

Thai Cultural Conceptualizations that Underly Intercultural Business Communication Problems with Koreans

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Abstract : Nowadays, business settings are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural under the conditions of globalization. When people from different linguistic and cultural background interact, their divergent cultural conceptualizations may result in communicative problems. Even though intercultural business communication between Thais and South Koreans has become increasingly significant along with the development of international trade relations, there have been very few attempts to conduct research on interactional problems in that context. Based on a Cultural Linguistics perspective, this study analyzes Thai cultural conceptualizations that underly interactional problems with Koreans at Korean business organizations where were located in Thailand. The data was gathered through in-depth interviews with ten Korean and ten Thai employees as well as through six months of field observations. The results indicate that there are three cultural pragmatic schemas that underly problems of interaction between the two groups; (1) the schema of kreng-jai as a communicative strategy of withholding one's intentions in order to not hurt another's emotion, (2) the schema of mai-pen-rai as a linguistic strategy of inducing interlocutors to not be concerned about substantial matters so as to avoid confrontations, and (3) the schema of jai-yen as a linguistic expression used for persuading interlocutors to maintain a calm state of mind in order to avoid conflicts. The linguistic behaviors of Thai employees in relation to these three cultural schemas had led to misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts with Korean supervisors and co-workers. These interactional problems were caused not only because Koreans were unfamiliar with Thai cultural conceptualizations, but also because these conceptualizations were incompatible with goal-oriented Korean business discourse. The findings of this study can enhance mutual understandings between Thai and Korean employees. Thus, it contributes to the promotion of smooth intercultural communication in the workplace.

Keywords : business context, cultural conceptualizations, cultural linguistics, intercultural communication, thai culture

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