Cultural Identity and Intercultural Communication: An Interdisciplinary Research Approach

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Macau’s unique cultural identity as a Special Administrative Region of China has been attributed to its historical blending of East and West and the confluence of the diverse origins of its people. According to definitions from the Bank of English, blending includes: “mixing and mingling”; “to look good together, harmonize”; “a mixture produced by blending.” In terms of the blending of people and cultures, it might be argued that the definition should include the manifestation of effective discourse and intercultural communication. In terms of miscegenation a definition should include the mixing and mingling of different races, languages, customs, and traditions. To apply these definitions to the context of Macau implies that there is evidence that blending has occurred and its particular forms of discourse and intercultural communication continue to define its uniqueness. The research on which this paper is based provides evidence that blending has indeed occurred, but the authors argue that more interdisciplinary research is needed to examine cultural changes which are occurring in the Asia region and identify the role that the study of discourse and intercultural communication might play in the preservation and perpetuation of Macau’s unique cultural identity. In this paper, the importance of English as a research tool is acknowledged with reference to the literature on intercultural communication. The authors however emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach to research on cultural change, ethnicity, migration, and second language acquisition, influencing discourse and intercultural communication.

Introduction

This paper represents a research initiative undertaken from an intercultural as well as interdisciplinary perspective. The authors, who can trace their own origins to the mixing and mingling of races, share a mutual interest in contributing to the disciplines of English discourse analysis and intercultural communication by applying knowledge acquired through their respective disciplines of linguistics and cultural tourism. The second author, whose native language is English, is constrained by the most important variable for empirical as well as theoretical research: having the linguistic tools necessary for elucidating the complex relationship between language and cultural identity in the unique cultural heritage environment of Macau. Although English as a functional language is recognized as being important to the future development of Macau, its function as a tool for research on the changes affecting the cultural identity of the former Portuguese administered territory of China, the authors argue, is dependent on understanding the linguistic legacy of the Portuguese minority and its experience of four hundred years of intercultural communication with the Chinese majority.
Before the ascendancy of English as a global language, set in motion by the expansion of the British Empire, the Portuguese language was the lingua franca during the Portuguese voyages of exploration. It also became in every sense, a part of the Portuguese colonial power that extended from Europe, to Africa, then Asia and finally to South America (Holm, 2000:71). In the course of building an overseas empire, the dissemination of the Portuguese language gave rise to many varieties that evolved particularly from trading through direct contact with the indigenous people.

The trading and shipment of the slaves along the Guinea Coast was the prime impetus for a pidgin version of Portuguese to develop (Holm, 2000:72). There were many varieties of pidgin Portuguese derived from the feitorias; especially along the African coast. By the mid-fifteenth century, the Portuguese were known to have transported slaves to the Cape Verde Islands to work in agricultural and livestock production (Holm, 1989:261). As there were very few Portuguese women living in those outposts, the Portuguese men began taking the indigenous slave women as their wives (Marques, 1976:240). These men might have learned the language of the locals, but it is assumed that they must have used a very simplified form of Portuguese to communicate with their African wives (Holm, 1989:270). This was probably the initial creolization process of the Portuguese language.

These brief insights provide a foundation for interdisciplinary studies of cultural change, ethnicity, diaspora, migration, and second language acquisition. There is perhaps no better environment to engage in research on these factors which continue to affect the process of intercultural communication in the contemporary world, than amid the unique cultural heritage of Macau.

**Macau’s Unique Cultural Identity: Mixing, Mingling, and Blending**

The early Portuguese settlers of Macau of the sixteenth century consisted mainly of a small group of male sojourners known as ‘Reinois’ who comprised individuals with military status (Governadores and Ouvidores), civilians, representatives of the church, and many others loyal to the Portuguese Crown (Amaro, 1997:34). There was, however, a larger group of mixed race ‘mestiços’ and slaves from many other ethnic origins, who were brought aboard the ‘nau’ (Souza 1986:14). Most sojourners were male because at that time it was unheard of for female Portuguese nationals to travel long distances (Lessa 1994:97) on perilous voyages sharing the vicissitudes faced by the early settlers.

