result, we see the linear expression process *in presentia* on the syntagmatic axis. Especially, the “dynamic” process of “sequence” with “contiguity” on the syntagmatic axis should be distinguished from the “static” system of “composition” with “similarity” on the paradigmatic axis.

In general, we might argue that compared to the Eastern culture, Western cultures place more weight on the syntagmatic oriented communication styles. One case supporting such argument is the example of “dining course” in Western cultures. The word, “course” indicates that different kinds of foods are chained by the “both-and” logic. This linear structure on the syntagmatic axis may be shown as in Table 7.

Unlike the Western dining course, the Korean traditional manner for serving food is to serve “a set of dishes” on the table at once. This is called “*Pansang*” (the table with a set of dishes) that includes boiled-

Table 7. Syntagmatic Praxis of American Dining Course Example

| Similarity \ Difference | ② Sequence of Syntagmatic Relation, Dynamic Displacement [Axis of Combination] | | | |
|--|--|-------------|-----------|---------|
| | Beverage | Salad | Main Meal | Dessert |
| ① Static Concurrence of Paradigmatic Relations (Axis of Selection) | Water | Lettuce | Beef | Pie |
| | Coke | Cucumber | Pork | Cake |
| | Juice | Celery | Chicken | Cookie |
| | Tea | Broccoli | Fish | Fruit |
| | Coffee, Etc. | Carrot, Etc | Etc | Etc |

rice, soup, *Kimch'i* and other side dishes. There are different names for the table (*Pansang*) depending on to whom the table is served (*Papsang* for children, *Chinjisang* for adults, and *Surasang* for the king) and how many side dishes are on the table (three, five, seven, or nine sets of dishes, and twelve sets of dishes only for the palace). Thus, the Korean manner for serving food seems to be the practice of a paradigmatic system. That is, as the Western dining course appears to be in a “dynamic melody (see Wilden’s terms in Table 5)” of different kinds of foods, the Korean style of serving food appears to be in “static harmony” with a set of foods such as boiled rice, soup, *Kimch'i*, and side dishes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Korean Traditional Set of Dishes for a Meal
(The Praxis of Paradigmatic Communication)



4. The Conflicts and Misunderstandings Between Two Communication Styles

1) Social Web of Similarity vs. Social Network of Difference

The paradigmatic axis contains the paradigm that is a set of substances on the basis of “similarity” (e.g., a beverage paradigm - Water, Coke, Juice, Tea, Coffee, Etc.). Thus, the paradigm is composed by a “parallel system.” If we look at social interactions in Korea, we can eas-

ily find a social web [set] of people who form a paradigm with similarities (common denominators) such as the same hometown, pedigree, school (alumni), etc. This social web plays a great role in human relations in Korea. Especially, an individual's creative behavior that breaks the "harmony" (in Wilden's term) is not allowed in a paradigmatic cultural group. Thus, the members of the group with similarity display their "paradigmatic unity" and reinforce the web of connection. Whether the other person has a connection with "me" in a type of social web makes a big difference in communication contents, form, and the ways of handling issues. Also, there appears a closed communication with those outsiders who do not belong to the member of the "paradigm" in terms of homogeneity and similarity. Thus, people tend to be reluctant about opening and sharing information with people from other groups.

On the other hand, the syntagmatic axis contains a syntagma that is a set of substances delineated by "difference" (e.g., syntagm of dining - Juice (beverage), Salad (vegetable), Steak (meat), Cake (dessert)). Thus, the paradigm is composed by a "linear and/or series process." This paradigmatic style reflects "a social network of difference" in the culture (like modern America) that consists of various racial, ethnic, and national members. Thus, in this network of differences there appears a tolerant range of recognition and acceptance for the heterogeneity and difference among its members, which Wilden expresses as "melody" in Table 5. Accordingly, there is a tendency for people to have open communication with the members of other groups or networks.

Therefore, the collision of a social web of similarity and social network of difference creates cross-cultural conflicts as follows: For the members of the social network of difference (e.g., Americans), the people of the social web of similarity doing business based on the connection (the web of similarity), and being exclusive to the members of other group may be viewed as irrational, antidemocratic, and discriminant (gender, race, ethnic, or class). On the contrary, for the members of the social web of similarity (e.g., Koreans), the people of the social network of "difference" may be viewed as non-controllable (a lack of unity and conformity) and non-systematic (open systems).

2) Connotative Communication vs. Denotative Communication

As Holenstein summarizes in Table 4, the paradigmatic axis is *in absentia* while the syntagmatic axis is *in presentia*. Thus, the paradigmatic style of communication emphasizes not only “what is said” but “what is not said (*in absentia*).” A person in the paradigmatic style of communication should count “what the counterpart said,” “what the counterpart did not say”, and even, “what has been implied by the counterpart with present and absent messages.” This is the connotative communication style on the paradigmatic axis.

