

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION BY CHINESE ENGINEERS WORKING IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The increase in International Trade in Ghana has raised the alarm of multilingualism. The Chinese are leading world trade now, their companies are spreading through the whole world and Ghana is not an exception. The aim of this paper is to investigate the means of communication by Chinese engineers working in Ghana, using Twellium Industrial Company as a case study. A qualitative approach via semi-structured in-depth interviews was used for the study. Out of a population of 120, (64) participants were involved in the study to ascertain their means of communication, Both synchronous and asynchronous forms of communications were found to be employed by project team members with face to face by the translator, WeChat chatting by translating software, whatsapp chatting by translating software and non-verbal or sign language communication. Communication barriers such as lack of attention, distractions, differences in perceptions, no clear speech, use of jargons, dissemination procedures were also identified as key challenges faced by engineers at Twellium Industrial Company.

Keywords: International Trade, multilingualism, communication, Chinese

INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism has become important in our society today due to international trade around the world. In times of rapid growth, both in terms of economic development and globalization, an increasing number of firms extend their businesses abroad and some investors move from their home country and establish businesses abroad. Communication tends to present a new challenge to managers, engineers and workers of these firms sent from their home country abroad to work.

Background of the study

Communication plays a very crucial role in our daily lives, and as long as the Chinese are coming to Africa, there is a need for language and communication. According to (Robbins et al,2000 :63) communication is “ a participative two-way sharing of understanding and purpose, leading to appropriate action.” Twellium Industrial Company is a Ghanaian multinational beverage corporation headquartered at Nsawam in Ghana, in the Eastern Region precisely. It was established in September 2013, to manufacture, retail and market non-alcoholic beverages. In February 2014, the company obtained the franchise from Monarch Beverage Company to produce beverages including Rush Energy Drink, Verna Natural Mineral Water, Original American Cola, Rasta Choco Malt, Planet Range and Bubble up lemon-lime.

Due to the differences in the culture of people, communication is usually proving to be hard and thus not effective. Communication barriers, therefore, are manifest and renders communication between two workers difficult. From the mid-2000s to 2013, approximately

50,000 Chinese migrants entered Ghana to engage in various economic activities. According to Edwards (2009), language is fundamental to people's distinctiveness. The reason is that the varied languages that individuals speak impact which groups they fit into in a community. Furthermore, the speaking dialect of a group is the basic metaphorical method through which cultural data is moved, exchanged and transformed.

Ghana and China are immersed in different cultures which lead to different ways of thinking and behaving. When a Chinese company tries to understand the management style or behaviours of Ghanaian staff, some basic principles stand to be challenged. For instance, the Chinese feel that all men are born unequal and they should all obey the decision of the authority (Martinsons & Hempel, 1998). While Western people believe that all men are born equal and they can make independent decisions and act on their own (ibid). Ambos and Schlegelmilch (2008) argue that one culture may support certain type(s) of organizations or firms rather than other types, and culture differences may influence the performance of a company. In other words, national culture can influence the management and communications of organizations.

Companies who extend their business abroad have to face the challenge of multicultural communication. Bennis and Nanus (1985) refer to Erez (1992) and claim that communication is the only approach by which group members can cooperate with each other toward the goal of the organization especially for multicultural firms in other countries. It is therefore necessary that managers, engineers and workers have frequent communication and sufficient understanding for organizational goals to be achieved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language barrier

Language is one of the obvious hindrances to communications yet maybe not the most integral. Individuals who don't share a language or who feel that they have a poor command of someone else's dialect might have some troubles communicating and imparting. There is likewise the likelihood of false impressions happening between individuals when they don't share a typical dialect. However, sharing a common dialect does not ensure understanding. Indeed, even speakers of the same dialect don't have the very same comprehension of the implications and meanings of words (Patel, Li & Sooknanan, 2011). In this sense, the Chinese and the Ghanaian would have problems in communicating.

