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Li-Rong Lilly Cheng

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Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

A Quest for Cultural Competence

Li-Rong Lilly Cheng
San Diego State University

Professionals in the field of special education are constantly being asked about efficacy and outcome-based practice. The tragic event that took place at Virginia Tech shocked the world. This article uses the Virginia Tech tragedy as a base to discuss the need for all professionals to develop cultural competence. Furthermore, it discusses the topic of cultural reactions to communicative disorders and the need to develop cultural competence to decode each message in its cultural, linguistic, and social contexts and to provide culturally appropriate intervention when called for. It also builds on the notion that the world is flat and describes the challenges we face as we try to decode the messages from the world of English-language learners, the world of Englishes, and the codes shared by the e-generation. Finally, it advocates the need to develop cultural humility with the goal to quest for cultural competence.

Keywords: *cultural competence; cultural intelligence; cultural humility; ELL; Englishes*

The purpose of this article is to use the Virginia Tech tragedy as a base to discuss the need for understanding cultural humility and for developing cultural competence. It uses the cultural reactions to communicative disorders by the Cho family as a base to further discuss the need to develop cultural competence in order to decode each message in its cultural, linguistic, and social context and to provide culturally appropriate intervention when called for. Furthermore, the article describes the challenges we face as we try to decode the messages from the world of English-language learners, the world of Englishes, and the codes shared by the e-generation. As projected by Thomas Friedman (2005), the world is getting flatter, which means that we have an urgent need to understand more about peoples and cultures that we do not know. As speech-language pathologists, we work with children and adults from all over the world. Our general lack of information about the cultural, linguistic, and social imperatives of our diverse populations makes us very vulnerable and incapable of detecting potential speech and language disorders; thus, we fail to provide early intervention and family counseling. The bigger question is, Are we prepared to work with the multicultural and multilingual Google generation? Finally, this article advocates the need to develop cultural humility with the goal to quest for cultural competence.

Lesson Learned From the Virginia Tech Massacre: A Case Study

Cultural competence is a necessary part of our everyday encounters. The lack of such competence may lead to tragedies such as the Virginia Tech massacre. Cultural humility is learned and acquired with multicultural encounters (Mahendra et al., 2005; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Cultural humility embodies such principles as a life-long commitment to reflection, self-evaluation, and self-critique, while admitting limits to one's knowledge and being teachable. The following are two examples of how we can be taught about people's ways of life.

The massacre on the campus of Virginia Technology on April 16, 2007, shocked the world. This tragedy resulted in the deaths of 32 innocent people and the death of one very troubled youth. Who was Seung-Hui Cho? The most important question about this tragedy is, Could this tragedy have been prevented? If the persons who had encountered Cho had been culturally competent, could the tragedy have been prevented? What kinds of problems did he have? From the way he executed the killings, we

Author's Note: Please address correspondence to Li-Rong Lilly Cheng, San Diego State University, 5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego CA 92182; e-mail: lcheng@mail.sdsu.edu.

know that he had been planning the massacre for months. He bought the guns, practiced shooting, prepared the tape, mailed it, chained the doors, and carried out the massacre. When the story first broke, the reporters mentioned he was an Asian. Was he from East Asia? South Asia? Southeast Asia? Was he a new immigrant? Was he a foreign (international) student? Was he born in the United States? Later, more information about this troubled person became available. This case study was composed from newspaper articles, television reports, school reports, and sources from the Internet.

Cho was born in South Korea, and as a child he had difficulty communicating with his family and others. During Cho's early life in South Korea, his family lived in poverty in a small, three-room basement. To find a better life and better educational opportunities for Cho, the family immigrated to the United States in 1992 when Cho was 8 years old. They first lived in Detroit and then moved to Centreville after learning that the Washington, D.C., area had one of the largest Korean populations in the United States.

