The Interface between Cultural Intelligence and Interlanguage Pragmatics: The Case of Gratitude Speech Act

Zia Tajeddin
Associate Professor, Allameh Tabataba'i University
zia_tajeddin@yahoo.com

Mohammad Momenian
Ph.D. Candidate, Tarbiat Modares University
momenian21@gmail.com

Abstract

The process of globalization entails the acquisition of a construct, cultural intelligence, with which EFL students can function appropriately in intercultural situations. This study was, first, intended to find the relationship between cultural intelligence and the use of expressions of gratitude by Iranian EFL learners. Second, it sought to determine whether there were any significant differences between low and high culturally intelligent EFL learners in the way they used expressions of gratitude in English. To this end, 118 intermediate learners were selected through convenient sampling, with their proficiency level being controlled. A discourse completion test (DCT) for the expressions of gratitude and a cultural intelligence scale were given to the participants of the study. Learners' DCT responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale and then analyzed. Statistical tests including Pearson Correlation Coefficient and t-test were used to investigate the research questions. The results of the analysis revealed that there was not a significant relationship, either positive or negative, between cultural intelligence and use of expressions of gratitude. Furthermore, no difference was found between the two groups, high and low culturally intelligent, in the way they used English expressions of gratitude. These findings have implications for the instruction of pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Expressions of Gratitude, Intercultural Competence, EFL Learners

1. Introduction

Intercultural competence (ICC) is based on a line of research which has studied it from a variety of perspectives (Bolten, 2001; Caligiuri & Di Santo, 2001; Earley & Ang, 2003; Gertsen, 1990; Gudykunst, 1992; Hammer et al., 1996; Imahori & Lanigan, 1989; Martin, 1993; Milhouse, 1993; Neuliep, 2003; Wiseman, 2002). One perspective is English language education (Byram 1997; Derin, Zeynep, Pinar, Özlem, & Gökçe, 2009; Kramsch, 1999; Liddicoat, Scarino, Papademetre, & Kohler, 2003; Li-sheng, 2000; Porto, 2009; Scarino, 2009; Schultz, 2007). ICC is defined, according to Spitzberg (2000), as a kind of "impression that behavior is appropriate and effective in a given context" (p.379). It is a multidimensional construct in that it consists of different components such as knowledge, skills, motivation, effectiveness, and appropriateness (Ruben, 1976; Spitzberg, 2000; Wiseman, 2002).

Because of the rapid growth of globalization, technology development, and population migrations (Chen & Starosta, 2008), the need for communication with people from other cultures was recognized in ELT in the 1980s, which then resulted in the intercultural perspective towards language teaching (Derin et al., 2009). The competence in this orientation is no longer that of the ideal native speaker; rather, it is an intercultural one (Corbett, 2003) through which students "decenter from their own linguistic and cultural situation to consider that of others" (Scarino, 2009) and develop positive attitudes and reduced sense of ethnocentrism towards other cultures (Schultz, 2007). This paper is intended to report on the findings of a study conducted to find the relationship between cultural intelligence and the use of expressions of gratitude.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Thanking as an Expression of Gratitude

Expressing gratitude is one of the most demanding tasks L2 learners have to accomplish since it is through these expressions of gratitude that they bring about solidarity and close mutual relationships with their interlocutors (Goffman, 1967). If they fail to do so, communication breakdown will happen. L2 learners are mainly unaware of the differences in the "cross-cultural realization" of expressions of gratitude (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986) and think that they can transfer these expressions from their first language into their second language.

The speech act of thanking has been defined and categorized from a variety of perspectives. As regards face as "an image of self" (Goffman, 1967), Brown and Levinson (1987) refer to the desire of the speakers to be approved by their interlocutors as positive face and "the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions" (p. 13) as negative face. They regard the expressions of gratitude as face-threatening acts (see Koutlaki, 2002, for a counterargument that the Persian system of expressing thanks is a face-enhancing one which does not fall into Brown and Levinson's categorization) because it threatens the interlocutors' negative face by acknowledging a debt to the hearer. Searle (1969) looks at the positive side of thanking functioning as creating solidarity between the interlocutors, rather than being a face-threatening act. Leech (1983) asserts that the expressions of gratitude are convivial, that is, they are intrinsically polite (Wong, 2009). The different ways of realizing the speech act of thanking is also captured in a category consisting of eight thanking strategies by Aijmer (1996).