The two individuals speak entirely different languages. Various ways in which a dialect can be an obstruction to intercultural communications includes the problems of vocabulary, idiomatic, experimental and conceptual equivalences. The absence of vocabulary equivalence happens at the point when there are no words in one dialect that relate precisely to the meaning and importance of words in another language. It happens mainly with particular or extremely illustrative words. Take for instance a situation where a letter that reads: 'I wonder if you will set an agenda and a meeting date for our meeting' is written by a Ghanaian in English to be translated into Chinese.. In this case, the word 'wonder' is used as a courteous method of requesting for information from the Chinese on the agenda of the meeting and meeting date, when translated into Chinese it means an entirely different thing. It means 'doubt'. When translated, it waters down the courtesy (Patel, Li & Sooknanan, 2011). The sentence would thus read 'I doubt if you will set an agenda and meeting date for our meeting'. For this situation, a sentence that means well can result in a great conflict due to the offensive meaning (Phipps, 2013).

In several cases, when a Ghanaian speaker communicates in English to a Chinese and uses idiomatic expressions, it creates confusion. Even though English is not a native language for

both, one individual may be well informed with the idiomatic expressions like a native speaker. Take, for instance, when one says ‘kick the bucket’, it means to die. In some cases, it may create confusion when one of the individuals who comprehends its meaning uses it to express death to the other person who doesn’t understand its meaning (Phipps, 2013). Conceptual equivalence, on the other hand, becomes a setback for communication if notions or concepts are not well comprehended in similar ways in various cultures.

The examples of communication barriers between Ghanaian and Chinese cultures are inclusive of but not limited to language differences, nonverbal misinterpretation, preconceptions and misunderstandings, high anxiety assumptions of the similarities, discrimination, ethnocentrism and tone differences (Balsmeier & Heck, 1994). Ghanaians have different concepts of some fundamental and contemporary issues in a way that may appear to be quite divergent as compared to how the Chinese understand the same (Large, 1983).

Ethnocentrism

It is very normal for one brought up in Ghana to have the values of the community he or she is brought up in, likewise to one brought up in China. It is because of the way the two individuals brought up in these cultures interact and learn from them. Ethnocentrism is the belief of one in his or her culture. It is the sense of focusing on one's own culture in everything one pursues. It is clearly a setback in communication since it offers the basis of one judging other cultures and rendering them to be inferior (Bi et al., 2012). The Chinese would have difficulty and challenges in communicating with a Ghanaian if both parties do not have a sense of tolerance towards each other. For example, a Chinese working in Ghana would feel inferior if a Ghanaian looks down upon him (Olshin, 2006). Ethnocentrism, in this case, promotes superiority in the Ghanaian who believes that his culture is superior to the Chinese culture. This kind of attitude in the Ghanaian affects communication between the Ghanaian and the Chinese (Bi et al., 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This section explains the methods that were used in collecting the data, the research design for the study, population of the study, sampling, sample size and source of data used for the study at the Twellium Industrial Company.

Research Design

A research design enables a researcher to ensure that the evidence obtained effectively addresses the research problem as clearly as possible. According to Kumar (2011), a research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems. For purposes of research, a qualitative approach was used for the study (interviews) to explore the means of communication used at the Twellium Industrial Company.

Population of study

The study was conducted on sixty-four (64) participants, of which twenty-four (24) were Chinese nationals, thirty-three (33) were Ghanaians, three (3) were Indians, four (4) were Lebanese and one (1) Moroccan all totalling 64 participants drawn from various departments under Twellium Industrial Company in Ghana.

Sampling

Sample design refers to the approach used to select the sample from the targeted population. Purposive sampling was used to develop the sample of the research under discussion or review. According to Neuman (2012), purposive sampling is often used when working with very small samples such as case study research and when the study wishes to select particularly informative cases.

Sample Size: Out of a population of 120 participants, 64 were chosen as the total sample, representing (53.3%) interviewees from the Twellium Industrial Company.

