Study of the Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) Observed in the Movie Entitled

"The Hundred-Foot Journey"

Anna May Cano

Jackie Manaog

Janina Jasmine Mendoza

Ricaella Reyes

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Hundred-Foot Journey is a drama film released on the year 2014. The movie opens with the scene where Hassan Kadam, an aspiring chef , and his family explaining to the French Immigration the reason why their family is moving to France. They had lived in Mumbai, India where they owned a restaurant which was set on fire because of an election riot that led to the loss of their restaurant, the death of their mother, and their migration to Europe. Hassan is a very talented cook who learned his cooking from her mother. However, he had no proof that could show that he knows how to cook so he tried to offer the Immigration officer a homemade samosa and said that the vegetables in London are not good enough and probably France's are too.

The family was driving on the French countryside while trying to pick out some garden vegetables until the car brakes broke on the hills of Saint-Antonin-Noble-Val. A young woman (Marguerite) offers them help in bringing their old van to the town while finding a mechanic. She also, welcomed them in her home and offered them good food. The Kadam family stayed the night in a hotel in which Papa bargained the fee. The next morning, an abandoned restaurant caught Papa's attention leading him to bargain with the owner to purchase it and eventually turned it into *Maison Mumbai*, an Indian restaurant in a French town. However, they have a competition just across the street exactly one hundred feet, *Le Saule Pleureur* which is a one-star Michelin restaurant and whose owner (Madame Mallory) is known to be very hostile.

Throughout the movie, the two restaurants compete with each other with all the unique and exclusive dishes that they are offering. The competition even got worse when the friends of the head chef (Jean-Pierre) of Le Saule Pleureur's tried to burn the *Maison Mumbai* and vandalized their wall with the words "Indian people will never be French". This tragedy became the wake-up call of Madame Mallory to stop the unhealthy competition between the two restaurants. She even acknowledged the gift and talent Hassan has in cooking. Madame Mallory offered to train Hassan formally in cooking especially French cuisines to polish off his cooking skills more and to open more opportunities for him in the world. *Le Saule Pleureur* received its much awaited second Michelin star and Hassan were sent to *Le Baleine Grise* where cooking is not considered an art anymore but a science. This is where he started to be acknowledged and become famous all over Paris because of his incredibly great talent and innovations in cooking.

After a year, Hassan was burnt out from all the popularity he gained that made him realize how he misses his culture especially Indian cuisine which he used to cook. He went back to Saint-Antonin-Noble-Val just a night before the Michelin star announcement and surprised his family and friends by cooking them good food. Despite his success and fame in *Le Baleine Grise*, he decided to stay in the town with his new business partner, Marguerite, and managed to get a third Michelin star for *Le Saule Pleureur*.

The film was selected because it shows how the differences in Indian and French culture pose communication and relationship conflicts between the characters. This paper contains an analysis of the intercultural communication competence of the movie The Hundred-Foot Journey by identifying verbal and non-verbal codes specifically low-context vs. high-context, proxemics, and haptics that were shown in the film. Aside from the behavioral analysis, this study also considers how preparation of cuisine and the individual taste of each culture signifies intercultural communication competence. With this, the researchers intend to widen their knowledge of intercultural communication competence that is often presented in films and use this analysis to pursue understanding of cultures despite the differences.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Gallois & Liu (2015), in the past centuries, the distance one could walk typically constrained social relationships, but with the availability of the new methods of connecting with others and human relationships have been expanded manifold. This is a time when people across the world are more interconnected than ever before. However, this is also a time when intercultural relations are becoming not only increasingly important but also more complicated.

It is known that communication and relationships between immigrants and residents have always been complicated, with both parties trying to protect their own way of life and culture (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). In this case, many would assume that the first challenge for intercultural communication conflicts would be language barrier; having different languages would automatically hinders conversation. According to Martin and Nakayama (2010) language can relieve or put more stress to intercultural interactions. But in the film, both the French and Indian people depicted, use English as an interface, to adjust to other people although it can always

be seen that they are always comfortable speaking on their own languages and would use their native tongue to express disagreement and negative remarks as to not offend the other party. With this it can be stated that despite the equal linguistic capability, conflicts would still arise.

