Communication Achievement and the Need for Language Reform

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Abstract

Globalization and modern technology have drastically reduced the constraints of time and space between the different nations of the world. To cope with the exigencies of the twenty-first century, people from different linguistic and socio-cultural contexts need to communicate rapidly, more efficiently and, eventually, at a lower cost. To achieve communication, we have at our disposal a considerable number of natural and human-made means. Language, however, remains the most effective medium that can actually bridge the gap between the different peoples of the world. The present article is a brief survey of some salient aspects of verbal communication. With a special reference to English, it evokes a reconsideration of the role of the linguistic means in achieving communication. Accordingly, three interrelated concerns of verbal communication are discussed. These are namely (1) how verbal communication achievement depends largely on the linguistic meaning as a means that triggers the contextual meaning, (2) the linguistic and contextual disturbances that may partly or wholly obscure communication and (3) the implications of such issues with regard to intercultural communication and foreign language learning. Then, a paradox of paramount importance is raised with regard to the English language. English is increasingly standing out as the first international lingua franca of the twenty-first century, while its linguistic system continues to suffer from many inherent inconsistencies. Therefore, it is deemed that the first global language needs to undergo some serious remedial reforms with the purpose of making it easier to learn and more efficient to use.

Keywords: communication achievement, inconsistency, language reform.

Introduction

During mainly the last four decades, a remarkable number of communicative and pragmatic approaches have prevailed in the domain of language learning and language use. As a revolutionary reaction against language structuralism and its related pedagogy, those approaches have brought about an outstanding shift of focus from the grammatical aspect of language to the use of language in context. One of the most commonly quoted statements with regard to this revolutionary orientation reads as follows: "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (Hymes, 1971, p. 278). In general terms, the rules of grammar are those rules that govern the overall linguistic system of a given language. They are accordingly related to syntax, phonetics, lexis, morphology, tense, orthography, etc. The rules of use, on the other hand, are rules according to which we pick up items from our linguistic repertoire in order to interact appropriately with each other in a certain communicative event. As examples of these rules, we normally say "good morning" when it is morning, we address our superiors with forms like "Sir" or "Madam", we call our intimate friends by their personal names rather than by their family names, we provide a piece of information to someone according to a certain purpose, we use formal rather than colloquial language in formal contexts, and so on and so forth.

The rules of use are important entities in verbal communication, but what if our linguistic repertoire suffers from a certain shortage involving the rules of grammar? Very obviously, this will partially or wholly hinder communication. From a rational point of view, Hymes' statement sounds plausible, but somewhat inequitable and incomplete. The quote will gain more credibility if a complementary part is added so that it would read as follows: "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless, and there are rules of grammar without which the rules of use would be helpless."

Normally, communication achievement requires both grammatical rules and contextual rules. However, the excessive shift of interest from the linguistic system to the contextual use of language has brought about a couple of issues. Firstly, there has been an underestimation of the grammatical mastery, while actually verbal communication depends largely on the correct use of the linguistic system. This is remarkably apparent in the learners and users of English, be they native or non-native speakers. Secondly and more importantly, the inequitable shift of interest from language to context has deviated attention and averted criticism vis-à-vis a highly important concern. This is namely the excessive inconsistency of the grammatical rules of the English language. In all vital domains of the twenty-first century, English is actually the most widely used language. Globalization and information technology are still widening the scope of its use; this is happening rapidly and drastically all over the globe. Thus, English has become distinctively the most used and the most needed means of communication worldwide. However, the first international language continues to run under a flagrant set of anomalous grammatical rules. One of its most apparent inconsistencies lies in that large discrepancy that exists between its phonetic articulation and its spelling form. The English grammatical system also suffers from a number of other irrational and unnecessary inconsistencies like irregular verbs, irregular adjectives, irregular adverbs, complex and confusing rules that often carry with them attached categories and sub-categories of exceptions, and so on and so forth. This significantly hampers and delays the process of learning and consequently hinders both intracultural and intercultural communication. Therefore, researchers should strike a balance between the rules of grammar and the rules of use. Accordingly, a reorientation towards the grammatical rules of the first global language is insistently needed. With regard to this outstanding issue, there are two possible solutions. The first solution consists in investing more time, more money and more efforts to

improve the teaching and learning of the English language with its inherent inconsistencies. This is actually what has been done, especially over the last eight decades. A long series of approaches, methods and techniques have been developed and used, while the learners and users of English have been continuously suffering from the burden of those anomalies. The second solution is to opt for a serious and rational reform of the English grammatical rules. This would facilitate the learning and the use of English. This would also upgrade the English language to meeting the exigencies of the present century, namely in terms of rapidity, efficacy and cost. Such a solution would also promote communication and coherence between the different nations of the world.