Research on expressions of gratitude can be classified into two categories: (1) research which has been carried out on the participants' first language, and

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(2) research conducted on a second language which is mainly English. Research belonging to the first camp has mainly focused on the characteristics of expressions of gratitude L1 users utilize. The other camp, however, has studied the use of expressions mainly in classroom or an instructional environment and focused on the comparison between the way English native speakers and L2 learners use the expressions of gratitude, different strategies they use, and pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failures they may encounter. First, we will have a review of the first camp, and then the research catering for L2 will follow.

Apte (1994) studied the expressions of gratitude among South Asian languages. He found that those speaking these languages did not use expressions of gratitude with family members because they though what they did to them was an act of obligation; thus, it did not need to be rewarded with an expression of gratitude. Lebra (1976), Tames (1981), and Coulmas (1981) carried out research on the way Japanese people used expressions of gratitude. Their findings showed that the Japanese did not like to verbalize their gratitude because of a strong sense of indebtedness they harbored. That is why Japanese people express their gratitude as *I am sorry* rather than the conventional *Thank you* in English.

Hymes (1971) compared British English and American English in the way they used *thank you*. He pointed out that in American English *thank you* is a formulaic and ritualized way of expressing gratitude, whereas in British English it is considered as a discourse marker. Okamoto and Robinson (1997), furthermore, found that *thank you* is used in the British English when the interlocutor is of higher status. A study by Rubin (1983) also showed that *thank you* is used in different situations for several functions including as an expression of compliment and as a way to terminate the conversation.

Intachakra (2004) carried out his research on the difference between British and Thai expressions of gratitude. He found that these expressions are used as a sign of indebtedness in both cultures. However, he also found a difference. British and Tai speakers were different in the way they applied thanking strategies. Redmond (1998) found that the Tai do something to show their indebtedness rather than verbalize expressions of gratitude.

As for the second camp, the expressions of gratitude as used by English language learners, Eisenstein and Bodman (1986, 1993) were the pioneers. They focused on the differences between different English learners with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the way they verbalized their gratitude in English. They found that native speakers seemed more consistent in their use of expressions of gratitude compared with non-native speakers. They also found that the lengthier the expression, the more indebtedness in the situation. In their study, the shorter expressions of gratitude showed social distance between the interlocutors.

Hinkel (1994) studied the judgment on the appropriateness of these expressions among different English learners. The findings of the study showed that English learners' judgments were different from those of native speakers. Cheng (2005) also carried out research on the Chinese learners of English. He noted that the Chinese used more terms of address with these expressions because of the complicated social status system they had. He also found that the number of thanking strategies was highly affected by the social status and degree of imposition in that situation.

Regarding the effect of proficiency level and instruction on expressing thanks, there have been different perspectives. Researchers like Bouton (1994) and Trosborg (1987) believe that as the proficiency of learners increase, the chance of pragmalinguistic transfer from their L1 decreases. However, the

findings of the studies by Eisenstein and Bodman (1986, 1993), Bardovi-Harlig, Rose, & Nickels, (2008), and Janani (1996) revealed that advanced learners of English had considerable pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic problems while expressing thanks. There are also studies which call for the necessity of L2 pragmatic instruction including the expressions of gratitude. It is believed that mere exposure to the target language without explicit teaching is useless because L2 learners, according to Schmidt (1993), may not notice the relevant patterns without explicit teaching (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986, 1993; Ghobadi & Fahim, 2009; Janani, 1996).

2.2. Cultural Intelligence

Due to globalization, multiculturalism, and international status of the English language, it is highly important to develop L2 learners' cultural intelligence (intercultural competence). Cultural Quotient (CQ), in line with Stenberg and Datterman's (1986) multidimensional perspective of intelligence, is defined as an "individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings" (Ang & Dyne, 2008, p.3). CQ only relates to the special domain of intercultural settings (Ang et al., 2007). That is why some scholars believe that it should increase with the increase of intercultural and international experiences (Takeuchi et al., 2005). CQ is a culture-free concept, as opposed to EQ which is culture-bound (Earley & Ang, 2003), covering a general set of capabilities which have relevance to situations reflecting cultural diversity (Ang & Dyne, 2008).