Table 1. Sample representing interviewees from TIC

Engineering and technicians team	Frequency
Engineer under DSM (Chinese Company)	10
Engineer under Song Ben(Chinese Company)	8
Engineer under Ri Cheng(Chinese Company)	6
Ghanaian Technicians	33
Indians Technicians	3
Moroccan Technician	1
Lebanese Technicians	4
Total	64

Sources of Data

A primary source data was used for the study to collect first-hand information from the respondents by the researcher through interviews and observations. Primary data offers direct access to the subject of the research work about the people and the phenomena.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Face to Face Conversation by Translators

Face to face communication plays a key role in our daily life as well as achieving success in business relationships and serves as a means of interpretation used in the public and private sector. This is where an interpreter is physically present to allow the two parties to communicate effectively through body language, facial expressions, conversation, meetings, teleconferences and interviews with the workers when the need arises as far as communication is concerned. According to Nardi and Whittaker (2002), face-face communication is still the golden standing among the mediated technologies based on many theories, particularly in the context of the media richness theory where face-face communication is described as the most effective and informational. Media breaks down language barriers and cultural differences in situations where communication would otherwise be impossible. It builds a collaborative environment, which attracts, inspires and motivates employee's satisfaction as far as the company's culture and growth is concerned.

WeChat Conversation by Translators Software

WeChat has been one of the paramount chat apps in the world for communication, particularly as a Chinese multi-purpose messaging social network through the social media in the form of text messaging, video calls, voice messaging, voice recordings, conferencing, online payment, e-commerce, blogs as well as location sharing. WeChat as a marketing strategy was not in doubt but a must. According to (Jason Lim,2014) WeChat is been called

“China’s App for Everything” because of its many functions and platforms and lauded as one of the world’s most powerful apps. It enhances communication and the native language among employees. It allows the employees to express themselves in their various languages, which helps the translator to give prompt feedback to the workers for efficiency and productivity.

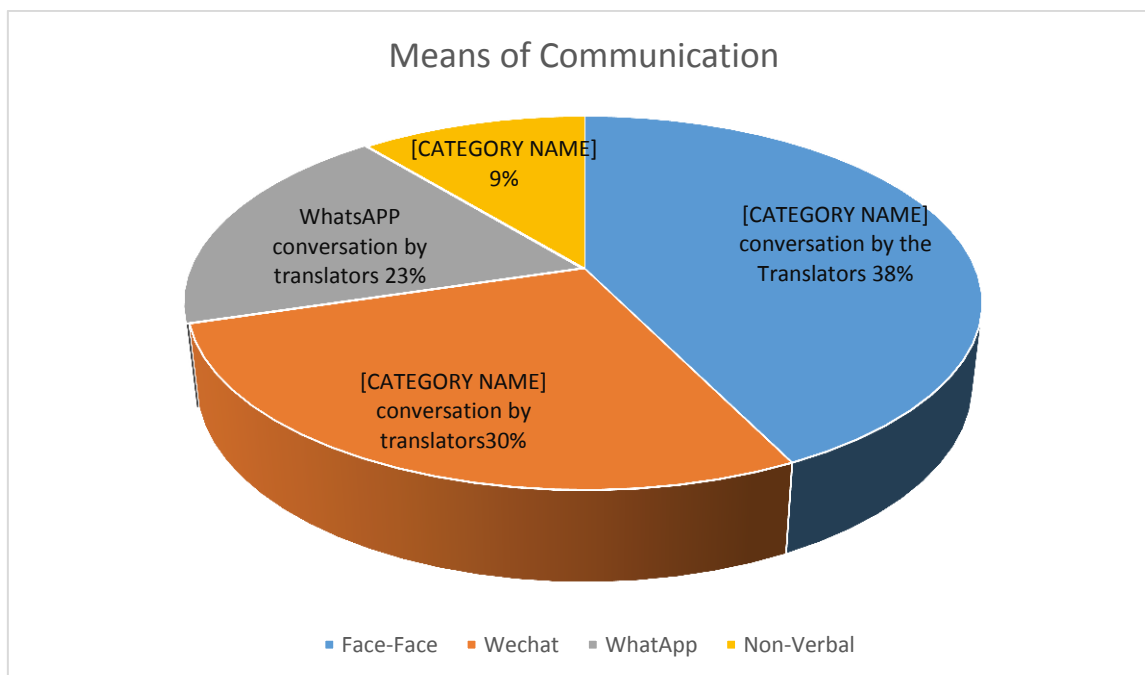


Figure 1: The Means of Communication Used By Chinese Engineers Working In Ghana WhatsApp Conversation by Translators