1. Communication achievement

In general terms, verbal communication is achieved when the addressee recognizes the intended message of the addressor; that is to say when the addressee understands the addressor's intended meaning. At a more detailed level, the understanding of the addressor's intents involves the recognition of two types of meaning: the linguistic meaning and the contextual meaning. This is respectively what Widdowson (1978) calls "signification" and "value". These two dimensions of meaning are inherent variables in verbal communication achievement.

1.1. The linguistic meaning

The linguistic meaning or, in Widdowson (1978)'s terminology, "signification" refers to the meaning that words convey by virtue of their grammatical entities. This involves the linguistic elements through which a certain linguistic meaning is expressed. For example, in saying "*Driss went downtown*", "*Driss*" stands for a male proper name having that grammatical function of a subject. The form "*went*" indicates an action of moving from place to place some time in the past, since the verb is conjugated into simple past tense. The word "*downtown*" refers to a generic mental representation of some centre in some city. Then, the linguistic meaning of the sentence above covers the meanings of those three words as they are defined separately in a dictionary, in addition to the holistic meaning that those three words acquire together thanks to their grammatical relationship within that sentence. It comes out that the linguistic meaning is generic and somewhat fuzzy, but once it is used in a real communicative situation, it triggers a very specific meaning. Such a specific meaning is context-bound. It is called here contextual meaning.

1.2. The contextual meaning

When used in context, a linguistic meaning is normally intended to convey a certain contextual meaning. The contextual meaning is that particular piece of information that a linguistic meaning is intended to express by virtue of its use within an actual communicative event. This type of meaning is what Widdowson (1978) calls "value". Accordingly, "*Driss*" in our example refers to a particular person in the real world: let us say my cousin whose name is Driss. Moreover, both my addressee and I share some knowledge about that particular person. For example, we have some sort of shared knowledge about his age, his physical details, his mental aspect, his familial status, his occupations, etc. The item "*went*" points to a specific type of movement within a specific situation. It is used to indicate that the action of going was performed by that very person who is called Driss. Depending on the amount of knowledge that I share with my addressee about the contextual components of our communicative event, "*went*" may also designate that this particular action was performed on foot and not by any means of

transportation, that such an action took place at a specific past time and for some specific reasons, etc. Likewise, "*downtown*" is intended to mean a particular centre in a specific city; let us, for example, say the centre of Hamria in Meknes. The contextual meaning, then, involves the use of a given linguistic meaning as a means to convey a certain context-bound communicative intent.

Here, it is important to note that the dichotomy of linguistic meaning versus contextual meaning is actually subject to many controversies. As a matter of fact, it is difficult and confusing to try to provide a clear-cut delimitation between the constructs of that dichotomy. This is so, because the pairs of the dichotomy together with their complex constituents are very much fused into each other and are, therefore, very difficult to discern. This involves a set of highly complex labyrinths, especially when it comes to the overlapping and interactive aspects of those constituents. In this regard, Swan (2007) comments, "Confusion between the two senses leads to the common and mistaken claim that all the structures of a language encode two levels of meaning, 'semantic' and 'pragmatic', both of which must be learnt for communicative competence" (Abstract section, para. 1). Another confusing difficulty in trying to deal with the constituents of verbal communication is the chaotic aspect of the terminology that has been used to discern meaning. In the literature that is related to verbal communication, sometimes different terms are used to mean one and the same thing, sometimes one and the same term is used to mean different things, sometimes different terms are used to refer to similar or overlapping things, etc. Despite all these problems and despite arguments like Swan (2007)'s, it remains necessary to call for the dichotomy of linguistic meaning versus contextual meaning, at least for the sake of illustration.

Thanks to our human mental faculties, the achievement of communication upgrades from linguistic meaning to contextual meaning. In normal communicative events, this happens so rapidly and so covertly that it becomes quasi-impossible to detect the two types of meaning. This actually makes the movement from the first meaning to the second go unnoticeable. However, in some communicative events such a distinction becomes easier to depict. Let us consider the following example:

- Ahmed: *Have you heard the news?*
- Driss: *What news?*
- Ahmed*: Mohamed bought a laptop.*
- Driss: *Oh, fine. I have always encouraged him to buy one.*