As a multidimensional concept, CQ consists of four dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. Metacognitive intelligence focuses on the higher-order mental processes which are concerned with the acquisition, monitoring, and control of cultural knowledge (Dyne,

Ang, & Koh, 2009). It is believed that those people with high meta-cognitive intelligence examine closely the cultural assumptions (practices) and bring about changes in their cultural mental models while interacting with individuals from other cultures (Brislin et al., 2006; Triandis, 2006). Cognitive intelligence refers to an individual's knowledge about different cultures, including their norms, traditions, and practices (Ang & Dyne, 2008; Ng et al., 2009). This knowledge structure consists of both shared similarities and differences among various cultures (Ang et al., 2007). Motivational intelligence recognizes that "most cognition is motivated and that the magnitude and direction of an individual's energy represents motivational intelligence" (Ang, Dyne, & Koh, 2006). This kind of intelligence is in line with Eccles and Wigfield's (2002) expectancy-value theory of motivation in which accomplishing a task is dependent on the expectation and value associated with that task. Behavioral intelligence is the fourth component of CQ. It includes the capability to behave appropriately in a cross-cultural setting using different relevant verbal and non-verbal behaviors and practices such as culturally appropriate gestures, facial expressions, and tones (Hall, 1959; Ng 2009, Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988).

3. Purpose of the Study

Against the backdrop review above, this study seeks to determine the difference between culturally low- and high-intelligent Iranian EFL learners in their use of the expressions of gratitude. Thus, the study specifically seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between cultural intelligence (intercultural competence) and the use of expressions of gratitude among Iranian EFL students?

2. Is there any significant difference between culturally low-intelligent and high- intelligent Iranian EFL students in the way they use the expressions of gratitude?

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

The study participants consisted of 118 Iranian intermediate English language students learning English at both university and English language institutes. Both male (N = 65) and female (N = 53) participants were included in the study. Students' proficiency level was determined through Oxford Quick Placement Test. The participants were selected through purposive sampling procedure. To collect the data, all participants were contacted and visited by the researchers themselves or a research assistant who was himself a teacher. The age of the t participants ranged from 21 to 30 years. The study included English learners of various ethnic backgrounds and educational degrees.

4.2. Instruments

There were three instruments used in this study: a written discourse completion test (DCT), the cultural intelligence scale, developed by Cultural Intelligence Centre in 2005, and Oxford Quick Placement Test. The first one was adopted from Janani's study (1996) conducted on the expressions of gratitude. The reliability of the DCT was reported by him to be 0.84. The instrument consisted of 10 situations in which the students were asked to provide the best expressions of gratitude they thought were appropriate for that specific situation. In this study, the reliability of the DCT was reported to be 0.81.

The cultural intelligence scale consisted of 4 components. The first one, metacognitive CQ, included 4 items, the second one which is cognitive CQ was comprised of 6 items, the third one which is motivational CQ consisted of 5 items, and the last component, behavioral CQ, was composed of 5 items. The reliability of each component was reported as follows: metacognitive CQ = 0.72, cognitive CQ = 0.86, motivational CQ = 0.76 and behavioral CQ = 0.83 (Ang et al., 2007). In the present study, the reliability indices of the components were 0.76, 0.81, 0.83, and 0.80, respectively.

Oxford Quick Proficiency Test (OQPT) (2004) is a test produced by Oxford University Press together with the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (formerly UCLES). It is a quick way to test students' level of English. It is ideal for placing students in classes at the right level as well as for examination screening. It includes multiple-choice questions to test vocabulary and grammar. There are two versions of the test. One is a computer-based which adapts according to test-takers' level as they progress through the test. The other one is a paper and pencil version, which was used for the purpose of this study. OQPT consists of 60 multiple-choice questions that take 15-30 minutes to answer. The OQPT consists of grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension modules.

4.3. Data Collection

First, every student's proficiency level in English was assessed through OQPT coming up with a pool of intermediate students. The DCT (Appendix 1) and the Cultural Intelligence Scale (Appendix 2) were distributed among the participants, each in a different session. First, the students were presented with a very brief introduction of the purpose of the research, and then the two main constructs of the study, cultural intelligence and expressions of gratitude, were

very briefly elaborated on. The participants of the study were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. A code was written on the instruments through which the participants could be informed of their performance. Standard Deviation was used to divide the participants of the study into two groups of culturally low- and high- intelligent students based on the results obtained from their scores on Cultural Intelligence Scale.