WhatsApp is globally recognized as a cross-platform means of communication used by various people around the world. It is known to be one of the most popular social networking applications across the world which hosts about more than 1.5 billion active users daily. Similar to WeChat translation, WhatsApp translation provides the platform where employees can easily communicate and enhance work efficiency. According to (WhatsApp,2016), a service which was began in 2009 by Brian Action and Jan Koum, WhatsApp enables users to send text messages, photos, videos & documents. Its widespread use is attributed to the view that the application is appealing as it offers cheap and affordable means of sending information worldwide (Church & de Oliveira, 2013). WhatsApp helps us to send messages instantly, together with advertisement, location and even status with friends. According to (Jebakumar & Jisha, 2014), WhatsApp provides a platform for entertainment, education, collaboration, instantaneous sharing of information as well as maintenance of a community. It makes it easier and convenient for the translator to send multimedia messages at a time to his employees for the work to be executed accurately and efficiently.

Non- Verbal or Sign Language

Sign language mostly entails correspondence without words between two individuals. Messages are sent through facial expression, the tone and pitch of voice, eye contact, gestures displayed through body language (kinesics) and physical distance between the communications (proxemics). According to (Burgoon & Saine, 1978, p.6-7) [4] “nonverbal communication is all communication that refers to actions which are sent out purposely, received with consciousness and may have a response”. Gestures and eye contact have powerful meanings in both cultures. Most of the critical meanings generated in human

encounters are elicited by touch, glance, gesture, or facial expression with or without the aid of words.....every harmony or disharmony of signals guides the interpretation of the passing mood or enduring attribute (Barnlund,1968, p.536-537) [2]. Globally, learning or knowing about differences in cultures in nonverbal behaviour is very beneficial as it pertains to its intercultural communication. Non-verbal communication helps to portray a true reflection of individuals regarding values, attitudes, emotions and also been freed from isolating ethnocentrism. The translator uses sign language to point out things to the workers, which enables them to understand things quickly and act upon them amicably. It vividly enhances the relationship between countries and improves the international cooperation environment.

Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used for the study to ascertain the means of communication used by the engineers and the technicians working at the Twellium Industrial Company. Sixty-four (64) respondents were involved, of which twenty-four (24) of the respondents were Chinese nationals, thirty-three (33) were Ghanaians, three (3) were Indians, four (4) were Lebanese and one (1) Moroccan all totalling 64 participants. They were drawn from various departments under Twellium Industrial Company in Ghana.

The researcher began by enquiring from the engineers and technicians the means of communication they used in communicating during working sessions, and they replied by saying, they communicate through the face to face communication by the translator, WeChat chatting by translator software, WhatsApp chatting by translator and the Non-verbal or sign language respectively. The technicians raised some concerns of communication barriers that they encounter on the field regarding the translators: (a) some of the translators misinterpret some of the words which brings about misunderstanding between them.

A classic example is using words like “Na ge” which literally means “that one”, but they mistakenly take it as “Zhi ge” which means “this one”. (b) The translators sometimes are not familiar with the right technical terms used in the field and their level of translating the Chinese language is a factor. (c) it was realised that the translators had problems of translating words from the English language to the Chinese because their level of Chinese language was not strong. (d) In the interview process, the researcher realized that some of the technicians had challenges with their accents, example with the Indians. Their dialects are a bit cumbersome which leads communication gaps, but the translator tried to use the means of communication like nonverbal or the sign language in demonstrations for better understanding and clarifications.

Sometimes the use of jargons or slang and having a strong accent can impede or hinder communication. (e) the researcher also realized that stereotypical assumptions also affect the progress of the work. (f) In the interview, some of the technicians raised concerns that the translator needs to repeat some difficult concepts or terms to enable them to grip the meaning of it when the need arises. In the end, the researcher came out with some suggestions to improve upon the communication barriers been faced by the engineers and the technicians. The translator needs to have some basic training of the Chinese language and some technical terms used in the field to enable them to understand and deliver as expected.