Thanks to some examples like this one, it becomes easier to identify the passage of communication achievement from linguistic meaning to contextual meaning. In this communicative situation, Driss can recognise the intended linguistic meaning of the word "*news*", but he cannot immediately recognise its contextual meaning. This is why he asks the question "*What news*?". Thus, communication cannot upgrade to the level of the contextual meaning of that word. This small delay in communication at the word "*news*" allows us to point more clearly to the existence of the two types of meaning: the linguistic meaning which is generic and fuzzy and the contextual meaning which is rather specific. That brief pause takes place between the recognition of the linguistic meaning of the word "*news*" and the lack of recognition of the contextual meaning of that same word. In response to Driss' request "*What news*?", Ahmed provides a little pack of information by saying "*Mohamed bought a laptop*". Thanks to that information, Driss can eventually identify the intended contextual meaning of the word "*news*". Moreover, the information that Ahmed provides in "*Mohammed bought a laptop*" involves in its turn the promotion of communication achievement from linguistic meaning to

contextual meaning, but this time without any pause between the two types of meaning. Then, in an interactive way, the achievement of communication in "*Mohammed bought a laptop*" has actually promoted Driss' understanding of the word "*news*" from the linguistic meaning to the contextual meaning. This example, so simple as it may seem, is subject to longer and much more detailed analyses. Its linguistic and contextual components can be discussed further in terms of both rules of grammar and rules of use. It comes out that the achievement verbal communication is highly complex due to the large set of components and subcomponents that it involves both linguistically and contextually. The extent of that complexity becomes even higher when we think about the interdependent and interactive relationship that holds those components together. Nevertheless, some verbal communicative events, like the example above, can help in providing some evidence about the fact that the achievement of verbal communication involves two types of meaning: a linguistic meaning and a contextual meaning.

2. Communication disturbance
Verbal communication may break down partly or wholly even when the linguistic meaning is performed in context. Communication failure may be caused by one or more than one linguistic and/or contextual disturbance. Such a disturbance can be an erroneous item of language usage or a deviant rule of language use. An erroneous item of language usage can affect the linguistic meaning, which in turn can affect the contextual meaning. This can be illustrated through the following example: *"Actually, peopl get married at a later age "*. This sentence is from a piece of writing that an intermediate learner of English was asked to write to a virtual English friend, while the topic of writing was about marriage nowadays. In the linguistic repertoire of that learner "*actually*", like the French word "*actuellement*", meant "*nowadays*". This is an error that was identified by consulting the student writer and asking him about his real intended meanings. Thus, it was made clear that the word "*Actually*" was used erroneously to mean "nowadays". Then, a native speaker of English was asked to read the learner's paper as being supposedly the learner's addressee. More importantly, the native speaker was asked to provide a detailed report on what he could actually understand. After that, the learner's intents were compared with the reader's understanding. The comparison revealed that there was a mismatch between the learner's intended meaning and the reader's actual understanding at the word "*Actually*". In general terms, the learner intended to mean "<u>*Nowadays, people get married at a later age"*</u>, while his reader understood "<u>*In fact, people get married at a later age"*</u>. At a more detailed scale, the learner's error at the word "*Actually*" proved to be a disturbance involving an item of language usage. At the linguistic level, such a disturbance affected the learner's intended linguistic meaning, which in turn affected the reader's recognition of that meaning. At the contextual level, the linguistic disturbance in question affected the learner's intended contextual meaning and, eventually, caused failure in the reader's recognition of that intent. Thus, the learner's wrong substitution of "nowadays" with "*actually*" proved to be a linguistic disturbance that brought about a certain communication failure. The disturbance was, moreover, hidden under the seemingly correct form "*Actually*". The covert aspect of that disturbance, moreover, averted any remedial measure on the part of the reader. Aside from that, the reader could easily do away with the spelling disturbance in "*peopl*". The item "*peopl*" was then an overt linguistic disturbance. This disturbance, however, did not result in the reader's failure to recognise both the intended linguistic meaning and the intended contextual meaning of that erroneous item.

A defective element of language use, on the other hand, may affect the contextual meaning without necessarily having any deviant item at the level of the linguistic meaning. Here, it is important to recall that language usage covers vocabulary too. As we have already seen, when an addressor performs a linguistically correct sentence, the addressee may recognize the intended linguistic meaning of that sentence without being able to cope with its contextual interpretation. From a functional perspective, this can eventually occur when the linguistic meaning conforms to the rules of usage but violates a given rule of use. This occurs frequently in utterances involving problems of redundancy, fuzziness, contradiction, inconsistency, misplaced premises, distorted reasoning, irrelevance, etc. These problems usually involve longer texts and larger amounts of discourse. Eventually, this makes it practically difficult to illustrate these sorts of issues here. However, it is important to note that, in these cases as well, covert problems having to do with the linguistic mastery are not to be excluded.