The Chinese indigenous population of Macau and transients from outside the territory consisted of several different classes. Of the predominant class, many were wealthy traders. Another group of Chinese who came into contact with the Portuguese were the farmers from Heungshan. Of contemporary cultural significance, from a culinary perspective, mixing, mingling, and blending occurred when the Portuguese settlers, who did not eat rice or appreciate the typical vegetables from southern China, decided to grow their own varieties. The farmers from Heungshan, becoming familiar with the ‘new’ vegetables that the western pioneers had introduced to them (Braga 1949: 135), also began to grow these crops: thereby making a contribution to the unique cuisine of Macau.

The early Portuguese settlers, brought together by circumstances, inevitably began to intermarry. Reinois who got married became known as ‘casados’ while others, who
remained single, were ‘solteiros’. This group enjoyed a high status within the social hierarchy. They had slaves in their homes to perform domestic tasks. The Reinois often lived in a specially designated area where they constructed their dwellings, warehouses and churches, or near the major political or financial zones. If however, they chose to live outside the boundaries of the community, they were then classified as ‘lançados’. Even though the Crown authorities opposed the idea, controlling these groups wasn’t at all easy. The Chinese, however, lived separately in their own villages or settlements outside the main Portuguese communities (Braga 1949:139).

The women living in Macau were mostly Chinese. However, during the initial stages of settlement in Macau, many of the women with whom the Portuguese lived were slaves from Malacca, Indonesia, India, Africa, and courtesans from Japan (Souza 1986:32). A Jesuit priest, Father Alonso Sánchez S.J. (1582-85), noted that the Portuguese actually had a preference for Chinese brides simply because of their many virtues. He describes the women as being:

an extraordinary caste, serious, modest, very faithful, humble and submissive to their husbands. They are more graceful and possess more beauty and discretion than the wealthy and noble women of Spain.

(Teixeira, 1994:152)

Juan Baptista Roman (Factor of Manila) also confirmed the Portuguese had wives of Chinese origin (Lessa 1994:101). As the Reinois began to intermarry with the Chinese women (newly converted Christians), some would also be taken either as concubines or even as ‘young-intimate servants’ called mui-tsai. Souza described the preferred wife for the Reinois as those with substantial dowries. For those Reinois who could not find a wife, it was presumed they would form illicit sexual relations with their female slaves and servants.

By about 1621, the population of Macau can be described as being a diverse racial society. Among the population there were around seven or eight hundred Reinios and Mestiços and some ten thousand Chinese. Most were traders or merchants, not soldiers (Lessa 1996:103).

Research on the demographics of the territory which includes data on other racial groups however is difficult to find. It is known that among the crews on the Portuguese ships bound for Goa, Malacca, and Macau were sailors from other European countries and some of Arabian origin. Missionaries and their entourages represented difference races as well as religions. Others engaged in trade in Asia converged on Macau for the economic opportunities offered by the enclave; transients from the British, Dutch, Spanish, and French expeditions seeking to establish their own settlements in the Region. The port cities of Asia, as well as those along the trading routes via the Indian Ocean – Zanzibar, Madagascar, Mauritius, Ceylon, could be characterized as the epitome of mixing, mingling, and blending. While a variety of languages could be heard in these ports, Portuguese, and later English, grew to be the main channel for intercultural communication. Discourse inevitably would have centred around maritime activities: the exchange of information on seafaring, navigation, cartography, commerce, and of crucial importance: the availability of reliable translators and interpreters. Unfortunately, little is known about the latter, although it is axiomatic that missionaries had a significant role to play in developing the parameters of discourse and intercultural communication.
Miscegenation in Macau: The Macanese

The term, Macanese, or ‘Filhos da Terra’ (the sons of the land) is not easy to define. An acceptable assumption is that its origin was a result of the Portuguese establishment in Macau during the sixteenth century: a group of ‘mixed-blooded’ Eurasians, who were born in Macau from the miscegenation of Portuguese men with women of different ethnic origins. They are also known, or referred to in Cantonese as ‘Tou Saang Pou Yan’ - literally ‘Portuguese Born of the land’.

