

Relationship Analysis Lost in Translation



Jack Metz

Loras College

5/15/2012

Lost in Translation – Relationship Analysis

Despite being filmed in only 27 days, the film *Lost in Translation* still was able to grasp the full composition of relationships. The film involves an American actor traveling to Japan, who is well past his prime and relegated to doing commercial spots for large sums of money, while his relationship with his wife back in the U.S. strains due to distance and lack of luster after twenty-five years of marriage. On the other side of the spectrum, a young woman with no meaning of life, and in search of what it has to offer for her, is in Japan supporting her husband, of two years, as he does photo shoots for celebrities. Director Sophia Coppola is able to create a work of art on the screen with the depth of relationships as the foreign territory, and the relationships with each spouse bring together the two characters, Bob and Charlotte. When all the aspects are looked at while watching this movie from the characters and story, it is the relationships in this film that make it one of the greatest films ever because it pulls at the inner-strings of each viewer that everyone will gain a different perspective and come out of the film with a different meanings.

This movie experiences a lot with nonverbal communications, much like relationships that we see formed today. According to Rodriguez (2011) nonverbal communication is any communicative behavior other than written or spoken language that creates meaning for someone. The first relationship to discuss is Bob Harris, played by Bill Murray, and Japan as the levels of communication between Bob and the entourage of Japanese studio people that are assigned to make sure he gets into his hotel smoothly and to the commercial shoots on time. Before Bob gets to the Hotel, though, through the cinematography the camera shows him in a taxi, up against the window glass, taking in downtown Japan and through nonverbal communication one can see his overwhelmed look on his face looking at all the lit-up signage

and buildings in Japanese language and not being able to understand it. However, he sees a billboard of himself and the whiskey product that he is promoting, and it is noticeable how unwilling he was to be in Japan, leaving his kids and wife back home. Upon Bob's arrival to the hotel he cannot fully understand what the people are telling him in Japanese, which leads to him having to pick up what he can from nonverbal messages. Interpersonal perception is the process of observing and interpreting the behaviors of other people and perception is the process of experiencing the world around you and making sense out of what you experience (Rodriguez 2011). Bob Harris had to observe his surroundings when was being driven through downtown Japan and has to interpret what Japanese citizens are doing and since he is not fluent in their customs it starts to drain on him so when he meets fellow American, Charlotte, I believe they find a connection in both being in surroundings where they are vulnerable and only have each other to remember about back home. Part of the film's attempt to make the viewer feel for the characters is that the film does not use subtitles to clear up and translate the Japanese language. This is most notable in a scene where Bob takes Charlotte to the hospital following her revealing that she had a problem with her toe. Everyone in the hospital spoke Japanese which led to the two characters trying to pick up actions done by the hospital employees. In the x-ray room, Charlotte is looking at her injured toe as the doctor explains in Japanese what happened to her, but she has no idea what he is saying. Similarly, when that is taking place, Bob is out in the waiting room trying to interact with a Japanese patient who is apparently saying something funny due to the two ladies in the background hysterically laughing as Bob tries to decipher what is being said. This situation can be seen as a non-verbal situation but could also fall under the ethnocentrism concept where Charlotte and Bob are only able to view the Japanese culture from their own beliefs and own cultural frame.

An important concept that can be used to explain this film is Bob's culture shock to the Japan culture. With the knowledge that Charlotte has prior Japanese friends suggests that she has either been there before or has been in Japan long enough with her husband to gain friends and as a result her culture shock would not be as fresh as Bob's. According to Rodriguez (2011) culture shock can present itself whenever there is exposure to a culture that has a worldview different than the usual one expected. Bob also experiences many of the characteristics that go along with the culture shock such as the feeling of loss, confusion, and even anger due to the loss of social rules that he is used to in America. The four phases that accompany culture shock also were shown during Bob's trip to Japan and starts with the honeymoon phase. The phase is filled with feelings and euphoria that the outsider may tend to notice about the culture that he prefers over his own culture. This phase is maybe best seen in the opening scene where Bob is taking in all the bright lights and language signs in downtown Japan. Another example is when Bob is calling his wife back home and makes a statement that he wants to start eating healthier and to do that he believes he should bring back Japanese food to the states to kick off that healthy start. The crisis stage includes feelings of anxiety and even anger when faced with norms of the culture, and this is best seen when Bob is at the commercial shoot and the director is criticizing and correcting what Bob needs to do in the commercial and Bob's interpreter tells him a shortened, sometimes in two words, what the director just told him, but Bob knows there is more to it and just wants the shoot to be over with. The adjustment phase is characterized by the gradual acceptance and a shift in behavior or attitude that makes the culture more bearable (Rodriguez 2011). Coupled with the excitement that the relationship with Charlotte brought into his life, this stage is best scene during the hospital scene where Bob just learns to have fun with people talking to him in Japanese, and tries to go along with what they are saying and even learn the way to correctly

pronounce the words, but to not much success. The final phase of adaption never really presents itself since the trip only lasted at the most a week, but Bob always viewed himself as a visitor to the country and knew that his time in Japan would come to a close at some point.