Cho's family had concerns about Cho's behaviors during his early childhood. Cho's relatives thought that he was mute or possibly mentally ill. According to Cho's uncle, Cho "didn't say much and didn't mix with other children" (Kleinfeld, 2007). Cho's great-aunt, Kim Yang-soon, described Cho as "cold" and a cause of family concern. She said that Cho was extremely shy and "just wouldn't talk at all" ("Relative calls Cho a cold, difficult child," 2007). She said she knew something was wrong after the family moved to the United States because she heard frequent updates about Cho's older sister, but little news about Cho.

Cho studied at Poplar Tree Elementary School and finished the 3-year program in 1½ years. He kept his distance from others. In middle school and high school, Cho was teased and picked on for his shyness and unusual speech patterns. Some classmates even offered dollar bills to Cho just to hear him talk. According to Chris Davids, a high school classmate, Cho looked down and refused to speak when called on. Davids added that after one teacher threatened to give Cho a failing grade for not participating in class, Cho began reading in a strange, deep voice that sounded "like he had something in his mouth" (Schulte & Craig, 2007, p. 2). "The whole class started laughing and pointing and saying, 'Go back to China'" (Schulte & Craig, 2007, p. 2). Another classmate, Stephanie Roberts, stated that "there were just some people who were really cruel to him, and they would push him down and laugh at him. He didn't speak English really well, and they would really make fun of him" (Apuzzo & Cohen, 2007). Other students recall crueler names and that most of the bullying was because he was

so alone. Christopher Chomchird and Carmen Blandon, former classmates of Cho, stated that they heard rumors of a "hit list" of other students Cho wanted to kill. His former classmates recalled instances of Cho being teased and mocked (de Kretser & Gittens, 2007).

To address his problems, Cho's parents took him to church. Cho was bullied in his church youth group, especially by "the rich kids." A pastor at Centreville Korean Presbyterian Church was concerned about Cho's difficulty in speaking, and he speculated Cho was a little autistic. He asked Cho's mother to take him to a hospital, but she declined. She also told her aunt that Cho might have autism, and she became increasingly concerned about her son (Thomas, 2007).

Cho enrolled as a business information technology major at Virginia Tech and later changed to English. His poetry professor, Nikki Giovanni, stated that she had him removed from her class because she found his behavior menacing. Cho had intimidated female students by photographing their legs under their desks and by writing obscene, violent poetry (Geller, 2007). Department Chair Roy alerted Student Affairs, the dean's office, and campus police, but each said there was nothing they could do if Cho had made no overt threats against himself or others. Roy said that his writing "seemed very angry" and that Cho whispered his response after taking 20 seconds to answer questions. She also urged Cho to seek counseling (Johnson, 2007).

Fellow students described Cho as a "quiet" person who "would not respond if someone greeted him." When it was Cho's turn to introduce himself in class, he did not speak. Cho wrote only a question mark on the sign-in sheet ("Loner filled with anger and spite," 2007, p. 30). One of his roommates commented that Cho "would sit in a rocker by the window and stare at the lawn below. Cho just typed on his laptop" (Gardner & Cho, 2007). He also reported that he witnessed Cho riding his bicycle in circles in the parking lot of the dormitory. Other roommates reported that Cho demonstrated repetitive behaviors, such as listening repeatedly to "Shine," a song by the alternative rock band Collective Soul ("Roommates give a glimpse," 2007) and writing the song's lyrics "Teach me how to speak; Teach me how to share; Teach me where to go" on the wall in his dormitory room.

As Boyd (2006) indicated, the Internet mirrors the dynamics that take place offline. Troubled kids offline are troubled kids online. If you see a troubled kid online, an offline intervention is needed. The Internet is not the problem—it's the mirror. This mirror showed how troubled he was.

