

Communications Gaps Found or Experienced in London

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要 旨

本論は、2004年8月に著者がロンドンに滞在したときに発見、または、体験したコミュニケーション・ギャップを実例として紹介し、それらに、言語学的見地及び隣接する関連研究分野の視野から考察を加えたものである。序論では *communications gap* という言葉と、*miscommunication* という言葉の存在自体が問題であること。Section 1では、英国の Colgate 社製品の歯磨きをめぐる家族的語彙と年齢差による語彙の問題。Section 2では、先入観から来る *miscommunication* の問題。Section 3では、体調に影響される *miscommunication* の発生。Section 4は多言語社会の問題。Section 5は、*communications gap* を未然に防ぐネイティブ・スピーカーの矯正力のこと。Section 6は、外国人の矯正力について。Section 7では、真実を伝えることが *communications gap* を防ぐことになるのかどうか。Section 8では、芸術という手段を使って *communication* を成功させている例。以上の実例を、言語学的に、社会的に、歴史的に、地理的に、あるいは心理的に説明、考究したものである。

The phrase “communications gap” is employed to signify “a lack of communication, or a gap in communication, resulting from imperfect information and the gap between old and young persons”. This is the definition given to the phrase in *Kenkyusha's New English-Japanese Dictionary*, 6th ed.¹⁾ *Taishukan's Unabridged Genius English-Japanese Dictionary*, which is also a newly published dictionary, includes the phrase and gives a similar definition.²⁾ The only difference between those dictionaries is the latter

1) *Kenkyusha's New English-Japanese Dictionary* 「新英和大辞典」, 第六版(Tokyo: Kenkyusha 2002); English translation of the definition is by the present writer.

2) *Taishukan's Unabridged Genius English-Japanese Dictionary* 「ジーニアス英和大辞典」(Tokyo: Taishukan 2001).

parenthesises the ‘s’ of the word communications. What puzzles me, however, is that the phrase “communication(s) gap” cannot be found in the leading English dictionaries published in England and America.³⁾ The present writer’s solution here is to accept the phrase as it is in the English dictionaries published in Japan, and as employed in the sense mentioned above. The chief aim of the present paper is to illustrate the phenomenon of communications gap by familiar examples, and to study the cases not only from the linguistic point of view but also from the social, historical, geographical, and psychological points of view.

1 *Korugēto*: once a well used name for a domestic article in Japan

According to the *Mammoth Book of Great Inventions*,⁴⁾ the first mention of a toothbrush with bristles is found in an encyclopaedia compiled in Chinese in 1498. The toothbrush was introduced to Europe in the 17th century, and soon came to be used widely there.⁵⁾ The inventor of the toothpaste was the Romans.⁶⁾ It included Portuguese urine as an ingredient, because its ammonia served bleaching function. Japanese word for toothpaste is *ha-migaki* “tooth-cleaning”, and it seems that the word was in use by the early nineteenth century.⁷⁾ There is another Japanese word for toothpaste, which is *ha-migaki-ko* “tooth-cleaning-powder”. Its quotation citation is half a century later, but now this word sounds archaic or even obsolete. It seems that *ha-migaki* is the usual Japanese word for toothpaste now.

Two or three decades ago, the situation was a little different. The word *korugēto* “Colgate” came to be used as a kind of generic term for toothpaste. This was because the article produced by the Colgate Company was widely used in Japan in those days. This phenomenon had something in common with *mama-lemon*, a generic name for detergents of any company. It seems that the term came to be used because the detergent called *mama-lemon* got a large share of the Japanese market of this industry.

Now, after two or three decades, which age groups would understand those generic terms, especially, *korugēto*? The younger generations would not understand what it is. It might have escaped the memory of the older generation. It may be lucky, in a sense, for all my family members to have used the word in our daily life. People will blame us for still using an obsolete word, and think us to be ultra-conservative,

3) I have looked up the phrase in the *OED*, the *SOED*, *Collins English Dictionary*, the *COD*, *Webster's Third New International*, the *Random House Dictionary*, and some others. The word *miscommunication* may be regarded as conveying a similar meaning: its verb, *miscommunicate*, signifies “to communicate mistakenly, unclearly, or inadequately” (the *Random House Dictionary*). *Kenkyusha's New English-Japanese Dictionary* contains the word also, but none of the above mentioned British and American dictionaries except the *Random House* contains *miscommunication*, either.

4) James Dyson and Robert Uhlig, *The Mammoth Book of Great Inventions: the illustrated story of over 700 inventions and inventors that transformed civilization from 350,000 BC to the present* (London: Robinson 2001, repr. 204), pp. 135–36.

5) *Ibid*, p. 136: “Americans, however, did not get into the daily habit until after the Second World War, when GIs were forced to brush their teeth regularly by the army”. In Japan, it is called “*ha* (=tooth) *burasi* (=brush)”, and the *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* “The Great Dictionary of Japanese” (Tokyo: Shogakukan 1975) cites the first example of this word from an author who lived 1898–1947. It also contains another Japanese word for ‘toothbrush’, which is *hamigaki-yoji* “*齒磨楊枝*”.