Charlotte's side of the relationship deals with her husband who she decided to follow to Japan as he does photo shoots. Charlotte has a few friends in Japan, but at the same time she feels that she and her husband are drifting apart as they never have time for each other. Charlotte's self-concept plays a role as it impacts the way she interacts with the world and communicates with others. The six identities of interpersonal interaction can also be assessed because Charlotte does not know who she is in this life and what she is doing with her life. Her husband looks at her as his supporter, but probably does not see that she has a need to get attention and he does not reciprocate the attention. This negligent behavior leads to her attraction to Bob, who is willing to make her feel needed. One concept that helps form the six identities is social comparison, which is the process of noticing how you compare and contrast to other individuals with whom you interact (Rodriguez 2011). In the movie, under so much distress and on the verge of crying, she attempts to call her best friend back in the U.S., but her friend has no time for her, and whenever she goes out it is always with her husband's friends, who she has no interests in and finds to be rather dumb. From the combination of looking at herself and her social comparison she creates a low self-esteem, which includes perceptions of traits of her skills, abilities, talents, which she feels she has not found out yet, and her relative appearance to other people. This concept leads to the eventual friendship formed with Bob, who visited the hotel bar often and would see her hanging out with her husband's friends.

The relationship between Bob and Charlotte is the main attraction in this film as they come from two different sides of life, with Charlotte just fresh out of school, and Bob in a mid-life

crisis, of sorts, taking any job opportunity that can guarantee him money. One of the first concepts to explore in this relationship is the age group and the rare relationship that is formed through that. Age reflects the social identity and worldview that people are brought up in and the way people form most of their beliefs. As Rodriguez (2011) explained one way to better understand the worldview of people from different age groups, and consequently their communication patterns, is to view them in terms of generations to see how they see the world and the type of interpersonal communication that they are involved in. With the twenty plus age difference between the two characters is makes for a good example when both are lying on the bed and Charlotte asks Bob if life ever gets easier. With Bob's twenty-five years of marriage and Charlotte's two years, she attempts to understand if there is a chance that her relationship can last that long.

The relationship between Charlotte and Bob make a Movement through interpersonal relationships and can be analyzed with Knapp's Relationship Escalation Model as stages in their relationship are identified on a basis of verbal and nonverbal communication that occurs between two people in the relationship (Rodriguez 2011). The first step of the model, initiating, can happen quick, but in this instance it took several nights for Charlotte and Bob. Bob was sitting at the hotel bar after the commercial shoot and Charlotte was sitting at a table listening, but not interacting, to the conversation her husband was having with a friend he knew. Charlotte and Bob would make eye contact from time to time and Charlotte would laugh from afar at how goofy Bob looked with clips on his suit jacket, to make it fit him, from his commercial shoot and Bob would acknowledge her glances. Charlotte returned to her room, but not before sending a table snack to Bob, to accompany his drinking. The initiating stage is completed when Charlotte cannot sleep the following night and walks down to the hotel bar at 4 a.m. to find an over-served

Bob, and that leads into the experimenting. During the experimenting stages is when the two characters find themselves getting to know why each other are in Japan and spending every day together, until Bob leaves to go back to the U.S. In the intensifying stage self-disclosure is key and that is where the two are lying in bed, as mentioned earlier, and are less formal together just talking about relationships in their lives and how to find meaning in the world. During the integrating stage, Charlotte starts inviting Bob out to hang out with a few of her Japanese friends that she knew prior to meeting Bob then it is just them two hanging out in the Japanese culture and enjoying each other's company. The bonding stage is not so much an announcement to anyone, but also where the viewer finds out the real emotions that are connected to this relationship between Bob and Charlotte. They really are not sure how to say goodbye to each other, but with Bob's Japanese entourage around to escort him to the airport a casual good-bye is made between the two, but Bob knows that is not enough. When being driven to the airport he spots Charlotte walking through a Japanese street and gets out of the car and chases after her. They embrace and Bob whispers something in Charlotte's ear that is not audible for the viewer to hear, and end with a kiss. According to the film's IMDB page, the line that Bob whispers to Charlotte is "I have to be leaving...but I won't let that come between us, okay?" in which she responds okay. That final line explains how important their relationship was to each other and how they really do not want it to end but, in a sense, reality of going back to the U.S. sets in.

In addition to the Knapp Model, other concepts played an integral part in how the relationship was strengthening and the increase in attraction as the two characters spent more time together. Proximity, which deals with proximity and states that the accessibility to the person makes an attraction grow, and in Charlotte and Bob's case the situation of being in the same hotel was all they needed to grow their attraction to one another. Another concept is

reinforcement, which extends attraction when people validate and support the other person's values, beliefs, and attitudes. Charlotte was lacking the support and validation from her husband, who was often doing his own thing, many times where Charlotte had to invite herself to be around him, but with Bob, Charlotte was able to get the validation and Bob gave her the attention she needed. Approachability is the final concept that plays a role in how attraction grows throughout the Knapp Model, and it states that people feel more attracted to people who are more approachable, and in *Lost in Translation*, Bob was very approachable since he was used to the attention of being a public star, but the fact that he was alone in Japan and found companionship with Charlotte, who was alone too, grew to care and love for each other.

Interpersonal interaction occurs when the communication between two or more individuals is determined by their interpersonal relationship and individual characteristics, and not driven by the social groups or categories to which they respectively belong (Rodriguez 2011). This embodies the film, *Lost in Translation*, as Bob and Charlotte formed a relationship that would seem rare by most. As first glance there would seem to be nothing that would be similar about the two, besides their American background, that would make them a match, but they find out that, regardless of age, everyone has those challenging times in their lives and they found the solution in each other. The choice to make the ending consist of the characters embracing each other and whispering something in the ear that the viewer is not able to hear only epitomizes the creativity of the film since the semi-open ending can linger with the viewer and encourage their own endings. For me the ending really was not an ending for them at all, but only the beginning for something more for the characters as they move on in life.

Resources

Rodriguez, J. I., & Hutchinson, C. C. (2011). *Two to Tango: Interpersonal Communication for Everyday Living*. California: National Social Science Press.

Lost in Translation (2003) - IMDb. (n.d.). *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*.

Retrieved May 13, 2012, from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0335266/>