4.4. Data Analysis

A rubric was adapted (Ghobadi & Fahim, 2009) to rate the students' answers on the DCT on a five-point Likert scale, each defined as the following:

5 Excellent - Expressions are fully appropriate for the situation.

                      -No or almost no grammatical and discourse errors   recognized in the response.

- Completely native-like, full of creativity in producing responses

4 Good   - Expressions are mostly appropriate for the situation.

                     - Very few grammatical and discourse errors.

3 Fair   - Expressions are only somewhat appropriate.

                     - Grammatical and discourse errors are noticeable, but they do not interfere with appropriateness and comprehensibility.

2 Poor   - Due to the interference from grammatical and discourse errors, appropriateness is difficult to determine.

1 Very Poor - Expressions are very difficult or too little to understand.

There is no evidence that the expression of gratitude is performed.

     Afterwards, the data were entered into SPSS 11.5 version to be analyzed. The statistical tests used to answer the research questions of the study were Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and independent samples *t*-test. The correlation test was used to determine the relationship between

cultural intelligence and the use of expressions of gratitude. The *t*-test was used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups of the study, culturally low- and high-intelligent students, in the way they used the expressions of gratitude. Another set of *t*-tests was used for each component of cultural intelligence to see whether those high and low in each of them would differ in their use of expressions of gratitude.

5. Results and Discussion

The first research question dealt with the relationship between cultural intelligence (intercultural competence) and the use of expressions of gratitude among Iranian EFL students. To address the question, the means and standard deviations of gratitude and cultural intelligence were calculated (Table 1). The mean of the participants on the gratitude DCT was 38.77 or 3.87 on a Likert scale. The mean of their CQ was 94.62 or 4.73 on a Likert scale.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Gratitude and CQ

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gratitude	118	38.77	4.60
CQ	118	94.62	15.60

In order to find the relationship between cultural intelligence and the students' use of expressions of gratitude, the Pearson correlation coefficient was employed. The results of this analysis (r=.04) showed that there was not any significant relationship between cultural intelligence and EFL learners' use of expressions of gratitude (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation between Cultural Intelligence and the Use of Expressions of Gratitude

		Gratitude	CQ
Gratitude & CQ	Pearson Correlation	1	.04
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.62
	N	118	118

To address the second research question, a t-test was used to see whether there was a significant difference between culturally low- and high-intelligent Iranian EFL students in their use of expressions of gratitude. The results of the analysis (Table 3) revealed that there was not any significant difference between the two groups in their use of expressions of gratitude (t=-1.05, df=116, p>.005).

Table 3. T-test for the Difference between the Two Groups in Their Use of Expressions of Gratitude

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	1.10	.29	-1.05	116	.29	-.90	.85
Equal variances not assumed			-1.03	97.83	.30	-.90	.87

Participants were also divided into two groups on every component of the cultural intelligence scale to compare their use of expressions of gratitude. For instance, participants were divided into high and low culturally meta-cognitive ones and then the difference in the way they used expressions of gratitude in

the DCT was determined. To this end, four independent sample t-tests were used, each for one of the components of the scale. Results of the analysis revealed that there was not a significant difference between culturally low- and high-intelligent participants on any of the four components in their use of expressions of gratitude.

There was a conceptual hypothesis behind this study. It is believed that cultural intelligence is an ability which applies to all situations and is not culture-bound as is emotional intelligence. On the basis of this claim, in this study it was claimed that there would be a positive relationship between cultural intelligence and the use of expressions of gratitude by Iranian EFL learners, and that culturally high intelligent students would outperform their culturally low-intelligent counterparts in the way they would use expressions of gratitude in English. However, as the results of this study revealed, this hypothesis remained unproved because of different explanations presented below.

All of the participants of this study were at the intermediate level of proficiency. One of the reasons why there was not a significant difference between the groups in the study might be that they had already acquired the necessary competency to use expressions of gratitude in English. Therefore, this makes the applicability of cultural intelligence more or less redundant. It will be more revealing to carry out this study with beginners to see if having higher cultural intelligence will make a difference with the level of proficiency controlled.

Another explanation for the lack of a significant relationship between cultural intelligence and the use of expressions of gratitude and difference between the groups in this study might be due to the fact that expressing gratitude is universal across all languages (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Fraser,

1978). Therefore, one can hypothesize that students of all proficiency levels can perform this speech act appropriately and cultural intelligence does not have a very significant role to play. By this it is meant that learners translate the same expressions of gratitude they have in their mother tongue in English and then put them to use. Some inconsistencies as far as grammatical accuracy might be recognized; however, they do not risk the appropriateness of the speech act so far as they seem comprehensible to the interlocutors.