Cho was crying for help, and as speech-language pathologists watched the development of this case, many questions came to mind: What was his birth history? What was his early developmental history? How about

family history? What was his early language history? What was his social history? He wanted people to teach him how to speak. Did he have a speech–language disorder? He wanted people to teach him how to share. Did he have a pragmatic disorder? He wanted people to show him where to go. Was he lost? He wanted people to tell him there is love. Could he find love in his life? All these questions cannot be answered because Cho is no longer here. The message that his family finally announced to the world also indicated hopelessness and helplessness and a sense of despair and loss. Could his family be helped? Could early diagnosis and intervention have helped to prevent this tragedy?

Was he in an English-as-a-second-language program? Was he referred to speech pathology services? Or was he a victim of being bullied? Was he referred to counseling? Did his parents get involved in his schooling? Or were they silent about his education? Was there any record of attempted communication with his parents about his problem? What was his life like as a high school student? What was his social life like? We know that he finished high school and then went to Virginia Tech. More questions: Was there a family history of communicative disorders? How about his family history? What was his early language history? Did his parents take him to see a medical doctor? Was there a problem in his early development? If there was a problem, did his parents seek help when they noticed the problem? What actions did his parents take to solve this problem?

The following words expressed by Cho revealed so much anger and hatred. They also revealed how he felt about being “crucified” and his feelings of weakness and defenselessness. In his own words:

You just loved to crucify me. You loved inducing cancer in my head, terror in my heart and ripping my soul all the time.

You have vandalized my heart, raped my soul and torched my conscience. You thought it was one pathetic boy’s life you were extinguishing. Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ, to inspire generations of the weak and the defenseless people.

Do you know what it feels like to be spit on your face and have the trash shoved down your throat? (Welch, 2007).

His family could never have envisioned that he was capable of so much violence. Could his family be helped? His sister, Su-Kyung Cho, said, “This is someone that I grew up with and loved. Now I feel like I didn’t know

this person. . . . My brother was quiet and reserved, yet struggled to fit in. . . . We have many unanswered questions as well” (Cho & Gardner, 2007). Could early diagnosis and intervention have helped to prevent this tragedy? This tragedy has confirmed one thing: the need to understand people and their needs and help them when they are going through crisis.

Cultural Reactions to Communicative Disorders

This tragedy provided a base for in-depth discussion on the topic of cultural reactions to communicative disorders by various cultural groups. In the Korean culture, having a child who is not typical might have brought shame to the family. Children are expected to be high achievers and to be obedient and filial. The following questions came to mind:

In the context of the Korean culture, were the parents ashamed of his problem? Were the parents trying to take care his problems? The mother sought the help of a pastor, but did she not seek medical help? Did they move to the United States because they were ashamed of this child? Did they get the help from professionals, including psychologists, speech–language pathologists, or counselors? If not, why did they not seek help? Did they think that he would outgrow his problem? Did they think that by going to the United States, the problem could be resolved? Did tradition have anything to do with their lack of action? Did the cultural imperatives of the Korean culture of feeling shame about a child’s abnormal behaviors interfere with their decision making of seeking professional help? Did they have knowledge or information about emotional or communicative disorders?

As speech–language pathologists, we work with children and adults from all over the world. On occasion, we lack specific information about the cultural, linguistic, and social imperatives of our diverse populations, which makes the early diagnosis of communicative disorders and timely intervention difficult. And we might miss the important signs of a speech–language disorder and thus fail to provide proper assessment and early intervention and relevant family counseling. In the case of Cho, teachers might have thought that his silence was merely the normal pattern of second-language acquisition. In the discussion of making certain we do not mistake normal second-language acquisition for speech–language disorder in bilingual cases, could we have missed the signs of a speech–language disorder?