An utterance may misleadingly show a problem involving a rule of use while it actually suffers from a grammatical problem. Here is an authentic example from the composition paper of a high-school learner of English as a foreign language: "*I passed my exam and I succeeded.*" In analysing this statement, two types of interpretation were used. These were what Corder (1973) calls "plausible interpretation" and "authoritative interpretation". A plausible interpretation involves the inference a researcher can make in trying to identify the intents of a given utterance. Without asking directly the learner about his or her real intents, such an inference relies mainly on the interpretation of the linguistic and contextual properties of the performed utterance. The researcher's thorough mastery of the learner's mother tongue and second language can actually provide much help in carrying out a plausible interpretation. An authoritative interpretation, on the other hand, requires asking the learner directly about his or her real intents in a given utterance. To assure a credible result, the learner is interviewed in his or her own mother tongue. Apparently, the learner's statement in our example above seems to suffer from a problem of language use. The statement sounds clearly redundant, since "*passed*" and "*succeeded*" mean the same thing in English. Apart from that, the sentence looks grammatically correct. However, a plausible interpretation revealed the existence of a serious error of vocabulary. The identification of that error was confirmed later by means of an authoritative interpretation. Actually, the student wanted to say "*I took my exam and I succeeded*", but he lacked the linguistic means "*to take an exam*" and "*to sit for an exam*" for encoding his intent. Therefore, he erroneously used "*to pass an exam*" and, thus, he could not come out with his intended message within safe borders. It is very common for a language learner to make use of sentences that suffer from covert linguistic problems like this one (Hiddas, 1997). Moreover, a lack in the linguistic repertoire may result in a much more hidden cause of failure. Language users may simply resort to skipping some parts of their communicative intents, because their linguistic mastery does not cover the linguistic items through which they can encode those intents (Corder, 1981; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; among others). Then, when failure is apparently attributed to a deficiency at the level of what Hymes (1971) calls rules of use, this does not necessarily exclude the existence of some covert gaps in the grammatical mastery as being actually the major cause of failure.

In general terms, the effect of a disturbance on the achievement of communication can be situated somewhere in a continuum going from the degree of almost no damage to the degree of total damage. At the lowest level of damage, a disturbance may simply cause a minor difficulty or a short delay to the fluency of the addressee's process of understanding (Hiddas, 1997). These are disturbances involving for example minor problems of spelling or pronunciation. At the highest level of the continuum, disturbances are very often related to problems of vocabulary.

The next examples are taken from some learners' real performances. These examples are listed here according to a progressive order with regard to the gravity of their effects on communication. For practical reasons, they are presented briefly without providing accounts about the contexts in which they occurred. Nevertheless, the effects of these disturbances on communication can be easily guessed. Here are the examples: "*peopl*" instead of "*people*", "*childrens*" instead of "*children*", "*boys*" instead of "*children*", "*usually*" instead of "*always*", "*uselly*" instead of "*usually*" and with an intended meaning of "*always*", "*pass an exam*" instead of "*take an exam*", "*illiterate*" instead of "*literate*".

Congruently with what Grice (1975) calls the "cooperative principle", the participants may have to call for some additional efforts in order to clarify their intended contextual meaning. Accordingly, the achievement of communication may require some extra pauses or additional remedial measures. In addition to the use of paralinguistic means, like gestures and facial expression in a face-to-face interaction or punctuation and pictures in writing, the addressor may call for different communication strategies such as paraphrasing, exemplification, appealing to the addressee's feedback or help, etc. The addressee, in turn, can contribute by calling for the addressor to confirm or refute some of his or her hypothetical remedial measures. This can be illustrated through the following example. This is an authentic communicative event which I personally witnessed while I was once on the train from Meknes to Rabat. The person I name here "addressor" was a teenager who was apparently a Moroccan learner of English, while the "addressee" was a young woman, very likely a British native speaker. Here is the example:

- Addressor: *My MP3 cost me ...* [the addressor marks a few-second pause for converting
        Moroccan dirham into US dollar] *... forty dollars.*
- Adreessee: *... er ... hum ... . You mean fourteen dollars: ten plus four ...?*
- Addressor: *... Yes, yes. This is what I mean. Fourteen ..., yes, fourteen dollars.*

In this example, the disturbance occurs at the level of the linguistic meaning. The linguistic item "*forty*" is erroneously used instead of "*fourteen*". Although it is linguistically covert, the erroneous item is identified by the addressee at the level of the contextual meaning. The addressee knows that the MP3 in question, with its limited specificities and as a second hand device, is far from being worth forty dollars. According to a plausible explanation, she instantly deduces that her addressor may be untruthful, may have been swindled, or has simply made a linguistic mistake. Then, she immediately opts for the most credible hypothesis which is that of her addressor having made a linguistic mistake, because most probably she believes that there is no reason why her addressor should tell a lie, that her addressor is a foreign learner of English and that his English is not that perfect. In this simple example, the fundamental informative intent is preserved thanks mainly to the cooperative remedial efforts on the part of the addressee. The addressor, too, has been cooperative by confirming his addressee's remedial guess.