The cultural conflicts observed in the movie was deeply analyzed through the use five verbal and non-verbal codes which are considered most appropriate for this film. For the verbal codes, the low-context and high-context and self-enhancing or self-effacing is used. Low or high context is assessed based on the way the speaker expresses his/her thoughts, whether it be direct, clear, concise, and detailed or not, while the self-enhancing and self-effacing refers how an individual addresses his/her abilities and capabilities to others, as assertive or restraint. Furthermore, for the non-verbal codes: appearance, how the Indian and French present themselves externally; proxemics, the use of interpersonal space and distance in communicating; and haptics, the meanings delivered through touch, were used.

Although it can be mentioned that there are more similarities to both cultures than differences, this study focus not on the cultural differences of Indian and French culture but the conflicts in communication of an immigrant and a resident of a country.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A time was allotted to give each member an opportunity to watch and review the film *The Hundred Foot Journey.* Each member was tasked to take note of important scenes and conversations that the intercultural (in this case French and Indian culture) communication presented in the film. The research is more of a qualitative analysis of how the different culture differs and on the other hand, somehow resemble. The focus of the analysis pivoted towards the representation of the distance, the food and the personality of the characters that were exhibited in the film. These factors are deeply analyzed through the use of verbal (appearance and self-enhancing communication style) and non-verbal codes (Matsumoto and Hwang, 2012), and Sorrels' six entry points for cultural praxis. A structural framework was constructed as guide for the analysis of the intercultural communication competence observed in the movie (Figure 1).
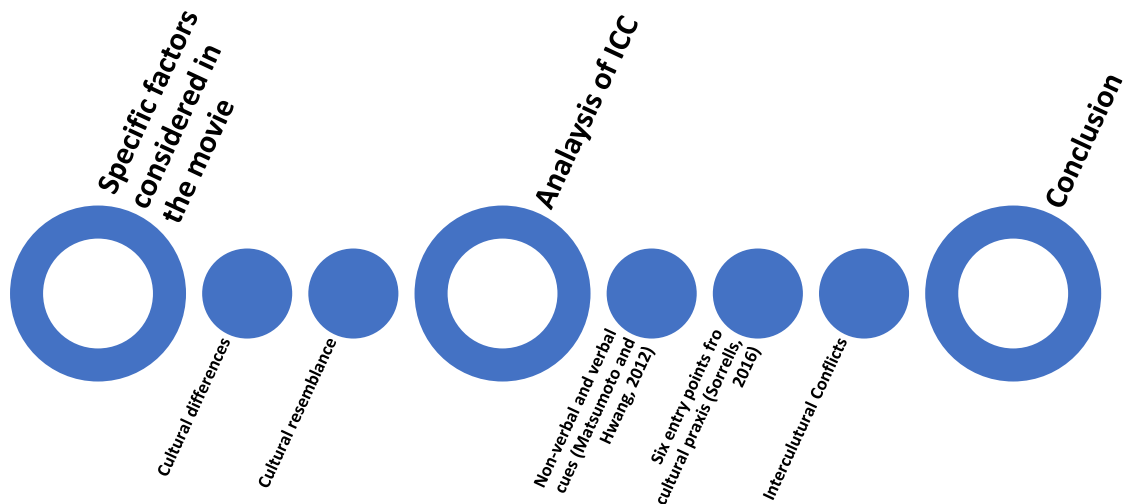
Figure 1. Structural framework for the analysis of the intercultural communication competence observed in the movie.

IV. DISCUSSION

The Hundred-Foot Journey revolves around the story of the Kadam family, a family from India who chooses to migrated to France because of a conflict in their locality. Their first step in this foreign land significantly addresses the cultural differences in the society. The hundred-foot distance between the Indian and the French restaurant is a representation of the differences among the two cultures. As part of the intercultural encounters, when someone knows about the race of another individual, which is different to them, stereotyping cannot be prevented (Piller, 2011). Stereotyping among cultures is a form of generalizing a person or a group of people and fitting them in self-imposed categories usually in such a way that is negative and discriminating. This type of prejudice was indirectly conveyed in the movie as the Kadam family is seen as 'others' because of not being a native citizen of France. A prominent catch phrase in the movie is "Indian can't become French, and French can't become Indian." which constructed an identity for the Indians that they cannot be part of the French culture and that French can never be affiliated with the Indian culture. According to Sorrells (2016), cultural identity is the way an individual is

developed through cultural encounters in different locations. The Kadam family encountered cultural identity concerns because they are Indians in French land.

