Demarcative Analysis of Cultures as an Approach to Intercultural Communication

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In Japan, the bathing area and the toilet are always in separate rooms (except in some Western-style hotels or apartments); the American euphemism "bathroom," meaning toilet, is thus very confusing to Japanese who take care to distinguish the two as the clean place and the dirty place.[1]

Hell is the meeting place of opposites, for while The World is relatively ordered so that opposites are kept apart, Hell is chaos, so they come together.[2]

It is well known that persons and members of various cultures categorize experience in different ways; this is the essential cultural difference. Variations in how the continuum of the enviroment is distinguished into separate things may contribute to the difficulties of intercultural communication,....[3]

Introduction

This is an attempt to contrast and analyze the differences among cultures in segmenting or demarcating the amorphous continuum of

our total environment, and it also aims at predicting and potentially controlling the outcomes of our intercultural encounters which have become one of the most exigent factors of our survival in harmony with our fellows in the global village.

The assumption underlying this attempt is that each culture has its own particular way of demarcating the continuum of reality, and that some of the segments in one culture might coincide perfectly with those of another culture, but others might not be necessarily identical with their counterparts, or they might be totally absent from another culture.

Let us now suppose that there are two persons who have different cultural backgrounds, say, a Japanese and an American, and that they have a means of verbal communication in common with each other, English in this instance. Thanks to the commonly understood language, it would be possible for them to get their messages across to each other. The Japanese, for example, could say in perfect English, "The traffic light is *blue*," meaning that the traffic light was *green*. In stead of green he uses the term "blue" because it is the way the Japanese people usually describe the color for "go" on the traffic signal. The color "blue" has much larger ranges of applicability in Japanese than in English and it often includes in it its neighbor on the spectrum, "green."

As is evident from what has been described, demarcative frameworks vary from culture to culture although there can exist incidental correspondence among various cultures. This very fact accounts for the better part of difficulty distressing the two communicators across the cultural boundaries, and what makes it more difficult is that those demarcative differences are not always so explicitly disclosed as the first quotation at the outset of this paper. They are frequently so implicitly and subtly embedded in their cultural frameworks that they are very likely to pass unnoticed unless the two communicators share the same or similar demarcative

structure.

Such being the case, what should be done to avoid communication breakdowns or difficulty arising from these inconspicuous differences? As one of the possible answers to this question, it is here proposed that prospective communicators across cultures be trained to be aware of and sensitive to those differences, making use of the findings of contrastive studies of demarcative structures of the cultures in question. By so doing, communicators will be able to realize the reason for their partners' puzzling or incomprehensible behavior or attitude, and they will also be able to predict with considerable accuracy the reactions that their partners will make to a particular matter. By virtue of the knowledge and training thus acquired, it will become feasible for them to direct their future intercultural communication to a desirable goal.

Theoretical Scheme of Demarcative Analyses

The concepts presented herein, relating to demarcative structures do not necessarily originate with this author : Some of them are well known and established facts in the fields of anthropology, psychology, sociology, speech communication, and linguistics.

Linguists have long aware of the differences in demarcation of human languages, which manifest themselves most strikingly in their vocabularies, and they have been giving warning against danger in thinking in their own language when examining other languages.

An American linguist, Benjamin Whorf, argues as follows :

> A category such as number (singular vs. plural) is an attempted interpretation of a whole large order of experience, virtually of the world or of nature ; it attempts to say how experience is to be segmented, what experience is to be called "one" and what "several.".... Certain things

that were plural in these languages were singular in Hopi.[4]

He also insists that for a true understanding of another language it is essential to stand aside from our own languages, pushing ourselves willy-nilly out of the ruts of our routine thinking, and to take a direct approach to a language under examination through the use of its own viewpoint and frame of reference. Otherwise we would end up doing the same thing to foreign languages as we had already done to nature.[5]

Another linguist of Denmark, Louis Hjelmslev, asserts:

> Each language lays down its own boundaries within the amorphous "thought-mass" and stresses different factors in it in different arrangements, puts the centers of gravity in different places, and gives them different emphases. It is like one and the same handful of sand that is formed in quite different patterns, or like the cloud in the heavens that changes shape in Hamlet's view from minute to minute.[6]