On the contrary, the syntagmatic style of communication emphasizes a direct and concise form of expression. That is, denotative communication is highly valued over connotative communication. Thus, the message interpretation is also focused on “what is said (*in presentia*).” The members of denotative communication culture not only express themselves directly and frankly (cf., Hall’s “low context culture”), but also are enthusiastic and aggressive in speaking out their ideas, while those of connotative communication cultures tend to be passive in expressing themselves and would expect the counterpart actively to interpret the “true meaning” of the speaker’s indirect and euphemistic message (cf., Hall’s “high context culture”).

The collision of the connotative communication and denotative communication cultures also present the following cross-cultural conflicts: From the viewpoint of denotation culture, a business counterpart from a connotative culture who presents indirect and unclear messages may be viewed as dishonest and unreliable. In addition, strategical communication behaviors (spiral approach) of the connotative culture such as the reservation or suppression of the “final” decision may be misunderstood as a “sly trick” (linear approach). Thus, in Korean-American business negotiations, a Korean negotiator often presents communication problems, such as ‘not being able to say no directly,’ ‘flowery words instead of concise and simple expression,’ ‘long introduction,’ ‘indirect statement,’ etc. These problems can create “communication noise” for the American negotiator. However, from a Korean point of view, an American negotiator with a denotative communication style may be misunderstood as too direct (i.e., impolite or rude) and inconsiderate of the counterpart’s face (i.e., inhuman and machine-like).

3) Metaphorical Communication vs. Metonymic Communication

As Jakobson argues, the paradigmatic axis is the axis of metaphor, which generates metaphoric communication styles. Metaphoric relation presupposes a semantic equivalency of the “whole to whole” relation between two factors. Thus, metaphoric communication styles tend to be total, collective, and uniform. Such tendency appears in several problems of Korean communication like “inclination to say all in one speech,” “repeating the synonyms (tautological problems),” and “paralleling the euphemistic words in a sentence.” Korean speakers are usually strong in presenting the generals but weak in presenting particulars. The fact that Korean linguistic expressions are mostly “general” and “abstract (vs. ‘concrete’)” indicates that Korean culture belongs to metaphorical communication culture.

On the other hand, metonymic relation at the syntagmatic axis presupposes a semantic representation of the “part-to-whole” relation between two factors. Thus, metonymic communication styles display the characteristic of “partial approach to the whole issue,” “a linear process of ‘case by case,’” and “a narrative structure of ‘cause-effect’ order (i.e., disposing of matters in sequence order).”

Thus, there are great possibilities for cross-cultural conflicts between metaphorical and metonymic cultures. For the person from a metonymic culture, the speech of the counterpart from a metaphorical culture may be “too condensed (abstract),” ambiguous, and somewhat tautological. In reverse, for the person of a metaphoric culture, the speech of the counterpart from a metonymic culture may appear “clinging to too narrow or partial problems.” Also, the person with a metaphoric communication style, i.e., holistic and collective, may feel frustration coping with the metonymic speech of “case by case.”

4) Static System vs. Dynamic System Communication

The vertical line of the paradigmatic axis represents the space of meaning and the “silent” stage before expression (see Table 5). A paradigm, “a set of synonymic words,” is a “static system” which provides the selections to the speaker. This static communication emphasizes the strategic formation of meaning by the careful selection of words from the paradigm. That is, the transformation from a thought (meaning) into an expression demands some serious deliberation. Thus, this

static system lends itself to a culture that encourages “listening” over “speaking.” As a result, the members of the static system (on the paradigmatic axis) often show passive, indirect, and defensive communication behaviors. In the culture of a static system, a person’s communicative competence may be judged by the degree of depth in static knowledge and strategy. That is, in this static communication culture a fluent speaker is not necessarily labelled as a competent communicator.

On the contrary, the horizontal line of the syntagmatic axis represents the axis of expression and sound. A syntagma is the chain of different factors that facilitates the expressive culture of the dynamic system. Expressive culture encourages a dynamic process of speaking. As a result, people with communicative competence display active, direct, and assertive communication styles. If we observe American talk shows, we can easily see that the participants in the programs are very active in taking turn and assertive in expressing their ideas. In this dynamic system, an individual’s communicative competence indicates performance, practice, and achievement, as well as expressive skills and wits.