Cultural difference is the central theme of the movie. It is an East meets West tale where the clash between the two cultures was notably depicted in the movie. In different cultures, the food plays a role in establishing a connection. Food plays a role in identity construction and intercultural communication. It can provide multicultural understanding. Hassan's family has to incorporate their Indian culture in a French restaurant. It is not easy for him because there is a tension building up. Analyzing the movie, food is a form of non-verbal code. It speaks for Hassan's family. The effects of food on both cultures are interpreted in different ways. The way the French people perceive food is different from the Indians' perspective. Food is seen as a form of body language. However as the movie furthers, Hassan's style of cooking greatly represents an adopted mixture between Indian and French cuisine.

Moreover, appearance of the characters is also viewed as a non-verbal code in the film. It is known that French and Indians have unique striking features. In the movie *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, there had been a cold war between Papa Kadam and Madame Mallory. It started when Mallory's chefs vandalized Papa's restaurant with a graffiti saying, "France for the French." Since they are not French, they are viewed differently in the society. The French people think that they are superior over any other nationalities in France. They think that the service of France is for the French only. Ethnocentrism is also evident in the film. It is a form of positioning as constructed in the intercultural praxis by Sorrells (2016). The French think that they are at the top of hierarchy because they are in France.

With concerns to both French and Indian culture, they have similarities in a way that both countries are multi-cultural and multi-ethnical. Generally, both are examples of self-enhancing culture. Baldwin (2014) defined self-enhancing is a form of verbal communication in which an individual is direct towards his/her accomplishments. In the film, Hassan displayed the said verbal code. He heard that Mallory is hiring chefs through omelette-tasting. He knows that he can cook a delicious omelette based on his recipe although he has injured hands at that time. As a form of intercultural praxis by Sorrells (2016), the scenario is an example of inquiry. Hassan is willing to

take risks to cook for Mallory; he inquires whether he can engage himself with the French culture by cooking for her. Framing, as a form of intercultural praxis, is also observed in the film. Hassan is aware that the Indian cuisine is different from the French one. As a solution, he mixed both cuisines, so he can show the cultural cross-over in between cuisines.

In the film, all the intercultural praxis developed by Sorrells (2016) are employed. Dialogue, action, and reflection are the most explicit ones. The abovementioned praxis like inquiry, positioning, and framing are analyzed throughout the movie. The film reflected how individuals' function in an intercultural space despite the differences.

V.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Intercultural conflicts such as stereotyping, discrimination and ethnocentrism was prominently presented in the movie. This cultural stance was not only displayed by one culture, as sometimes expected where the considered classical culture will dominate the other, but both cultural parties. This proves that even with the existence of conflicts cause by cultural differences, culture cannot be ranked thus one culture cannot be considered higher than the other.

However, it should be noted that cultural differences can be considered an important factor in analyzing the intercultural communication competence observed between cultures. Although this study focuses only on two specific cultures, the constructed framework cab be an effective tool in analyzing intercultural communication as each country is composed of diverse cultures each having their own unique identity that differs them from one another. This unique identity is not only represented by clothing or linguistic identity but other cultural element as well, such as cuisines. Each culture's own style and technique of preparing specific dishes influences identity construction and development.

With the differences of each culture, finding similarities to obtain understanding of the intercultural communication behavior is also necessary. The relationship and interconnection of each culture will give various information on how they are able to interact in an intercultural space despite of clashing cultural identities.

Other than the listed factors that could help in analyzing intercultural communication, there are still other cultural element presented in the film that can also be studied and deeply discussed.

VI. REFERENCES

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