By way of illustrating his assertion, he takes up the color spectrum on which each language arbitrarily sets its boundaries. The paradigms in various languages of the designations of color disclose a wide variety of demarcative differences in compartmentalization of the gradually merging continuum of the spectrum. The incongruence in this respect is diagrammatically presented in the schematic confrontation of the English segmentation of the spectrum with that of the Welsh language (Figure 1).
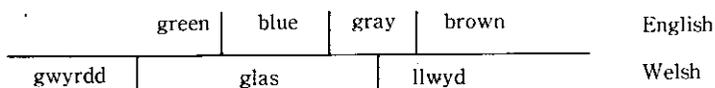
	green	blue	gray	brown	English
gwyrdd		glas		llwyd	Welsh

Figure 1   The schematic confrontation of English and Welsh[7]

As is easily understood from the diagram, none of the color compartments of English correspond perfectly with those of Welsh : *Glas* in Welsh covers the whole area of "blue" and parts of "green" and "gray," and *gwyrdd* is part of "green," and *llwyd* extends over "brown" and part of "gray," With such wide incongruence among languages, we are tempted to conclude that because of a great gulf fixed between them, it would be next to impossible to successfully communicate across cultural boundaries. Before drawing any conclusion from the evidence thus far presented, there is an important notion we can not afford to overlook.

An American cultural anthropologist, Edward Hall, has proposed a theory asserting that culture has three levels : the technical level, the formal level, and the informal level.[8] The following examples in terms of time will suffice here in illustration of the three levels. "Technical : 'Resolving time is 1 μsec' ; Formal : 'We always start services promptly at 11'; Informal : 'I'll see you later.' "[9] He classifies Whorf's description of linguistic events as the one based upon "formal" differences between languages.[10] Hjelmslev's contrastive study of English and Welsh in terms of the color spectrum is also nothing but "formal." Laying aside the technical level for natural scientists, due consideration must be given to the informal level of culture when examining intercultural communication in action. That is to say, the great gulf mentioned earlier is not necessarily as rigidly manifested in reality as is claimed by them, which will, in effect, contribute to alleviating hardship in communicating across cultures.

On the other hand, however, such a vaguely defined term as "later" may well beget another sort of difficulty : how to interpret it. A good example of this sort of vagueness or ambiguity will be a Spanish expression, *mañana*. It literally means "tomorrow" in English, but it is also used to imply some unspecified future time in Spanish speaking culture.

At any rate, "a linguistic model was an excellent one for the anlysis of culture ; .... and all cultural events could be analyzed with *the methods of linguistics.*"[11] To follow suit the model will be further utilized for analyses yet to be conducted hereinafter.   But let us, for a moment, make a slight digression from the linguistic model proper and attempt an extrapolation of it into the other facets of culture, for "mankind is separated less by language barriers (grievous though they are) than it is by cultural differences."[12]

William Howell, a speech communication scholar, points out that meeting expectations (behaving appropriately) is a crucial dimension of the problem of intercultural communication in parallel with coping with the language barrier.[13]   He maintains :

> Degrees of eye contact, conversational distance, loudness of voice all have rather distinct and differing ranges of appropriateness. Violation of these rigid yet out-of-aware-ness norms contributes to rejection and results in the visitor's being categorized as an ignorant foreigner.   Fine distinctions carry much meaning. Apparently the "A-OK" American gesture is acceptable in the Middle East with much the same meaning as in the United States— *providing* the circle is made with the thumb and index finger.   If that gesture is formed by the thumb and middle finger, something an American might well do occasionally, the meaning becomes pornographic.[14]

As is stated in the above, it is of great significance that each culture is possessed of its own "ranges" of appropriateness, and that by contrast with different cultures, what is only a variant without any semantic difference in one culture may turn out to carry an incon-ceivably dissimilar meaning in another, no matter how fine its variation may be from the standard.   In the case of the above-

mentioned example, it does not make much difference to Americans whether a circle is formed with the index finger or the middle finger, together with the thumb. But to Middle Easterners it does make a mentionable and *unmentionable* difference. It is again in the demarcative differences between two cultures that lies the reason why a meaningful difference in one culture is meaningless in another : Middle Eastern culture draws a dividing line between the two circles, by which they stand in contrast, but American culture does not recognize them as two distinctive signals but considers one of them as a mere variant in spite of its apparent difference in composition.

As regards these ranges and distinctions, a linguistic model proves again to be an extremely useful tool for clarification of demarcative structures in nonverbal behavior. To compare these sorts of nonverbal behavior to human speech sounds, the two circles would be equivalent to *allophones* in American culture which were variants of one and the same *phoneme*, but in the Middle Eastern culture, those two circles would represent two discrete phonemes which were not variants but two independent sounds.