Many scholars have offered diverse interpretations of the Macanese. Father Henri Bernard affirmed that around 1565, the Portuguese in Macau had wives of many different ethnic origins, especially those who came from India. However, he concludes that the ‘Macaísta’ or Macanese race derived from marriages with the Chinese (Teixeira 1994:153). Bento da França (1897) described the Macaense as having mongoloid features while also including European, Malay, and Indian features. They are therefore a unique mix of different races (Amaro 1988:4). Álvaro de Mello Machado (1913) suggested that the Macanese were the offspring of marriages with women from Japan, Malacca and more recently, China. Francisco de Carvalho e Rego (1950) defined the Macanese as an individual born in Macau of Portuguese parentage. Eduardo Brazão (1957) argued that it was rare for the Macanese to be of Indian descendants. Characteristically, they show greater evidence of Malay ancestry, in fact, more than Chinese traits. Carlos Estorinho (1962) negates any ideas of miscegenation of the first generation of Macanese with the Chinese. He suggested that it might not have happened during the first three centuries. Father Manuel Teixeira (1965), holding similar opinions to many other writers on the basis of having consulted parish archives and records, refutes Estorinho’s argument. Instead, Father Teixeira’s definition clearly outlines the Macaense as the offspring (born in Macau) of the Portuguese men and their interracial marriages. Teixeira makes a clear distinction between the Macanese and the Chinese. The former was born already with a Portuguese name and baptized. The latter, however, had to be converted to Christianity, taught to speak the language of the Portuguese. They also had to cut off their long plaits and assume their new western ‘adopted’ identities. Thus they were known as ‘Chon-kau’, (tcheng-Cau) or ‘raban’ (rabão). Cabral (2002:39-40) emphasized several important aspects in his criteria of defining the Macanese Eurasian: Firstly, individuals born in Macau of a biological miscegenation with Portuguese roots; secondly, the conversion to the Catholic faith; and finally, the possession of linguistic knowledge of Portuguese or the Portuguese-based Creole evolved from an earlier Malaccan model. Individuals who fit the criteria could be defined as Macanese. The first generation-born Macanese Eurasian may have been Luso-Chinese Christians of either Euro-Indian and/or Euro-Malay origin (Morbey, 1994:200).

The Macanese Eurasians are characteristically noted for their Caucasian features, especially with the older generation (Yee, 2001:131). Amaro offered her insights in this quotation as follows:

Basta, nos nossos dias, olhar para um Pacheco, um Basto, um Senna, um Garcia, um Nolasco, um Melo, um Estorinho, por exemplo, para se pensar numa ascendência euro-asiática mas não chinesa, pelo menos próxima. Os seus caracteres antropobiológicos são muitos diferentes: ausência de
acentuada dolicocefalia, indices torácicos médios, estatura mediana a elevada, cor da pele dourada, por vezes acobreada, narizes. Alentos, olhos muitas vezes sem prega mongólica e, não raras vezes, azuis ou pretos.

Only look, during our time, at a Pacheco, Basto, Senna, Garcia, Nolasco, Melo, Estorinho, for example, when one thinks about the ancestry of the Eurasian, not Chinese, but it was close enough. The anthropological features were very different: especially the more noticeable absence of the dolichocephalic characteristics; medium thoracic cavity; medium height; fair-skin; straight noses, eyes usually without the Mongolian fold, and not rarely, blue or black. (Amaro, 1988:48)

The characteristics exemplified are evidence of traits from Burma, Malay, and Timor (Amaro, 1988:48). Amaro also noticed similar characteristics in the Portuguese-Eurasian descendants of the Portuguese Settlements in Malacca. Curiously, there were rather similar findings when compared to the Macanese. The noticeable difference however, was the colour of their skin, which seemed darker. This may be due to a weakened European bloodline.