Reading Signs and Missing Signs

Were there enough signs about Cho to warrant caution? Were his teachers able to read those signs? His college professors read the signs and followed up with the proper referrals, but the counselors did not sense the imminent danger in those signs. As clinicians, we must be alert to the signs and train ourselves to read those signs in the proper context in order to prevent missing dangerous or at-risk signs. In an article titled “Codes and Contexts: Exploring Linguistic, Cultural, and Social Intelligence,” Cheng (2007) discussed the importance of reading the contexts in decoding all messages. Is it possible that we can miss the signs of a deeply rooted communication disorder simply because we do not know how to read the signs and thus miss the opportunity to provide proper intervention? We all communicate by using a variety of codes, and these codes exhibit many properties and are consistently defined by history and culture and governed by rules. As the world is getting flatter through the use of the Internet and the shared and varied codes, more information is needed. In general, codes can be defined through verbal and nonverbal language, paralanguage, and discourse (Cheng, 2007; Cooley, 1983; Gudykunst, 1983). Codes can be formal or informal, and the rules for using codes may change depending on the cultural and social contexts in which the codes are presented. Different generations and cultures use different codes to achieve this goal. The Internet broke the traditional rules and has no borders or boundaries, thus creating a new challenge for defining codes and contexts (Brown, 2003; Cheng, 2004, 2006).

In addition to reading the various codes (signs) and contexts, we also need to be aware of first impressions. What was your first impression of Cho? Erving Goffman (1982) discussed the notion of impression management, and he indicated that impressions are managed within contexts or settings. Furthermore, they are expressed by personal front, which is the “face”: sex, age, clothing, hairstyle, skin color, ethnicity, language, and so on. The concept of face is central to the Asian culture; losing face brings shame to the family. A child with challenges often makes the family lose face or feel ashamed. Goffman also talked about front-stage behaviors, when we interact with others in public or professional settings, and back-stage behaviors, which occur in the home environment where one can be one’s self. So, what was the front stage for Cho, and how about his backstage behavior? These questions are an integral part of our understanding of a person. All of us have certain biases; most of them are learned. Biases must be examined constantly in the clinical management of our cases.

Examining Our Bias

What was our first reaction when we heard that the killer was Asian? Were there some immediate reactions to this piece of news? Were there some biases formed in our minds? More important, why do we have biases? Biases are learned and can be reduced. Our biases may be based on

- geographic region,
- social class,
- appearance (overall dress, manner, etc.),
- race and ethnicity,
- age,
- disability (visible and invisible),
- education,
- gender,
- code switching,
- sexual orientation, or
- place of origin.

To avoid or reduce biases, we need to ask the following questions in multicultural encounters: What is our reaction when we encounter someone with a background different than our own? Where do our biases come from? Where do we learn our biases and from whom? What impressions do we have when we encounter an unfamiliar social and cultural situation? Investigating the social, familial, and personal factors that influence our perception is crucial to our everyday lives and social encounters. To reduce our personal biases, we need to shift our theoretical paradigm from reduction of accent to enhancement of communication. Some fundamental concepts that need to be examined include the process of learning two languages consecutively, the impact of acculturation within the context of the acquisition of a new language, and the many factors that influence school outcome.

As projected by Friedman (2005), the world is getting flatter, which means that we have an urgent need to understand more about peoples and cultures that we do not know. The following is a summary of what Friedman proposed.

The World Is Flat

In his book *The World Is Flat*, Friedman (2005) gave a brief history of the 21st century and discussed 10 forces that flattened the world. He felt that the world is flat because the electronic age makes it easy for nearly anyone from anywhere to access information and to do business. The one flattener that is most related to our profession is *in-forming*, which refers to Google, Yahoo!, and MSN Web searches. Most Google searches are from

North America, Europe, Korea, Japan, and Coastal China. He indicated that it is the remarkable diversity of searches going on via Google, in so many different tongues, that makes the Google search engine such a huge flattener. Never before in the history of the planet have so many people had the ability to find so much information about so many things and about so many other people. Individuals have universal access to information in libraries all over the world (p. 152). Google's idea is that everyone everywhere will be able to carry around access to all the world's knowledge in their pockets. Google processes more than 1 billion searches per day, and the number is growing. Google is now searchable in more than 100 languages, and the company is working on search by voice—Internet searches for people who cannot use the computer. Google is empowering the formation of global communities across all international and cultural boundaries. The Google generation is redefining how to communicate. One typical example of this Google, or geek, generation is Danah Boyd.