6) Dyson and Uhlig (2001), p. 136.

7) The *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, Vol. 16, p. 421.

old-fashioned, or without progress. It is the word still alive in my family vocabulary: everybody in my family recognizes it as the generic term for tooth paste—the word is sometimes combined with the names of Japanese products, such as *PC-kurinika-no-korugēto*, *kuriakurīn-no-korugēto*, *kisiridento-no-korugēto*.⁸⁾ Our daughters are not responsible for introducing this strange term to family vocabulary. Their parents are to blame for it. The younger generation merely or innocently took over the term and obediently used it as their parents did. Our daughters became skeptical about the term when they used it in their conversation with their friends at school. They told to their parents that they found the term unintelligible to their friends. All the family had to recognize that the term *korugēto* was current in the family only, probably no longer in current use outside.

This issue of the term *korugēto* entered on a new phase a decade later, when the present writer visited London in the summer of 2004. He happened to watch TV at a hotel, and was surprised, and later became glad at the commercial message of “Colgate”. Next morning he went to a nearby supermarket, which opens at 8 o’clock (English shops now opens so early!), and there found several kinds of colgates: the bigger ones, the smaller ones, protecting against cavities, plaque, tartar, gum problems or bad breath. They (Waitrose by Gloucester Rd Station) sold tooth-brush of the Colgate Company also. The present writer bought one tooth paste of Colgate Company in order to show it to his family members and to prove the term *korugēto* originated from *Colgate* and was not a visionary one.

This is the instance of the communications gap between the members of a family and probably most of those of the other families. It may be also interpreted as the gap between old and young persons. Alternatively interpretation of geographical gap may be possible.

2 Communications gap caused by preoccupation

The present writer was waiting patiently in the rain for Museum of London to open, imagining himself recording materials of interest, especially the reproduction of Victorian streets, with his video/digital camera. It opened exactly at ten o’clock, and he went in, picking up the museum brochure, but he failed to read it carefully. He just skipped some regulations respecting the visitors’ manner, which included an article on prohibition of recording. Museum of London does not allow any kind of recording any time. It is so rigid a regulation that not only photographing but also even sketching is prohibited.

The present writer had visited the British Museum, Science Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum (in Oxford), the Ashmolean Museum (in Oxford), the Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, and used his video/digital camera quite freely (after carefully reading regulations in those museums). While visiting those museums and recording anything interesting, it seems that his ordinary prudence had been blunted and he had come to have a preconceived idea of unprohibited photographing. The present writer, possessed with the happy preconception, innocently started to video. This led to the communications gap or the miscommunication, which frustrated the official and made him give warning to the careless visitor using a video camera. It seems that the direct cause of this instance is simply neglecting to read through what was written in the brochure. We, however, may find that something else

8) *PC kurinika* and *kisiridento* (xylident) are products of the Lion Company, and *kuria-kurīn* is that of the Kao Company

lay behind it: it is preconception and the above story may be regarded as an instance of a communications gap caused by a psychological factor.

3 Why could an underground staff understand a Japanese map?

Round Earl's Court Station, as in any other places in London, there are lots of hotels or buildings of accommodation for tourists. At that season of the year (the beginning of August) especially, a great many tourists arrive at that underground station from various countries, tired and wearied of the long flight. Usually at underground stations maps are put on the walls or signboards are hung. At Earl's Court maps are put on the walls as in the other stations, and the station gave another service also. A senior staff was standing near the map of the area so as to help the tourists from foreign countries to locate their accommodations quickly.

When the present writer approached the map on the wall, that gentleman kindly talked to him and offered him help. It was so stupid of the present writer to show him an area map with streets' names written all in Japanese. He did not do so intentionally. The gentleman could not help me. Tiredness after long flight must have influenced the mentality of the present writer, and made him do such folly. Then he showed the gentleman the address of the hotel (written all in English). He happily and gently smiled and immediately showed where the hotel is on the map, in which direction the present writer should go, and gave him a coloured version of the area map. The present writer expressed his gratitude, and the gentleman smiled to him with the words "You're welcome". This is an instance of the communications gap caused by the discrepancy in languages, but it can also be regarded as miscommunication influenced by poor physical condition.

4 The hotel receptionist's languages

Jean Aitchison quotes the saying attributed to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1519–56), which goes that 'I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men, and German to my horse'.⁹⁾

When the present writer arrived at the hotel and stood in front of the reception for checkin, he experienced something like what Jean Aitchison quoted. The receptionist was on the phone and talking on and on in a language the present writer could not understand at all. It was not an English dialect, nor Estuary English. It sounded like a language spoken in the Middle East. He finished his long talk. The present writer told him his name, where he came from, and then gave the receptionist his accommodation voucher. To the surprise of the present writer, the receptionist's language changed from unintelligible language to clear enunciated standard English. The present writer's concern over communications gap completely disappeared. This is an instance of what is called code-switching in bilingual or multilingual communities.