However, it is noted that the younger generation of Eurasians clearly possesses more obvious Mongoloid phenotypic characteristics (Yee, 2001:131). This may be due to several reasons. Firstly, the Portuguese population in Macau diminished drastically following the withdrawal of the Portuguese Military battalion in 1975. The Portuguese who arrived during the 1980’s, were usually high government officials and bureaucrats. They probably came accompanied by their spouses, or married within their own ethnic group (Yee, 2001:134). Secondly, intra-Macanese marriages among the Eurasian community had also decreased (Yee, 2001:136). Therefore many Eurasians sought spouses of various Asian ethnic backgrounds. Finally, there was an increase in the number of intermarriages with the local Chinese, otherwise referred to in Cantonese as ‘boon dei yan’ or ‘O Moon yan’(Cabral, 2002:45).

It is not easy to research the Macanese identity in Macau today. The Department of Census and Statistics have not even made the information on their numbers available to the public. The census recorded in 2001 estimated the number of Eurasians living in Macau to be in the region of approximately four thousand three hundred (DSEC, 2001:133).

Similarly, it is difficult to find data on other ethnic or mixed race groups who comprise the Macau cultural identity. Although they are in the minority, their contribution to Macau society, its culture, and economy should not be underestimated by the majority of the population, nor overlooked by scholars seeking to correct misconceptions concerning their unique sociocultural influences during four hundred years of settlement. Unfortunately there is a lack of an interdisciplinary perspective on the significance of the origins of the community that constitutes Macau today, and a lack of initiative for making information accessible to the international research community. The linguistic heritage of Macau is a fascinating research area for scholars from diverse fields of inquiry: including the relatively new disciplines of discourse analysis and intercultural communication, in the context of language development and language demise.
The Changing Cultural Identity of Macau

At the turn of the twentieth century, educating the citizens of the territory governed by the Portuguese administration, and improving the qualifications of public officials in Macau, became an imperative for the Government. The key to progress was identified as learning the Portuguese language. The number of Portuguese language schools began to increase and the knowledge of standard Portuguese was promoted. As a result, Lingu Maquista, which was predominately spoken in the domestic domain, had started becoming increasingly decreolized. This led to a diglossic model in which standard Portuguese was the ‘High’ variant with an amplified social prestige: spoken in the appropriate contexts of the workplace, school and also with the Portuguese. Maquista, on the other hand, was the ‘Low’ variant spoken among family members and friends during informal social interactions.

When the war in the Pacific broke out during 1941 to 1945, many Eurasians of the Macanese communities from Hong Kong and Shanghai came to Macau as refugees. Since English was the official language for the governing and administration in Hong Kong, education in Hong Kong was conducted in both English and standard Chinese. Orally, the system was dominated by the Cantonese dialect, therefore, the decreolization process was even more noticeable, especially among the speakers of the younger generation because they were suddenly exposed to the teaching of standard Portuguese by the Jesuit Priests in the various refugee camps in Macau. (Batalha, 1985: 294).

After the war, as the refugees returned to their respective places of origin, the older generation of the Macanese communities in Shanghai continued speaking the creole. However, after the revolution of 1949, there was an exodus of Chinese immigrants entering Macau. They spoke only Cantonese or probably the standard form of Chinese: Mandarin. Some of the Eurasians from the Macanese communities in Shanghai who returned to Macau spoke a post-creole variety of Portuguese that embedded lexical and morphosyntactic elements of English and Chinese (Holm, 1989: 298). Batalha noticed the level of competence in standard Portuguese was declining:

…the grammatical structure is chaotic; and there is great difficulty with verb conjugations… subject-verb agreement, noun phrase concord, and the use of articles, conjunctions and prepositions. (Batalha: 1985:290)

The decreolization of Maquista was slowly ‘remodeled’ to bring it parallel to standard Portuguese. Children were punished if they were caught using the creole in the educational domains (Tomás, 1990:62).

Today, Maquista can be described as nearly extinct. The causes seemed to fit Aitchison’s (1981:208-222) definition of linguistic suicide:

The language concerned seems to commit suicide. It slowly demolishes itself by bringing in more and more forms from the prestige language, until it destroys its own identity.