For better conceptualization, let us take the sound P in English, for example. The phoneme $/P/$ can be represented at least by two distinct allophones : an unaspirated $[P]$ and an aspirated $[P']$, but most of us are not aware of the actual vatiations of this sound. Charles Hockett, a linguist and anthropologist, explains the reason as follows :

> ....throughout our experience with English, from earliest childhood, we have been trained to ignore certain variations in pronuciation, and to pay attention only to key differences. Accordingly, it is difficult to demonstrate to a speaker of English that his pronunciation of an element like *p* does vary quite widely. But it is easy enough to demonstrate comparable irrelevant ranges of distinction

in other languages.[15]

The Menomini Indians do not distinguish p from b, he reports, and these two sounds are interchangeably used in their speech with no confusion whatsoever. Therefore it is quite natural that those people fail to appreciate the difference in them. The two sounds (to English-speaking people) belong together and are acknowledged as allophones of the same phoneme in their language.

He proceeds to argue that :

....the elements of a phonological system cannot be defined positively in terms of what they "are," but only negatively in terms of what they are *not*, what they contrast with.[16]

He goes so far as to state that :

....there is little to be learned by examining the utterances of a language one by one, trying somehow to describe the sound of each. It is much more to the point to examine pairs of utterances to see how they differ in sound.[17]

This approach to a phonological system bears significant relevance and applicability to the demarcative study of nonverbal behavior as well as of other aspects of culture in that its primary concern centers upon the identification of phonemes, which is realized by establishing the ranges allowed of variation. Likewise, boundaries are to be identified for nonverbal behavior by contrasting it with its counterpart of other cultures. A case in point will be an A-OK gesture. In Arabic culture its boundary line is laid down between the index finger and the middle finger ; In American culture it is so laid

down as to include in its range the middle finger as well as the index finger.

That which must be borne in mind in this respect is that the boundaries of our own culture are so much taken for granted that we are very likely to fail to be aware of the fact that they are only arbitrary and peculiar to our own culture, and that they may be deformed or totally absent in other cultures. Just as every man has his humor, so every culture has its own boundaries. Even a minute difference will carry a widely different message, provided that it goes out of its allocated plot, or technically the difference is relevant in the demarcative structure of the culture under examination. From what has been said, it follows that in order to meet expectations, it is utterly imperative to identify the 'ranges of appropriateness' or boundaries.

For ease of conceptualization, resort will be made to schematic breakdowns to the demarcative system. In the first instance, let us bring into focus the 'bathroom' cited at the outset of this paper, because it provides us with one of the most conspicuous contrasts of demarcative differences between Japanese and American or western cultures. As Condon and Yousef point out in their book, the bathing area and the toilet are always in separate rooms in Japan, or originally they went so far as to house them in separate buildings.

> In the main building was the kitchen, where water-
> ....flowed constantly from a bamboo pipe. It then ran to
> the bath, housed in a separate building. From there the
> water flowed on to clean the privy, also in a separate
> building, then to the animal barn, ... and finally to a
> large cesspool.[18]

As described above, the Japanese have always kept them apart from each other and never let them "come together." Install-

ing a bathtub and a stool side by side in a single room is "as preposterous as living under one roof with foul, four-legged creatures,"[19] and an impression of "Hell" as described in the second quotation will ensue from the merger of the two, which is in tabooed violation of the Japanese demarcative rules. Therefore these areas in Japanese culture can be diagrammatically presented as two separate units (Figure 2).
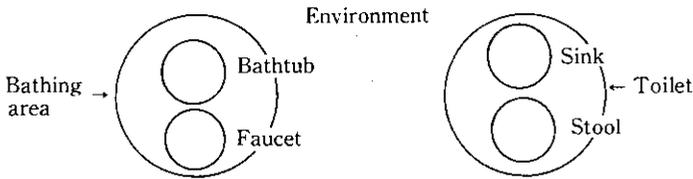

Figure 2　Schematic of the Japanese "bathroom" (a bath and a toilet)

The two large circles representing the bathing area and the toilet do not intersect each other, although circumscription of the two may take place, which signifies they are located next door to each other with a wall between them.