Differently from that, a disturbance can cause a serious damage to communication. At the highest degree of the gravity continuum that we have envisaged, the addressee cannot recognize the addressor's intended contextual meaning. Such an intent is either totally obscured or entirely distorted. This implies that the addressee has not been able to interpret the addressor's words or has made an interpretation which does not match the intended contextual meaning of the performed words. This can be more obvious in a communicative event wherein the participants are writer and reader and there is no opportunity for an immediate remedial cooperation to take place. That is why many readers fail to recognize their writers' intended contextual meanings despite of the presumed efforts they make in interpreting the written items of usage in question

and despite of understanding the corresponding linguistic meanings of those items. In such cases, communication is either postponed to some coming remedial events or closes up on a permanent failure.

When we speak or write, we do not do that for the sake of simply producing sounds or graphic forms. We rather do that to deliver a given contextual meaning. Our addressees normally receive our intended linguistic meaning through its corresponding graphic forms or oral sounds. Then, they analyse that linguistic meaning in terms of the different contextual components that they have in hand and, very often, they provide a feedback to inform us about the extent to which they have actually recognized that intent. Thus, in a communicative event, the participants may get involved in a relatively longer interchange of role taking by shifting between the position of addressor and that of addressee. Within those verbal interactions, there is always a set of concrete and abstract contextual variables. Then, these variables determine the linguistic tools that we choose from our linguistic repertoire in order to convey our communicative intents in a more efficient and more relevant way. These contextual variables, moreover, are inherent in our linguistic and socio-cultural entities and some of them prove to be more knowledge-specific and/or more culture-specific than others. Nevertheless, the linguistic means or what Hymes (1971) names rules of grammar have always had a paramount importance in achieving communication accurately and fluently. They also have an important role in boosting cooperation and providing remedy when a given disturbance takes place.

3. A reconsideration of shared linguistic knowledge
When contextual knowledge is shared between the participants of a communicative event, this does not necessarily entail success of communication. Two monolingual speakers of two distinct languages, like Arabic and English for example, cannot understand each other so clearly and so fluently by relying solely on their shared contextual knowledge. Through our previous example *"Driss went downtown",* let us add that communication has been achieved smoothly without any intervening disturbance. Accordingly, my addressee has been able to recognise my intended contextual meaning clearly and fluently. This is due to three main reasons. Firstly, my addressee and I have some shared linguistic knowledge, at least vis-à-vis the linguistic elements of that sentence. Thanks to that linguistic knowledge, I have been able to formulate and perform that sentence correctly according to the grammatical requirements of the English language and appropriately according to the contextual requirements of that communicative event. My addressee, on his part, has been able to successfully analyse the linguistic codes through which my message has been delivered to him. Eventually, my addressee has been able to recognise the linguistic meaning through which he has succeeded in recognising my intended contextual meaning. Secondly, my sentence does not suffer from any grammatical disturbance, and my addressee's ability to interpret the linguistic components of my performed sentence does not suffer from any deficit either. This is why my addressee has found it easy to understand my intended contextual meaning. Thirdly, the contextual knowledge that I share with my addressee has been easily accessible, because it makes part of the ordinary experience that we have in common. Hence, that contextual knowledge has not actually required any demanding tasks to be learned. It has not been necessary for both my addressee and I to spend much time and enormous efforts on knowing that Driss is my cousin, that he has those physical and mental characteristics, etc. In general terms, what is rather demanding is to learn and use the linguistic items that are required to convey and recognise a given communicative intent so clearly and so fluently. Then,

unless shared contextual knowledge falls within the boundaries of complex and specialised fields like linguistics, aeronautics and biogenetics, the context of use together with its rules and norms are generously available in helping us to express and understand different communicative intents with much accuracy and fluidity. In fact, both linguistic knowledge and contextual knowledge are inextricably needed for the achievement of communication. However, contextual knowledge is relatively easier to learn and use, especially when it falls within the scope of our ordinary lives. The linguistic knowledge and its related skills, on the other hand, are much more demanding to learn and use, particularly when it comes to a second or foreign language.