The Macanese creole may only continue if there is a large number of speakers in the community. This was the case in the offshoot community in Hong Kong where the absence of the corrective influence of standard Portuguese allowed the creole to survive.
even until today. It is spoken by a very small number of Macanese Eurasians who can be found in homes for the aged. Although there are no records regarding the number creole speakers in Macau, traces of the creole can still be found in different contexts: Macanese Folklore, Music, Poems and Culinary Recipes and other Religious and Traditional Macanese settings.

Today, in terms of language shift and codes, there may no longer be a Portuguese-speaking environment among the younger generation Macanese Eurasians. Many Macanese teenagers are probably more competent users of Cantonese and may feel reluctant to converse in Portuguese (Yee 2001:137). They may also demonstrate a strong inclination to use Mandarin and English. Marreiros (1994:167) even hinted that they may even have a simplified linguistic code within their social-communicative network. This code may contain a ‘reduced’ grammatical fusion of Portuguese and Cantonese, elements. For example:

“Eu vái kai-si comprâ-sông.”
“Amanhã nos vái Héong Kóng tai Frank Sinatra Show.”
(cf. Marreiros, 1994:167)

The example shows a variety of Macau Portuguese embedded in a reduced code, possibly influenced by a post-creole variety among the Eurasian speakers, but of a different age-group. It is also evidence of a linguistic shift to Cantonese (Baxter, 1996:325).

After the sovereignty of Macau was officially returned to the Chinese Government on the 20th of December, 1999, further changes began to occur to the cultural identity of Macau and the composition of languages, and their varieties, that have complicated the nature of discourse and the process of intercultural communication within the territory. In 2001, the Macau Statistics and Census department revealed that 95% of the population residing in the Macao SAR was of Chinese nationality. The remaining 5% however was made up of various other ethnic groups (See Figure 1 below). There are no statistics for the exact number of other Asian ethnic minority groups such as the Indians and Pakistanis, Malays, Myanmar nationals, Indonesians, Japanese and Koreans. In the 2001 Census, these may have been grouped under ‘Others’.

While standard Chinese and Portuguese are the designated official languages of the SAR government, 97% of the population speaks the local ‘dialect’ Cantonese during social interaction. Portuguese, despite its former prestigious status, is only spoken by 0.6% of the population. English is widely taught in all the local schools and has become the language of preference when socially interacting with foreigners.

Statistics do not reveal changes to Macau’s cultural environment with the influx of Chinese nationals from other provinces and immigrant workers employed in mass tourism development transforming the territory into the ‘Las Vegas of Asia’, following the Handover of the Portuguese administration to the Government of the Macau Special Administrative Region of China. These changes have affected not only the demographic profile of the territory, but the cultural landscape as well as cultural composition of the community which plays host to a dramatically different visitor market. Many visitors, as
was the case in the historical development of Macau, will become the future residents of the territory and exert an influence on the cultural environment.

**Implications for Research on Discourse and Intercultural Communication**

The authors of this paper acknowledge that academic research on language development and language demise is contingent on the use of English as a research tool for the complex but rich research field that comprises the cultural identity of Macau. The field of inquiry however should include studies of factors such as migration, immigration, returnees, and the impact of dominant languages on cultures – especially minority cultures. Although English is the primary medium for discourse among the academic community, with a range of publications representing its various disciplines, the growing importance of languages such as Chinese and Arabic for intercultural communication in the ‘non-English-speaking world’ must not be overlooked.

Academic discourse in most disciplines today is characterized by its focus on communicating theory and practice through applied research. The explosion of information technology encourages centres of learning and individuals to share knowledge and skills facilitating intercultural communication at unprecedented levels. Access to research data and opportunities for the discussion of research findings enables academics and professionals to translate theories into practice in disparate economic, political, and cultural environments.
In the field of translation studies for example, researchers can communicate their findings through the Internet using portals such as TranslationDirectory.com. This portal also identifies through its client-base, issues which are of relevance to professional practitioners as well as academics. The following extract from an article on Intrtranews featuring an interview with the online magazine ‘Words Without Borders’ on publishing translations of literature online for free access is quoted below. The spokesperson for Words Without Borders is Alane Salierno Mason, a senior editor at W.W. Norton & Company, with over sixteen years’ experience in high-quality book publishing. Ms Mason has translated from the Italian for New Directions Publishing Corporation.