There might be another explanation why the two groups of the study did not differ in the way they used expressions of gratitude. Perhaps the situations in the discourse completion test used in the study were all culturally familiar to the participants. One can say that these situations would elicit similar expressions in both Iranian and English cultures. Therefore, the difference in their CQ was not a determinant of their performance on the expressions of gratitude.

There are two different kinds of gratitude expressions in English: explicit and implicit. The DCT used in this study mainly sought to elicit direct or explicit ways of expressing gratitude. There was no difference recognized in this study between the two groups, i.e. culturally low- and high-intelligent, in the way they employed the direct expressions of gratitude. However, in the way EFL learners use indirect or implicit expressions of gratitude, CQ may have a role to play and make a difference.

6. Conclusion

This paper was intended to determine if there was any difference between culturally low-intelligent and high-intelligent EFL learners in their expressions of gratitude. Another aim of this paper was to find any relationship between cultural intelligence and the use of expressions of gratitude. The results of the

analyses revealed that there was not a significant relationship between cultural intelligence and the way EFL learners used expressions of gratitude. Moreover, there was not a difference between the two groups in the study in the way they employed expressions of gratitude. It can be concluded that intercultural intelligence does not make a significant contribution to the ability to use expressions of gratitude. This, however, cannot be extended to the relationship between CQ and pragmatic competence in general and the enhancement of CQ to affect speech act production in particular because gratitude is only one manifestation of speech acts in English.

As to suggestions for further research, researchers can focus on the effect of CQ on beginner learners to see if having higher cultural intelligence would make a difference in the way they use expressions of gratitude in English. Another suggestion is to conduct a study of this kind with culturally unfamiliar situations in the DCT to explore how culturally low- and high-intelligent EFL learners perform on these unfamiliar situations. A special DCT can be developed to elicit implicit ways of expressing gratitude. Then, by using the same design, it can be determined if culturally low- and high-intelligent EFL learners would differ from each other in the way they would use implicit expressions of gratitude.

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Appendix 1: Discourse Completion Test

Directions: Read each of the following scenarios. In the space provided, write what you would say in the situation in a normal conversation.

 1. You have put on a new sweater. You run into your fellow student on the street. She says, "What a pretty sweater you have!"

How would you respond?

2. You've got an 'A' grade on your exam. Your teacher says, "Congratulations, you did a good job!"

How would you respond?

3. You are in sudden need of money for your next term tuition. Your friend notices this and offers to lend it to you.

What would you say to thank her for that?

4. You are a student. Your teacher gives a lecture. The time is over and he is finished. You want to leave.

What would you say to thank her for the lecture?

5. You are in a restaurant with your friend. You have a wonderful meal. Your friend says, "I'll pay."

What would be your response?

6. You are invited to a party. You have a new haircut. Your friend says, "You look wonderful with your new haircut!"

What would be your response?

7. You go to your teacher's office to find out about your score on the exam. Your teacher says, "Congratulations! You've got an 'A'."

How would you respond?

8. You are short of money for half of your tuition. Your friend finds out and says, "what if I pay you the other half and you pay me back later on."

How would you thank her for it?

9. The school bell goes. Your teacher says, "Ok. Class dismissed."

As you leave the class, how would you thank her?

10. You and your friend go to a Japanese restaurant and have a good meal. Your friend pays for it.

What would you say to thank her for that?

Appendix 2: CQ Scale

CQ-Strategy:

MC1   I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.

MC2   I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me.

MC3   I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions.

MC4   I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures.

CQ-Knowledge:

COG1   I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures.

COG2   I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages.

COG3   I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.

COG4   I know the marriage systems of other cultures.

COG5   I know the arts and crafts of other cultures.

COG6   I know the rules for expressing non-verbal behaviors in other cultures.

CQ-Motivation:

MOT1   I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.

MOT2   I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.

MOT3   I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.

MOT4   I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.

MOT5   I am confident that I can get used to the shopping conditions in a different culture.

CQ-Behavior:

BEH1   I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

BEH2   I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.

BEH3   I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.

BEH4   I change my non-verbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.

BEH5   I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.