As we have seen, the linguistic means constitute a mandatory condition for verbal communication to take place. The linguistic system constitutes a major variable in determining the amount of success in verbal communication. The importance of shared linguistic knowledge, however, has been largely underestimated by the different communicative and pragmatic approaches during the last few decades. As it is mentioned before, there has been an excessive shift of focus from the rules of grammar to the rules of use as a reaction to the traditional structural approaches, which used to emphasise the linguistic aspect of language at the expense of its contextual use. As a result, those context-oriented approaches have withdrawn much attention from the constituents of shared linguistic knowledge and from their compulsory role in verbal communication achievement. Such a shift of focus has actually disregarded major determining variables in the achievement of communication. These variables involve mainly the specificities of the linguistic system of rules under which verbal communication runs. From a descriptive point of view, this is an interest that was largely dealt with by traditional structuralism. What has been remarkably neglected by the different trends of both structure-centred and context-centred approaches, however, is the interest in the linguistic form of communication from an analytical and critical perspective. More precisely, there has been an apparent lack of interest in the consistency of the rules of grammar. Actually, there is a critical need to carry out a thorough investigation in the linguistic system of rules with two main objectives in mind. The first objective is to check the extent to which a linguistic system lends itself to smooth learning and to efficient communicative use. The second objective is, eventually, to provide efficient corrective reforms to the identified inconsistencies. As a matter of fact, the consistency of the linguistic system is an issue of paramount importance, especially with regard to language learning and language use for communicative purposes among the different nations of our composite world. Unfortunately, this concern has been largely disregarded by researchers.

4. Interlingual and intercultural communication

As human beings, we acquire various forms of knowledge and skill to communicate efficiently and appropriately within our native linguistic and socio-cultural context. In that natural context, we acquire our mother tongue together with the norms and rules that govern its use for communicative purposes. As native speakers, we normally have at our disposal those necessary linguistic and cultural properties through which we can communicate effectively with the members of our socio-cultural community. Under the effect of some deviant items of use and usage, however, communication may partly or wholly fail. This can take place even between the members of one and same speech community. In other words, this can happen even when those members have at their disposal a consistent linguistic and non-linguistic shared knowledge. It comes out that when we interact with people whose native language and culture are different from ours, the risks of communication failure prove to be much higher. As a social behaviour, verbal communication differs from society to society and from culture to culture. Therefore, to

learn a second or foreign language in isolation from its socio-cultural entities is said to be of little help, especially when it comes to real-life verbal interaction. Communication achievement proves to be even more vulnerable when a culture-specific topic is involved. Therefore, to communicate effectively in a second or foreign language, one has to be both bilingual and bicultural. Then, it is also worth mentioning that beyond the purely linguistic aspects of language, there are cultural dimensions which stand out as important variables in cross-cultural communication. Some of these dimensions involve even much higher risks of communication failure, because they involve areas of much more different cultural properties. This, for example, includes the way people from distinct cultures perceive time, space, fate, and personal responsibility. Those dimensions, as well, are significantly important. However, by virtue of globalization and modern technology, and thanks especially to satellite television channels and Internet services, the scope of culture has been so remarkably universalised. Bygone culture-specific issues, even at the most isolated local areas of the globe, have considerably been unveiled to the worldwide public. What remains almost unchanged, however, is the linguistic mastery without which it is definitely impossible to encode and decode our intents in a verbal communicative event.

5. Issues in learning and using the English language
The importance of English as a global lingua franca has been constantly growing since the last half of the previous century. Consequently, a series of approaches and methods have been adopted to cope with teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language. These are Audio-lingual Method, Direct Method, Communicative Approach, Content-Based Approach, Task-Based Approach, and Standards-Based Approach, among others. To be able to achieve inter-cultural communication has always been an outstanding element among the objectives of those approaches and methods. Such an objective, however, has usually proved to be very difficult to implement and has always been subject to a large number of controversies. In parallel, teachers and researchers have always pointed out to those large numbers of errors occurring in the performance of non-native speakers of English inside school and, more obviously, in authentic and authentic-like communicative events (Duskova, 1969; Whitman & Jackson, 1972; Nemmassi, 1991; Hiddas, 1997; Abe and Tono, 2005; Hemchua, 2006; among others).