9) Jean Aitchison, *Linguistics*, fourth edition (Tokyo: Hituzi Syobo 1999, first ed. 1994), p. 117.

5 Taking Notting Hill Gate for Nottingham

London underground is sometimes operated irregularly. Especially services of Circle Line are not reliable. The present writer wanted to visit the markets on Portobello Road, the nearest station to which is Notting Hill Gate on the Circle Line and the District Line. When he arrived at Gloucester Road Station, the starting point of his everyday travel, and saw the sign “No Service of Circle Line”, he was at a loss what to do. Then a ticket clerk there asked him where he was going. To the sudden question he could not mention the correct name of the station, and told him a wrong name “Nottingham...”. The ticket clerk kindly corrected the present writer’s mistake, saying “Notting Hill Gate!” The ticket clerk then told the present writer to take Piccadilly Line, change at Earl’s Court and take District Line. It seems that the ticket clerk picked up necessary phonemes from the present writer’s utterance, and immediately constructed the correct station name with those phonetic materials.

6 Korean tourists criticizing English pronunciation

Sitting on a bench by the side of Science Museum, the present writer suddenly found himself among a group of about a dozen men, all Koreans between 40’s and 50’s of age. They got out of taxis. One of them imitated the driver’s pronunciation, saying [probl], and laughed. It seems that the driver was a Middle Eastern person in origin, of whom it is characteristic to pronounce with contraction or dropping a syllable—here the original utterance of the taxi driver may have been [(no) probl(em)]. The innocent taxi driver smiled happily, and asked one of the Koreans what is “thank you” in Korean. He taught that it is “komaPs? wmnida”. Here the Korean gentlemen succeeded in avoiding miscommunication by the knowledge of peculiarity of the driver’s pronunciation.

7 Is exactness required for (good) communication?

Walking at Portobello Market, the present writer happened to find a young lady selling pizza outside her shop. He felt an appetite and stood in a queue. It seemed that she was rather slow in counting money, and a customer standing in front of the present writer was helping her to count. She finally understood, and the sale was made. It was the turn of the present writer. He gave her one pound coin, two twenty pence coins, and one ten pence coin. At first she looked puzzled, but finally understood that all made £ 1.50, which is the exact amount of money for a piece of pizza. The present writer went into the shop, sat at the table, and ordered a small can of Coca-Cola. He tried to give one pound coin, but the shop assistant told the present writer to give him fifty pence coin instead. So did the present writer. But to his surprise, the change the shop assistant gave him was two ten pence coins. The price of the drink was 39 pence!! Was this simply a mistake in calculation? The present writer is still wondering whether he should have told the shop assistant that his calculation was wrong. In such a case which would be better from the psychological viewpoint of communication? Referring to his mistake in calculation would be a proof of our honesty, but at the same time it might hurt his feeling, or his feeling of generosity, by pointing out his weakness in calculation.

8 Covent Garden artists

In case of street entertainers success depends on mental communication with the audience by their talent of art. At Covent Garden, there was a young couple standing in the corner of an open-air restaurant. They sang classical songs or Italian folk songs by turns. They sang so emotionally. The audience was moved by their songs, which led to success in collecting money. While one of them was singing, the other was moving round among the audience with a small basket. The man was a bad collector, whereas the lady collected much money by shaking a basket, thus making the sound of money, and letting the audience know about the approach of the money basket. Communication with the audience by art was great success, and they succeeded also in communication with the audience by walking round with money basket.

9 Conclusion

It may be said in general that from the end of the 19th century to the early 20th century the Faculty of Elocution, where students recited literary works, was reorganized into the Faculty of Speech, the Faculty of Drama, or the Faculty of Rhetoric, finally during the last half century developing, through the Faculty of Speech Communication, into the faculty where communication is studied as a whole.¹⁰⁾ Oxford University has the traditional Faculty of English and Literature. It also has a group of teaching staff in linguistics, philology and phonetics. The head of this group is Deborah Cameron, who is Rupert Murdoch Professor of Language and Communication. The study of communication, as is well known, is comprised of personal researches surveying individuals or more than two, of quantitative researches made in accordance with psychology and sociology surveying groups of several people or communication in organizations, and of qualitative researches of rhetorical criticism. Most of the instances discussed in the present paper illustrate communications gaps at the personal level, individual, a few people, or a family. The analysis attempted in the present paper is qualitative, not quantitative. Finally in each section, the instances have been considered not only from the linguistic viewpoint but from the social, historical, geographical, and psychological viewpoints also. The linkage of various linguistic branches with the external world has been illustrated by Jean Aichison.¹¹⁾

10) *Kenkyusha's Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* 「応用言語学事典」(Tokyo: Kenkyusha 2003), p. 416. Translated and altered by the present writer.

11) Jean Aichison, *Linguistics* (Tokyo: Hituzi Syobo Publishing Ltd. 1994), p. 7.