Danah Boyd (2006) expressed her opinion about “globalization,” a concept that developed out of the combination of globalization and localization: As concepts and trends go across borders into the global market, they develop based on local adaptation. In the current language of the geek population, the following is an example of what English looks like among many:

“PatTy D aka tHe ScO CitY 415 LiKe wHa!!!”—This message means party in southern California.

“yung ant wassup wit it jus show'n da page sum luv so do da same a where u get dat background bru”—This message means, How are you? Just wanted to show some love and commenting on the receiver, so the sender wants the receiver to do the same.

“suP WIt IT pLAY bOI?”—This message means that the sender wants to know what is going on and is calling the receiver a playboy, but in a good way.

Are we prepared to work with the e-generation and the geek culture?

Boyd uses a blog to communicate with the world about her beliefs.

The e-generation, in general, is more tolerant because its members chat with anyone from anywhere at any time and are exposed to many kinds of discourse and many new concepts and words. For example, the word *ajax* (also known as *AJAX*) does not mean the detergent but is short for “asynchronous Java script and XML,” a Web development technique for creating interactive Web applications. Flickr image viewer is a Java applet that reads two images and compares them visually in a third

window, which is called the flicker window. Twitter, on the other hand, is a kind of social network around short message service or text messages. We have to learn new words and concepts in order to understand the e-generation. The word *apophenia* means making connections where none previously existed. All these words indicate a flatter world with new connections and new lexical items. Many refer to themselves as geeks, and the following explains more about geeks in the e-generation.

A geek is an individual who is fascinated by knowledge and imagination, usually electronic or virtual in nature. *Geek* may not always have the same meaning. The official geek Web site is Geekcode.com, and by visiting it you can identify what kind of geek you are. Geekcode.com provides an assessment of what kind of geek you are based on a whole set of questions.

We have to become Internet anthropologists, finding out what people write and trying to understand what their cultures represent and how they mean what they mean.

Learning From the Geeks

Boyd (2006) expressed her thoughts about success, which helps us to understand this new culture and how people survive and thrive in this culture. Furthermore, her points lead us to a way of life in the new age.

Learning from the geeks leads to the topic of the use of the English language and world of Englishes. The geeks have no national boundaries and share the world of Englishes; they use and create English through the globalization process—meet, learn, exchange, create, enjoy.

English and Englishes

English is the dominant language of the Internet. Across the globe, the language has evolved and undergone such dramatic changes that a wide array of accents and local features exists. To decode the messages, contexts must be provided. A *lift* can be an elevator or a ride. *Bring a plate* could mean bring a plate to share or a plate to put food on. In addition to the social and cultural contexts of messages, accents can also make it difficult to understand. Regional accents develop over a long period of time. In the world of Englishes, speakers of the same language may have difficulty understanding each other, as illustrated in a previous section. Besides differences in articulation, lexical differences also exist. Along with spelling differences, words also purport different meanings, signaled by the context of their usage. Speech-language pathologists not only need to understand linguistic trends but also need to cultivate cultural humility.

To develop more cultural competence, one needs to believe in cultural humility, which is essential for the acquisition of cultural competence. The following story illustrates the need to be humble in order to understand the deeper meaning of culture.

The Niyok Story

Niyok (nee-zuk) means coconut in Chamorro. *Tuba* is a fermented coconut alcoholic drink. *Bonelos niyok* is a coconut donut. In the Chamorro (Micronesian) culture, coconut is very important. According to their legend, once there was a huge typhoon that destroyed the Micronesian islands. People were hungry and thirsty. A baby told her mother, "Please bury me in the sand and I will be able to bring foods to help the people." The mother did not want to bury her baby, but the baby kept pleading, and finally the mother buried the baby in the sandy beach. A few days later, a small tree grew, and it kept growing until it became a huge coconut tree. The coconuts had juice, meat, and oil for the people. The tree also could be used for wood, thatched roofs, skirts, utensils, and many other things. The baby saved the islanders, and when an islander eats a coconut, he should say "forgive me," and he should cut the coconut in a certain way. The coconut has two eyes and a mouth; a hole should be punched through the mouth, never the eyes, and the local tradition is to drink the juice through the mouth.