In a world rife with ignorance and incomprehension of other cultures, literature in translation has an especially important role, hence the value of Words Without Borders. Its purpose is to promote international communication through translation of the world's best writing – selected and translated by a distinguished group of writers, translators, and publishing professionals – and publishing and promoting these works (or excerpts) on the Web. So how does WWB see the future of literary translation, faced with initiatives like Google Print, and growing illiteracy rates?

Intranews: As the ‘major’ languages spread their influence, and with the growth in translation technology, is human translation going to become less important in the future?

WWB: No, certainly not in our area, which is literary translation. I don't believe that computers can translate any better than they can write. Voice, style, passion, originality -- the essential elements of literary writing and literary translation - those are human qualities.

Intranews: In Europe, with 25 official languages, publishers often receive state subsidies for translating works into other languages. Should governments do more in favour of translation, or should the initiative be left to independent publishers?

WWB: Of course governments should do more! Translation is a national and international good, with enormous cultural and thus economic benefit. Or, as Borges put it, "Translation is a more advanced stage of civilization." Certainly this is worth state support.

Intranews: It is estimated that at the present rate, half of the world's existing 6,000 languages will have disappeared by the end of the 21st century. Can and should anything be done to slow that down?

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1 http://intrtranews.intra.net/cgi-bin/index.cgi
2 http://www.wordswithoutborders.org
3 http://www.ndpublishing.com/
**WWB:** Our hope is that if writers have a better chance of being translated from a threatened original language, if they can expect to be read or heard both in the richness of the original and in the different richness of a translation, they are less likely to abandon their original language for the sake of a wider audience. Other incentives for keeping languages alive are political/social matters for the peoples themselves to decide.

**Intranews:** As publishers of translations, what are your opinions and strategy about current web policy to make all content free?

**WWB:** Since we are donor-supported, there is a strong sense that like National Public Radio, our content should be free and available to anyone interested in tuning in.

It is not only in the field of literary translation that writers need to have more support to enable them to reach a wider audience. In the case of Macau there have been many studies of the unique culture and heritage of the city published locally, but not internationally, because of the lack of translation and the type of scholarly interpretation that results from interdisciplinary endeavour. Understandably cultural interpretation of Macau’s heritage has been left to social scientists, but further research is needed on the impact of urban development and tourism development on the built heritage of Macau conducted by academics and professionals from disciplines such as civil engineering, environmental science, and real estate management. An interdisciplinary approach would facilitate and ensure that the wide range of issues affecting the management of Macau’s cultural heritage is given the attention they require.

The disciplines of linguistics and discourse studies have benefited from an interdisciplinary approach and continue to identify key concepts that have implications for research in other fields.

Bhatia (1993) for example, drawing extensively on empirical research and theoretical work in linguistics, pragmatics and psychology, has identified the theory of genre analysis as being important to answering questions such as: ‘Why is a particular genre written and used in the way it is?’ He has examined cross-cultural variation in many academic and professional settings, using examples from a wide range of non-native contexts. Although genre analysis has a long-established tradition in literature, the interest in the analysis of non-literary genres has been very recent.

According to Fairclough (2003), students and researchers in the social sciences, as well as language specialists, often discover that they cannot get as much from texts, conversations or research interviews as they would like because they are unsure exactly how to analyze these language materials. Drawing on a range of social theorists from Bourdieu to Habermas, as well as his own past research, Fairclough has devised a form of language analysis with a consistently social perspective. His interdisciplinary approach is illustrated by and investigated through a range of real texts, from political speeches and TV news reports to management consultancy reports and texts concerning globalization.