Let us now examine them in terms of general system theory,[20] which appears to be a very promising tool for demarcative analyses. The two units can be refered to as "systems" consisting of "subsystems" or components, namely, a bathtub, faucet, etc., and a sink, stool, etc., respectively. The two systems, in turn, constitute a still higher level of system or "suprasystem," which is a house in this instance. The immediate environment of the systems is the rest of the suprasystem or house in which they are contained. Between the systems and the environment are laid down boundaries within which there can exist a number of variations in layout and shape.

The American "bathroom" cannot be presented in like manner, on the other hand, the reason being that the bathroom comprises a

bath and a toilet.   In other words, those two facilities are subsystems
or components of the sytem called "bathroom."   As illustrated below
(Figure 3), the relation between them is that of a bathtub and a faucet
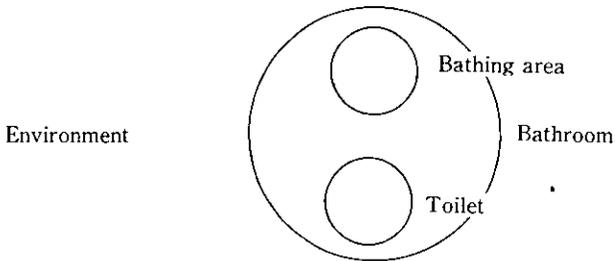of the bathing area in Japan, in a manner of speaking.

Figure 3   Schematic of the American bathroom

Variations in layout and shape are also in existence in this
system, namely, the dimension, color, etc. of a tub, stool, faucet, or
sink, and their location in the bathroom, etc.   It is mandatory,
however, that those components should abide in the stipulated bounds
of the bathroom that is separated from the environment by the
boundaries of walls.

In this connection, it may well be argued that what have been
refered to as components in the foregoing analyses can be just as well
considered as systems in their own right, which will in consequence
necessitate renaming the hierarchy in its entirety : The original
"system" will be elevated to a suprasystem, and the "subsystem" will
be upgrated to a system, and so on.   Therefore the two components
of the American bathroom could be considered as systems, just as a
bathing area and a toilet are conceived of as systems in Japan.   In
this respect arises a question that the bathing area and the toilet in
both cultures are to be considered as the same from the damarcative
point of view.   In order to elucidate the question, let us have recourse
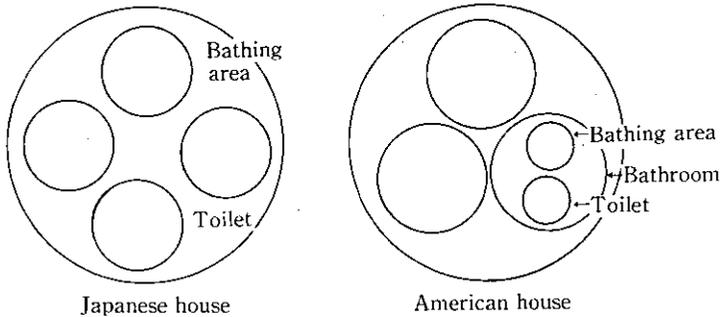to schematics of their immediate environment, or a house.

Figure 4　Schematics of the Japanese and American houses

As shown above (Figure 4), a bathing area and a toilet in the Japanese house are components or subsystems of the system "house," but those of the American house are components of a bathroom which is a component of the system "house." In other words, a bathing area and a toilet are subsubsystems of the system called house in the United States. It follows from what has been said that although both of the cultures have those facilities of civilization, the positions that they are allocated are distinctly different in terms of the hierarchic structures: They appertain to different planes or levels of the hierarchy of encompassing systems.

In the second instance, let us direct our attention to another sort of cultural entity, form of activity, with special emphasis upon the relation between "work" and "play" which is far less tangible and yet still more momentous to intercultural communication.

Edward Stewart, a psychologist, describes the relation of the two in American culture as follows:

One of the most important distinctions in the forms of activity in American life is the separation of work from play; .... Work is pursued for a living. It is what a man must do and he is not necessarily supposed to enjoy it.