5.1. A flagrant inconsistency in the English linguistic system
As a matter of fact, the English language is known for the excessive inconsistency of its linguistic rules. This actually hinders the rate of learning and, therefore, delays intercultural communication. The learners and users of the English language, at least those who have not reached a thorough linguistic mastery, encounter serious difficulties in the formulation of their linguistic meanings. This inevitably involves serious difficulties in learning and using those inconsistencies which exist inherently in the English linguistic system. This also implies that even the native speakers of English suffer from the anomalies of their mother tongue (Wade-Woolley and Siegel, 1997; Lipka, Siegel & Vukovic, 2005; Bell, 2004; among others). These resources have similarly reported that at the level of orthography alone, the average time it takes a young English native speaker to become properly literate before graduating to secondary school is approximately three times longer than the time needed in other languages like Spanish and Danish. Moreover, 20% of the English native children fail to cope with the chaotic speaking-spelling system of their mother tongue at the primary school. As a consequence, adult functional

illiteracy reaches 20% in UK and almost the same percentage in USA. Moreover, about 50% of the native speakers of English encounter serious problems of spelling and almost no English native speaker can claim to be a perfect speller. On his website "Spelling Dearest", Waldman (2004) provided a list of statements from linguists, thinkers and researchers who have tried to draw attention to this issue. Here are some of those statements:

- "English is not one language, but two -- a written one and a spoken one." (Rolf Johnson, professor of English, University of Illinois. From an article in The American Mercury, 1948).

- "One cannot tell how to spell an English word by its pronunciation or how to pronounce it by its spelling." (Professor Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language, 1959, page 13).

- "The biggest spelling-chaos that it has ever been the misfortune of any nation to cope with."
(Dr. Mont Follick, The Case for Spelling Reform, 1965, page 220).

- "The English language has the worst system of spelling of any major language."
(Robert C. Pinckert, Pinckert's Practical Grammar, 1986, page 22).

- "A learning period of 2 ½ to 3 years is needed to match the competence which is achieved in less than one year in most languages…. We would therefore like to retain the suggestion that learning to read in English is simply a slower process than learning in other languages." (Professor Philip H.K. Seymour, University of Dundee. How do children learn to read? Is English more difficult than other languages? From a Paper presented to the British Festival of Science, Glasgow, September 2001). (Supporting Information section)

Furthermore, the anomalies of the English language, especially those that are related to spelling and pronunciation, are held responsible for causing dyslexia to a large number of people (Siegel, 2006). According to this resource, dyslexia is an acquired reading disability that apparently occurs in the English-speaking countries more than anywhere else. Due to those linguistic inconsistencies too, many people have missed or lost a job simply because they have mispronounced or misspelled some words. Very unfortunately, those anomalies are vigorously maintained and protected by official political and educational authorities through highly certified dictionaries like the famous *Oxford English Dictionary*. In this respect, Waldman (2004) humorously comments, "*The Oxford English Dictionary became the unofficial bible of British spelling. Unlike the real bible, though, if you break one of the Oxford English Dictionary's commandments, you don't go to hell – hell comes to you*" (para. 5).

Cognitive psychology has always proved that we learn and process different components of knowledge according to well-organised patterns that are inherent in our mental faculties (Martin, 2007). This involves a set of basic procedures and processes such as categorization, super-ordination, sub-ordination, opposition and association. It comes out that when a learner says or writes, for example, "comed" instead of "came", "hardly" instead of "hard", "she know" instead of "she knows" or "foots" instead of "feet", the anomaly actually does not reside in the system of the learner's mental faculties. The anomaly, rather, lies in the linguistic system of the English language itself. Obviously, the linguistic system of English proves to be highly affected with the anarchy and arbitrariness of its rules. This includes that excessively flagrant mismatch between its spelling and pronunciation forms. For example, why should the pronunciation of "o" differ between "drove" and "above"? Why should the combination "ough" result in different articulated sounds as in "plough", "though", "cough" and "through"? What is the rationale behind putting the

spelling rule "i" before "e" except after "c" as in "believe" and "achieve" versus "receive" and "deceit"? Why has such an exception, like many others, been adopted and maintained? Why should there be a further exception to an already existing exception of a given rule as in "neighbour" and "weight" which take "ei" instead of "ie" even though there is no preceding "c"? Actually, the anomalies affecting the English linguistic system are so numerous and so varied. The listing of those inconsistencies requires long series of categories and subcategories. This involves spelling, pronunciation, tense, gender, number, vocabulary, word order, etc. Consequently, millions of learners all over the world suffer considerably from those irrational burdens, while the native speakers of English themselves do not make an exception to the rule. This misfortune is an inherent aspect of the English language and its origins are deep-rooted into history.