More research is needed on discourse and text analysis in the Macau academic environment since the choice of texts too often reflects culturally influenced, arguably culturally-biased, approaches to teaching and learning through the discourse used in
subjects such as economics, law, and second language acquisition. References should be made to studies by Ken Hyland and Christopher N. Candlin (2004) at the Centre for English Language Education and Communication Research in the Department of English at City University Hong Kong. They conducted research through a series of innovative studies focusing on eight disciplines and a variety of genres which identify the relationships between the cultures of academic communities and their discoursal practices. The researchers reveal, through close textual analysis based on theoretical and descriptive accounts, the social practices and institutional ideologies of different academic communities, how academics use language to organize their professional lives, how they carry out intellectual tasks and reach agreement on what will count as knowledge.

The academic community in Macau of course consists of not only culturally diverse teachers and researchers, but their students; many of whom also come from a wide range of social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. An interdisciplinary approach to studies of cultural identity and intercultural communication should include the identification and analysis of those factors which impinge on students’ capacity for getting the best out of their academic environment. Young people embarking on studies encompassing a variety of disciplines not only need tutorials and counselling in their encounters with the academic environment, but support and encouragement from their peers whom they will encounter and interact with in an increasingly intercultural environment.

Students from Macau have an advantage over many who come from outside the Pearl River Delta region. They are the inheritors of a legacy of intercultural communication dating back more than four centuries. Their culture is distinct from those of their peers who, on coming to Macau, lack the knowledge and skills essential for optimizing social, cultural as well as academic opportunities. However, those who come from similar cross-cultural communication environments will quickly find an affinity with Macau students.

An edited book on students’ experiences of cultures different from their own, by Byram and Feng (2006), contains data from researchers who have analyzed students’ experiences of studying and living abroad. In one chapter, Christine Burnett and John Gardner (2006:64) cite findings from research on Chinese students in the UK and Canada. Their own research focused on a group of students from Shenzhen University taking courses at Queen’s University, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Their findings illustrate the impact of entering a new culture that had so many new situations to understand and to which they had to respond. All the students had high expectations of their sojourn and were highly motivated to adapt successfully to the new culture. In the first stage of their cultural experience, the ‘Encounter’, the following observation was noted:

For many, like our students, the Encounter may be experienced as exciting, particularly since sojourners, being by definition voluntary migrants, tend to be highly motivated to enter a new culture. However, for those with limited experience of cultural differences, the Encounter will tend to be interpreted solely through their own cultural perspective, and may therefore be unhappy, confused and even, in the worst case, frightening. (Burnett and Gardner, 2006:85)
Dion and Dion (1996), in their study of Chinese students in Canada, point out that sojourning students must often adapt, not only to the usual demands of student life, but to a culture with different, if not opposing, values and customs to their home culture. The transition to a new culture is generally accompanied by what Oberg (1960) described as ‘culture shock’. Culture shock often results in feelings of anxiety, helplessness, loneliness, frustration and hostility to the host country. For some it takes only a short period of time to overcome the psychological distress while for others, it may be longer lasting and debilitating (Chen and Starosta, 1998).

Conclusions

This paper illustrates the importance of research on discourse and intercultural communication in cultural environments characterized by their uniqueness and difference. An interdisciplinary research approach has implications not only for the study of discourse and intercultural communication in the multidisciplinary academic context of university education, but for the social and cultural environments of centres of higher learning.

In the first part of the paper, an analysis of the historical and sociolinguistic factors that led to the formation of Macau’s unique cultural identity is provided. It should be mentioned in conclusion, that Macau was historically the first, and only centre in Asia for interdisciplinary study in a Luso-Chinese cultural environment. The impact of European philosophy, science, and culture is evident to this day.

The authors of this paper advocate the continuation of this interdisciplinary, intercultural legacy, focusing on discourse and communication studies that will facilitate the creation of a knowledge-based society in Macau. Lessons learned from four hundred years of cultural encounter, interaction, dispute and compromise, are valuable assets for the achievement of this objective.

This paper was written in English, the language of preference for many of those involved in research on language, discourse, and intercultural communication. In the case of Macau however, the authors hope that the local academic community will continue to play host to the international academic community using not only the culturally dominant languages of English, Chinese, and Arabic, but also strive to become a centre for the sustainability of minority languages and cultures.

References


*www.wordswithoutborders.org*