The collision between two different communication styles of the static and dynamic systems also brings up several problems. We can observe those communicative problems and conflicts between Korean and American co-workers in a multinational company in Korea. A Korean with a static style of communication complains that their American co-worker, who expresses their ideas without hesitation, is talkative and sometimes arrogant. On the other hand, the American complains that their Korean co-worker is sullen, unkind, and even foolish when the Korean friend cannot express their ideas or opinions. These communication conflicts arise from the lack of understanding of the communication styles of the counterpart.

5) Emotional vs. Rational Communication

We have discussed Korean *Han* and *Chǒng* on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes earlier in Table 6. Communication practices on the paradigmatic axis tend to be “intuitive” rather than “empirical” since a paradigm is made on the basis of the similarity and/or “common denominator” that transcends all factors of the paradigm. That is to say, another communication style on the paradigmatic axis is

“emotional” and “intuitional.” Thus, we may say that the paradigmatic axis provides the “space of emotion.” It is perhaps due to the emotional communication style of the paradigmatic axis that the Korean words, *Chōng* and *Han* which were explained at the paradigmatic axis (see Table 6) are usually followed by the word, “tear.” Although emotional communication often tends to be illogical and unreasonable, it facilitates more tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty than rational communication. However, emotional communication is sometimes accompanied with paternalism, which makes it difficult to make a proper distinction between the public and private domain.

On the other hand, the communication practices on the syntagmatic axis, based on displacement and sequence, are very logical, analytical, and rational. Rational communication emphasizes the practices of reason and experience rather than emotion and intuition. Accordingly, messages of rational communication are very logical and clear. However, people in a rational communication culture tend to have little patience for ambiguity, uncertainty, and contradiction, while they make a clear distinction between the public and private domain, as well as display their position as either “yes” or “no.”

The collision between the two different styles of emotional and rational communication also creates some problems. A person with a rational communication style may look at their counterpart with an emotional communication style as unreasonable and illogical, and may accuse their (ambiguous and contradictory) counterpart of being indecisive and dishonest. However, from the viewpoint of the person with an emotional communication style, the counterpart with a rational communication style may be viewed as cool-hearted, inhuman, and mechanical. Also, the counterpart’s “no” or “rejection” in business can be mistaken as a personal offense at the level of interpersonal relations.

5. Conclusion: Toward an Understanding and Practice of Cross-Communication Styles.

A human being is born in a culture and learns the communication style (verbal and nonverbal) with which he/she interprets (decodes) the other’s meaning and expresses (encodes) his/her own meaning.

From a semiotic point of view, a culture is the collection of signs with its own communication style. A child who grows up in Korean culture will learn the verbal and nonverbal semiotic system shared among members of Korean culture. Thus, the child will practice the communication style of Korean culture. That is to say, a culture is also “semiotic community” and/or “speech community.”

Understanding the culture of a racial, ethnic, or national group is to appreciate the styles of their ordinary and everyday lives. It is the style of culture that governs people’s social and cultural interaction. For example, when a Korean understands the “style” of American culture, he/she will make more “sense” of his/her American friends. In other words, learning the style of another culture in a cross-cultural setting is not to compare in terms of superiority between two cultures but to make sense of the ambiguous or uncertain speech and behaviors of the counterpart from the other culture. Thus, the ultimate goal of cross-cultural communication studies should be introspecting in “my” cultural styles of ordinary communication to which “I” am very accustomed as well as exploring the counterpart’s cultural styles of everyday communication to which “I” am unfamiliar.

In this paper, we have explored two distinctive communication styles on the basis of the Saussurian semiotic model of paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. In order to review the differences of the cultural styles between two cultures, we first examined the paradigmatic “practices” of *Chǒng* and *Han* in Korean culture. And then, we compared the American dining course as the syntagmatic practice and the traditional way of serving foods in Korea as the paradigmatic practice.

Following the discussion of the two cases, we focused our discussion on five thematic types in cross-cultural collisions, conflicts, and misunderstandings between Koreans and Americans by locating Korean culture as a “paradigmatic axis oriented communication culture [paradigmatic praxis],” and American culture as a “syntagmatic axis oriented communication culture [syntagmatic praxis]”: 1) social web of similarity vs. social network of difference, 2) connotative vs. denotative communication, 3) metaphorical vs. metonymic communication, 4) static vs. dynamic system communication, 5) emotional vs. rational communication.

There are also some limitations to our discussion in this paper: First,

we need to develop theoretical investigations into the application of the two semiotic axes as the generative frame of cultural communication styles. Second, the two contrasting communication styles (a binary system) suggested in this paper may not entail, due to its simplified modes, those complicated problems of cross-cultural communication in the 21st century when even in one culture the axes of the traditional and modern intersect. Thus, we need some further theoretical and methodological studies to locate the “bridge” between the fields of semiotics and cross-cultural communication.

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