5.2. A brief historical account

The massive inconsistencies of the English language, particularly at the level of orthography and pronunciation, have developed over long periods of history. They occurred progressively as the result of a set of interrelated factors. Waldman (2004) and Bell (2009) have provided some detailed reports about this issue. Accordingly, the present section consists of a brief account of some important events from the historical surveys of these two documents. One of the most affecting factors is what is known as loanwords. For hundreds of years, many words have been borrowed from different languages like Latin, Greek, Arabic, French and German. Moreover, the majority of those loanwords have wholly or partly kept their original spelling and/or pronunciation and, therefore, widened the gap between the graphic form and its phonetic articulation. Moreover, the English language has undergone a number of changes in pronunciation due to many social and historical events. One of the most known of those changes is what is known as the Great Vowel Shift. This three-word term is used to refer to a long historical transformation in the pronunciation of the English vowels. This took place mainly from the second half of the fourteenth century through the end of the sixteenth century. Over such a long period, the English vowels changed gradually and the result was a striking divergence with their alphabetic representations. According to some historians, this happened due to a long and complex series of people's migration and interaction. That happened under a number of historical impacts involving trade, epidemics, regional conflicts, etc. It comes out that the Great Vowel Shift was actually one of the major causes of those large numbers of discrepancies. In the sixteenth century, the English language was gradually standardised with some remedial intervention at the level of spelling. Unfortunately, those efforts were limited to orthography while pronunciation was remarkably discarded and kept in a remarkable mismatch with its written representation. Since then, many attempts were made to mend the damage, but those efforts always met strong resistance from higher decision makers. Apparently, there was also an underlying desire to limit literacy to the elite and keep it difficult to access for the majority of people. Fanatic nationalism and irrational xenophobia were also manifest in that resistance. Accordingly, attempts of reform were objected under the pretext of conserving the cultural heritage of the English language and denying the way for foreigners to have an open access to it. Later on, American English nevertheless drew some advantages from some spelling reforms thanks to Noah Webster's publication of *An American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828. However, the results of Webster' efforts were very limited, because they were confined to orthography. Then, the big mismatch between spelling and pronunciation was unfortunately maintained without any significant improvement. More inconveniently, another difficulty was

added to foreign learners and eventually to the actual users of the first global lingua franca. English was divided into two major versions: American English and British English. Up to the present time, many attempts have been made to fix or substitute for the anomalies of the English linguistic system. However, due to a number of economical, political and practical issues, none of those endeavours has been effectively implemented.

6. A mandatory need for a rational reform of the English language
Instead of progressing smoothly in learning new linguistic items and actually making use of them to achieve and promote cross-cultural communication, English language learners have to make additional efforts for the sake of complying with the correctness of those incorrect items. Consequently, millions of learners all over the world are forced to lose much time and postpone effective communication for the sake of preserving a well-formedness which is originally ill-formed. The loss and delay prove to be far more serious, especially when we take into account those excessively large amounts of time, energy and money that are spent daily on maintaining, learning and using those anomalies. What is logically needed is to make language comply with the nature of our mental faculties rather than the other way round. That is to make the "natural language" sound really natural.

Thanks to the dominance of its speaking countries, however, English is now the first international lingua franca of the globe. It is one of the most used languages on the Internet all over the world. It is, moreover, the major medium of communication among the six languages that are officially adopted by the United Nations. The number of people who use English as a second or foreign language far exceeds the total number of its native speakers (British Council, n. d.). More importantly, English has become a compulsory language in many vital domains like medicine, aviation, business, communications and international politics. Unfortunately, the first global language continues to run under a remarkably distorted system of rules. It comes out that the need for a rational reform of the English language proves to be critical and more urgent than ever before. The aim is clear and self-explanatory. That is to make the first international lingua franca of the twenty-first century much easier to learn and more efficient to use.

Conclusion
More than ever before, people from different parts of our present globe need to communicate with each other more efficiently. According to the exigencies of the twenty-first century, this should take place within a much shorter time, with less efforts and at a much lower cost. Actually, language remains the most effective means of communication. During the last decades, the linguistic meaning and its corresponding linguistic means have been remarkably underestimated by an excessive shift of focus from the rules of usage to the rules of use and from text to context. Accordingly, much importance has been attributed to the contextual meaning at the expense of the linguistic meaning. Normally, verbal communication achievement requires the recognition of the intended contextual meaning. However, such recognition depends inextricably on the understanding of its corresponding linguistic meaning. It comes out that, in normal communicative verbal events, the mastery of the linguistic system stands out as a primary condition for communication to take place. With regard to intercultural communication, English is distinctively the first global lingua franca of the present world. However, its linguistic system continues to suffer from a large amount of inherent inconsistencies. This evidently brings about a multitude of tangible issues. Day in day out, and throughout the whole world, huge amounts of time, efforts and money are spoilt on learning and using "correctly" incorrect linguistic items. In

addition to that, this considerably hinders and delays the achievement of communication. From a high-order functional and pragmatic point of view, it is high time the English language underwent a rational reform. The ultimate goal is to promote local and global communication.

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