Play, on the other hand, is relief from the drudgery and
regularity of work and is enjoyable in its own right....[21]

The American, hence, feels compelled to be businesslike and
brief in his business meeting and attempts to expeditiously conclude
his agenda, and after being released from his work, he engages in
recreation or play with the same seriousness of purpose expended on
work.[22]   The relation between them in American culture is char-
acterized as separation and can be diagrammatically presented as
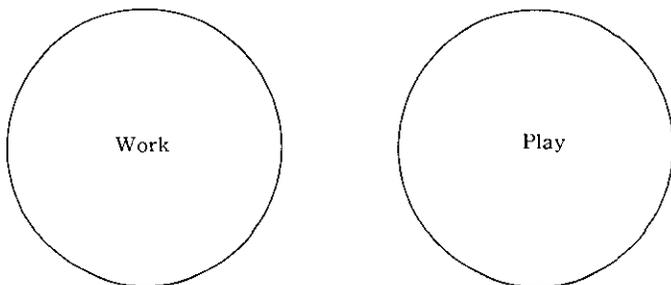below (Figure 5).

Figure 5   Schematic of American relation between work and play

Stewart goes on to argue that non-westerners, on the other hand,
do not make a clear-cut distinction between work and play, and
dislike to let work interfere with the amenities of living, and also they
are likely to expect foreigners to integrate their personal lives with
work.   Thus the relation of work and play can be diagramed as
two circles partially overlapping each other (Fiqure 6).

    The work circle intersects the play circle and the dividing line
between them comes so obscure that they make up something like
"union" in set theory.   Accordingly a non-westerner "may appear to
take work very casually.... The Latin makes the meeting into a
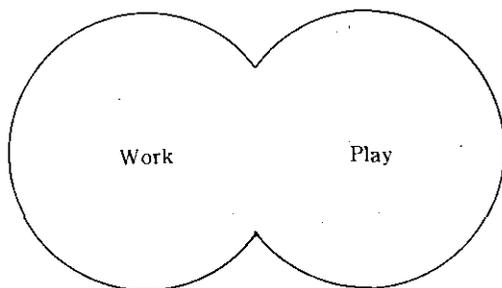social event."[23]   But do non-westerners really mix work with play?

Figure 6   Schematic of non-western relation between work and play

There is one important thing to be recalled in this regard.   That is,when examining another culture, we should not project our own framework onto that culture but rather think in its own terms.   Thus in the eyes of Americans, non-westerners may appear to mingle work with play, but to the non-westerners, there is a distinction made between them.   It is, however, very different from that of American culture.   Stewart goes on to point it out as follows :

> Essentially, the Latin does not make the American dis-
> crimination between work and play (or business and play).
> In each case, the view regarding activity matches the
> definition of the person provided by Latin and by North
> American cultures.[24]

An anthropologist, Ina Brown, has made reference to a similar phenomenon and she has also attributed it to a matter of definition.

> Many Westerners have reported that the American
> Indians, the Africans, or the South Sea Islanders, especial-
> ly the men, were lazy because they spent a great deal of
> time in activities that the Europeans defined as play or
> recreation.[25]

As both of them claim, the relation between work and play can be reduced to a matter of definition with reason, but it can also be considered in terms of demarcation.

Pairs of words such as *hot* and *cold*, or *same* and *different* are classified as polar-opposite words by semanticists.[26] The meanings of the pairs are merely two sides of one coin, neither half of the pair having meaning independent of the other. The pair in question, work and play, can also be regarded as polar-opposites, which can be diagrammatically presented in the form of continuum with work on one end and play on the other end (Figure 7).

American boundary

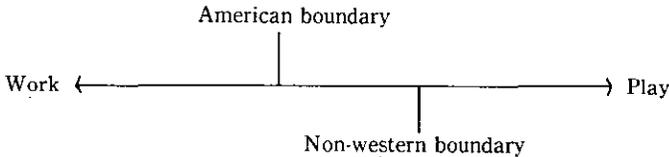Work ←——————————————————→ Play

Non-western boundary

Figure 7   Work-and-play continuum

The leftward-aiming arrow points toward one extreme representing the *hardest* work ; the rightward-aiming arrow points toward the other extreme representing the *softest* play. The American boundary line is set more toward the work end, while the non-western boundary line is laid down closer to the play end. Activities falling between American and non-western boundary lines can be regarded as either work or play, depending upon the observer's point of view.

For better visualization, let us revert to our original two-dimensional diagram using circles and combine it with this linear one (Figure 8).