Because the coconut is so important and there are many stages of development in the life of a coconut, the Chamorros have many words to describe the different types of coconuts and the different stages of the development of the coconut. By learning about the coconut story, we learn the culture as well.

The second example is the Hawaiian *imu* experience. *Imu* is a pit used to prepare traditional Hawaiian foods. The *imu* pit is dug before a luau. After the pit is dug, *imu* rocks and *kiwae* woods are placed in the pit and a fire is lit to make the rocks and wood hot. Then banana leaves are placed on top of the *imu* rocks, and then a salted pig, along with trays of other foods. More banana leaves are placed on top, and then burlap and sand are placed on top to seal the whole pit. People generally gather around the pit, eating pupu, storytelling, playing the ukulele, or simply sleeping. The *kalua* pig is left in the pit to be cooked for about 12 hours, and then the main foods for the luau are served. *Kalua* pig is generally served with poi and *lomi lomi*. *Imu* is central to the Hawaiian tradition; all children experience the *imu* making and have watched adults dig the pit, place the pig, prepare the foods, sing songs, and tell stories. They learn that taro is the symbol of their ancestors and that *imu* rocks have mana

(spirit). They learn about the big waves (the tsunamis) and faith healing. Mana is an impersonal force or quality that resides in people, animals, and inanimate objects and that instills in the appreciative observer a sense of respect or wonder. In anthropological discourse, mana as a generalized concept has attained a significant amount of interest; it is often understood as a precursor to formal religion. It has commonly been interpreted as "the stuff of which magic is formed" as well as the substance of which souls are made. Going through the *imu* experience helps to understand the Hawaiian culture. The best way to develop cultural competence is to be open minded and inquisitive.

Quest for Cultural Competence: Beyond MI, EQ, SQ, and PQ

Howard Gardner (1983) in his book *Frames of Mind* described the notion of multiple intelligence (MI): musical, mathematical–logical, kinesthetic, spatial, linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Later, he added two more dimensions, emotional and natural (see also Gardner 1993). Goleman (1993) introduced the notion of emotional intelligence (EQ), which caught the attention of many. And Karl Albrecht (2006, 2007) in his research on the new science of success mentioned that the human mental process has been the single most fascinating area of study, and he felt that the human software—the gray matter—is our last unexploited capital asset. He took Gardner's MI model and introduced the concept of situational intelligence (SQ) and practical intelligence (PQ). Furthermore, Harvard professors Earley and Mosakowski (2004) brought out the needs to study cultural intelligence (CQ).

With all these ideas, thoughts, and concepts that go far beyond the notion of IQ, we can attempt to create a mental model that might capture and explain the process by which we might be able to upgrade our mental "software" (Albrecht, 2007) and promote the concept of cultural competence. In the analysis of Cho's case, it became clear that CQ played an important role. Understanding his family's reaction to his "speech" disorder and "autistic-like behavior" and finding ways to provide early intervention might have prevented this tragedy. Life-long learning is part and parcel of a developmental model for building key competencies that will lead to cultural competence. Finally, cultural humility will facilitate this life-long learning process for the quest of cultural competence.

As Aristotle said, "Excellence is a habit, not an act." Excellence in clinical work requires dedication and passion for the quest for deeper understanding about cultural competence.

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Li-Rong Lilly Cheng is a professor in the School of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences at San Diego State University. Her research focus on cross-cultural communication, cultural intelligence, and bilingualism.

Erratum

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