Strategies to be used to avert the Barriers of Communication at the workplace

Today, the world is acknowledged to have become a global village where people communicate from time to time and from place to place irrespective of their location. Also, due to technological advancement, many people from different walks of life have had the opportunity to move from one location to another.



Figure 2: Strategies To Overcoming Communication Barriers

As this takes place, the challenges and issues of dealing with cultural differences and utilizing the potential advantages of the diversities become immense. The differences that exist across various cultures have a significant impact on communications. It is, therefore, prudent to put strategies that would help reduce and/or eliminate the barriers to communications.

1. Overcoming language barrier: It is the view of the researcher that due to the language differences among the engineering team, speaking slowly and clearly is a way to overcome the language barrier.

2. Practicing active listening: Active listening is a technique that entails restating the other speaker's sentiments to ensure that one grasps and understands their meaning and also, asking regular questions.

3. Paying attention to cultural assumptions: It is also believed that, if a person travels to a foreign nation, it is quite challenging to cope with the differences that exist in the nonverbal and verbal communications. As a result of this, we must encourage employees to learn the basic phrases and idioms in the other language to get rid of little grammatical errors that occur.

4. Exercising Patience: Exercising patience is very important when it comes to communication. Communication takes more time. It is the fact that communicating with a person from the same culture takes less time as compared to communicating with someone from a different culture

5. Avoiding Stereotypes: For successful communication, an engineer at Twellium Industrial Company believes that one needs to seek beyond the misconceptions and stereotypes behind one's background.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to explore the means of communication by Chinese engineers working in Ghana. The study employed a qualitative method in the collection of data through the usage of semi-structured interviews to gather data from employees of the

company. The study observed that 38% of the respondents use face-to-face communication by the translator as a major way to communicate at the workplace than using WeChat conversation by translators software, WhatsApp conversation by translator and non-verbal or sign language used at the field which recorded 30%, 23% and 9% respectively.

This illustrates that most of the respondents preferred the usage of face-to-face through an interpreter which is faster despite the advancements in technology because these apps are instant messaging apps which requires the transfer of messages from one device through a network to another device which has its peculiar challenges to get information quickly in real-time. The study also identified challenges associated with the various preferred methods of communication used at the factory. Some of such challenges were the right pronunciation of engineering technical terms and problem of translating the English language into the Chinese Language.

These challenges hamper the smooth flow of communication among the workers due to cultural differences. The examples of communication obstacles between Ghanaian and Chinese culture are inclusive of but not limited to language differences, nonverbal misinterpretation, preconceptions and misunderstandings, high anxiety assumptions of the similarities, discrimination, ethnocentrism and tone differences (Balsmeier & Heck, 1994). This can be averted if both Ghanaian workers and other foreign nationals put away their cultural differences and work as a team.

CONCLUSION

The influx of Chinese nationals and Chinese companies into Ghana has increased extensively over the years and is still counting. Due to the diversity in culture, there has been the need to dive into the means of communication used by the Chinese engineers working in Ghana using Twellium Industrial Company, Ghana as a case study. The organizational culture in our various organizations influences the performance of employees both positively and negatively. It is these differences in cultural backgrounds that render the two cultures quite different (Olshin, 2006). It was realized that the form of communication used by these workers on the field was the face-to-face by an interpreter, WeChat Chatting by Translator Software, WhatsApp Chatting by Translator, Non-verbal or Sign Language communication. Communication between two individuals from these two cultures as depicted in this research indicates that there exist various barriers that hinder effective correspondence. As such alternative words as well as non-technical terms in the field should be used. Language barriers can be a very crucial challenge, but working with people with different organizational cultures drives innovation and creativity. However, several strategies exist that can be put in place to curb and or reduce these communication barriers to ensure that the organizational goals and objectives are achieved effectively. The effectiveness of the communication medium adopted among the engineers undoubtedly makes a significant contribution to the overall performance outcome and success of the company. We must often adopt new ways to understand one another and to bridge the communication gaps to enhance effective collaboration.

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