There is no doubt as to the identities of the shaded circles representing American work and non-western play, because any sort of activity belonging therein will be looked upon as work or play in either culture, given that it stands clear of the borderlines. What is ambiguous is the activities belonging in the unshaded portions of the
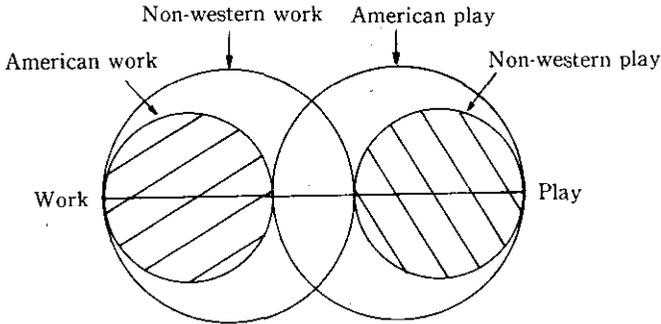
Figure 8   Schematic of interrelation between American and non-western work and play

circles.   An activity belonging in the intersection of the non-western work and the American play will be described as play by Americans, but work by non-westerners.   It is this intersection that provides outsiders with room for ethnocentric judgments such as those quoted earlier.   Yet to be clarified is the function of the remainder of the unshaded portions.   Taking it into consideration, let us elaborate on the schematic.

A cultural anthropologist by the name of Francis Hsu points out that "Human beings relate to each other in two basic ways : through role and affect,"[27] and goes on to state as follows :

> The escalation of role differentiation with the growth of
> societal complexity has given rise in the West, especially
> in the United States, to a significant phenomenon : the
> separation of affect from role.[28]

The relation between role and affect is diagramed, using two circles either intersecting or separating from each other, just like Figures 5 and 6.[29]   The term role, as is understood from the context, can be replaced with work without doing much harm to its integrity. Let us then add a Y axis representing affect to the already existing

X axis representing work and play. This combination will give us a
clue as to how to relate the void portions of the unshaded areas to
other cultural entities. The first step to be taken will be to deter-
mine the relative position and size of the entity affect on the re-
ctangular co-ordinates.

In this connection, one thing must be borne in mind. Up to this
point, the present demarcative study has been made on the assump-
tion of cultural relativity. That is, each culture has its own cultural
entities and demarcative system. Some entities, however, are uni-
versal and shared with all cultures, because of the fact that human
beings possess more or less the same or similar physiological and
psychological needs. The differences will be found in how they are
expressed and how they are related to other entities.

In keeping with the above assumption, affect can be sorted out as
one of the universal entities, so that what matters now is how it
relates to other entities, work and play in this case. The interrela-
tion among these three is the determining factor of the position and
size of the affect circle. With this point in mind, let us then embark
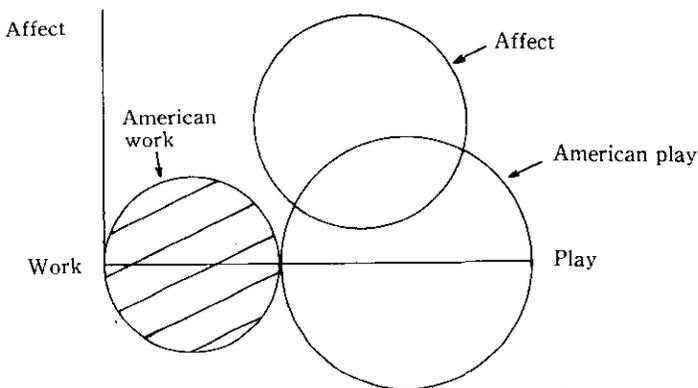on the composition of new diagrams.

Figure 9   Schematic of American interrelation among affect, work,
and play

As is evident from Figure 9, the affect circle does not intersect the American work circle although it does overlap with the play circle, indicating that there are a considerable amount of affective elements involved in play activities while no affective elements are involved in work in American culture.

In sharp contrast with the American interrelation among those three, the non-western work circle shares some elements with the affect circle which intersects the play circle at the same time (Fiqure 10). But the intersections made with the work and play circles in combination with the affect circle are relatively small, implying the non-westerners' split orientation of their affect.
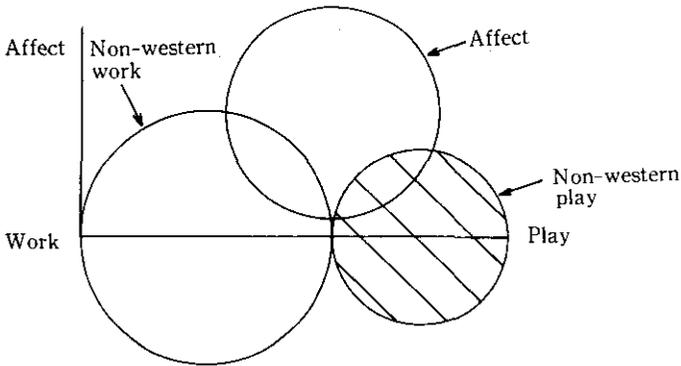
Figure10　　Schematic of non-western interrelation among affect, work, and play

An entity such as affect can overlap with any other entities, whereas polar-opposite entities like work and play can not intersect *each other as explained earlier. In a similar fashion, demarcative* analyses of various cultures can be conducted, and the findings obtained as the results of such analyses can be synthesized in such a way that detailed cultural maps may be drawn for easier inter-cultural encounters.

Discussion and Conclusion

The subject matter hitherto dealt with in this and other papers written by this author is, "in a sense, a value, but a specialized form of value."[30] Each culture arbitrarily segments the amorphous continuum of culture into a great number of compartments, placing much emphasis on some portions of reality and less on others. How many segments reality is divided into, and how fine or loose the boundariens are at what aspects of reality, and how they are related to other segments, all reflect the value system of a particular culture.

A case in point will be a group of words all meaning "snow" in the Eskimo language. Snow is one of the most familiar and important elements in their life, so that the Eskimo went the length of assigning a specific name to every single variant discernable to them. The large paradigm of words meaning "snow" in Eskimo, if seen from a different viewpoint, tells eloquently that they are deeply concerned with snow, and that the relative position snow occupies may well be interpreted as vitally important in their psychological picture of the world. In this sense, the study of cultural demartion overlaps with the study of values.

The efforts made herein are aimed at pointing to one of many directions that the study of intercultural communication can take for further development. Thus there is no intention harbored of claiming that this approach is a panacea for the maladies plaguing intercultural encounters. It is rather an attempt to provide practitioners and researchers in this field with a new perspective for more effective and efficient communication across cultural boundaries. Elaboration and refinement are the self-imposed tasks to be performed hereafter for the fruition of this attempt at theorization.

Notes

1 John Condon and Fathi Yousef, *An Introduction to Intercultural communication* (Indianapolis : Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), p. 157.

2 Jules Henry, *Culture Against Man* (New York : Random House, 1965), p. 414.

3 Edward Stewart, *American Culture Patterns : A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Pittsburgh : Regional Council for International Education, Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1971), p. 20.

4 Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality* (Cambridge : The MIT Press, 1956), pp. 137–138.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

6 Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Madison : Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 52.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

8 Edward Hall, The Silent Language (New York : Fawcett World Library, 1959), p. 66.

9 Edward Hall, "Adumbration as a Feature of Intercultural Communication," Michael Prosser, ed., *Intercommunication among Nations and People* (New York : Harper and Row, 1973), p. 83.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

11 *Loc. cit.*

12 Robert Oliver, *Culture and Communication* (Springfield : Charles Thomas, Publisher, 1962), p. xi.

13 William Howelll, "The Study of Intercultural Communication in Liberal Education," *Pacific Speech,* vol. II, no. 4, p. 3.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

15 Charles Hockett, *A Course in Modern Linguistcs* (New York : The Macmillan Co., 1958), p. 25.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

18 Isaiah Ben-Dasan, *The Japanese and the Jews* (New York : Weatherhill, 1972), p. 33.

19 *Loc. cit.*

20 Brent Ruben, "General System Theory : An Approach to Human

Communication," R. Budd and B. Ruben, eds., *Approaches to Human Communication* (New York : Spartan Books, 1972), pp. 120-144.

21 Stewart, p. 33.

22 *Loc. cit.*

23 *Loc. cit.*

24 *Loc. cit.*

25 Ina Brown, *Understanding Other Culture* (Englewood Cliffs : Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 77.

26 Louis Salomon, *Semantics and Common Sense* (New York : Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), pp. 41-46.

27 Francis Hsu, *Iemoto : The Heart of Japan* (New York : Schenken Publishing Co., 1975), p. 135.

28 *Ibid.* p. 138.

29 The schematics used herein have been developed independently of the diagrams of Francis Hsu.

30 A comment made by William Howell on one of this author's papers dealing with the theme of distinction-making or demarcative analysis. Speech Commuication Department, University of Minnesota, Mpls., Minn., 1974.

This is a revised version of the paper entitled "Demarcatics : An approach to Intercultural Communication" which was originally written in 1975 at the University of Minnesota.

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