

Understanding Intercultural Communication

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CHAPTER 1

WHY STUDY INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION?



CHAPTER OUTLINE

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As we enter the twenty-first century, direct contact with culturally different people in our neighborhoods, communities, schools, and workplaces is an inescapable part of life. With immigrants and minority group members representing nearly 30 percent of the present workforce in the United States, practicing intercultural communication flexibility is especially critical in today's global world.

Flexible intercultural communication means managing cultural differences adaptively and creatively in a wide variety of situations. The underlying values of a culture (e.g., individual competitiveness versus group harmony) often shape communication expectations and attitudes. How we define a communication problem in a work team and how we approach the communication process itself are also likely to vary across cultures, ethnicities, situations, and individuals. For example, some cultural groups (e.g., German and Swiss work teams) may believe that addressing a workplace problem directly and assertively can be stimulating and spark further new ideas. Other cultural groups (e.g., Chinese and Korean work teams) may believe that approaching a conflict issue indirectly and tactfully can facilitate a more harmonious communication process.

With such layered complexity facing global and domestic diversity issues, we must practice intercultural communication sensitivity when dealing with culturally different others. This chapter examines the reasons why we should understand intercultural communication in diverse contexts. The chapter is developed in three sections. First, we offer several practical reasons why we should pay special attention to the study of intercultural communication. Next, we define the major characteristics of culture. We end by summarizing this first chapter and "stamping" your intercultural passport, continuing you on your intercultural journey.

PRACTICAL REASONS TO STUDY INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

With rapid changes in the global economy, technology, transportation systems, and immigration policies, the world is becoming a small, intersecting community. We find ourselves having increased contact with people who are culturally different. In a global workforce, people bring with them different work habits and cultural practices. For example, cultural strangers may approach problem-solving tasks or nonverbal emotional expression issues differently. They may develop friendships and romantic relationships with different expectations and rhythms. They may also have different communication desires, end goals, and emphases in an intercultural encounter. In this twenty-first century global world, people are constantly moving across borders, into and out of a country. Neighborhoods and communities are changing. In what was once a homogeneous community, we may now find more diversity and cultural values in flux.

The study of intercultural communication is about the study of communication that involves, at least in

part, cultural group membership differences. It is about acquiring the necessary knowledge and dynamic skills to manage such differences appropriately and effectively. It is also about developing a creative mindset to see things from different angles without rigid prejudgment. There are indeed many practical reasons for studying intercultural communication. We offer eight reasons here: increased global workplace heterogeneity, increased domestic workforce diversity, engaging in creative problem solving, comprehending the role of technology in global communication, facilitating better multicultural health care communication, enhancing intercultural relationship satisfaction, fostering global and intrapersonal peace, and deepening cultural self-awareness and other-awareness.

Adjusting to Global Workforce Heterogeneity

In this global age, it is inevitable that employees and customers from dissimilar cultures are in constant contact with one another—whether it is through face-to-face, cellular phone, Skype, smart phone, or e-mail

JEOPARDY BOX 1.1 TOP FIVE MOST VALUABLE GLOBAL BRANDS BY DOLLAR VALUE

Brand name	Industry
1. Coca-Cola	Beverages
2. IBM	Business services
3. Microsoft	Computer software
4. Google	Internet services
5. GE (General Electric)	Diversified

Note: All U.S.-owned.

Source: <http://www.interbrand.com/en/knowledge/best-global-brands/best-global-brands-2008/best-global-brands-2010.aspx> (retrieved March 20, 2011).

contacts. To begin, do you know which companies have the most valuable global brands? Take a guess and then check out Jeopardy Box 1.1. Workplace heterogeneity on the global level represents both opportunities and challenges to individuals and organizations. Individuals at the forefront of workplace diversity must rise to the challenge of serving as global employees and leaders (Bhawuk & Sakuda, 2009; Moodian, 2010).

Many U.S. Americans are becoming global employees while staying on U.S. soil. An increasing number of computer workers in the United States are freelancing for companies overseas. In just one year, the number of international companies—from the UK, Australia, China, Pakistan, and India—that hired U.S. computer workers to work remotely jumped from 1,429 to 4,285 (Cook, 2010). In addition, hundreds of thousands of U.S. workers are currently working in overseas locations. U.S. corporations spend approximately \$25 billion annually on corporate relocation, and they also spend approximately \$16 million annually to transfer their employees for overseas assignments (Global Trends Relocation Survey, 2010).

Despite the number of U.S. workers overseas, international relocation researchers estimate that the proportion of U.S. workers who fail in their global assignments (i.e., return prematurely) ranges from approximately 10 percent to 20 percent—with the highest failure rates associated with assignments in developing countries (Global Mobility Effectiveness Survey, 2009). Contrast this with the fact that only

6 percent of assignees from Asia-Pacific-based corporations returned to their home countries before the end date of their international assignments. Although most U.S. international employees are considered technically competent, they may lack effective adaptive intercultural communication skills to interact appropriately and effectively in the new culture (Moran, Youngdahl, & Moran, 2009; Palthe, 2009; Storti, 2009).

Beyond workplace mobility and internationalization, the world's population is aging. Retirement for the 60-and-older ("baby boomer") population has begun, symbolizing a "graying economy" and an expected mass retirement. In the United States alone, the fastest growing part of the workforce will be of retirement age. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the percentage of workers over the age of 65 will increase from 15 percent in 2006 to 19.7 percent by 2014 (Kinsman, 2006). Unbelievably, baby boomers, who accounted for 56 percent of full-time workers in 2007, will increase to 65.2 percent by 2014 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).

With the upcoming exodus of workers anticipated as a result of retirement, many countries are wondering how to replace the skills and knowledge that will be lost. In Japan, new products and services are being created especially for the retired population, such as health foods, adult education classes, and planned communities (Coleman, 2007). In the United States, many companies are starting mentoring programs to help with older-adult transition issues. The baby boomer is a potential bonanza for innovative global companies planning how to appeal to this aging population that will have money to spend. Equally relevant will be how to retain the important work experience and institutional wisdom that may be lost when this population is no longer working.

Global managers and employees, international human resource groups, global product development teams, multiethnic customer service groups, and international marketing and sales teams can all benefit from mastering intercultural communication competencies (J. Bennet, 2009; Gupta, 2009; Hyatt, Evans, & Haque, 2009). Any groups or individuals that must communicate on a daily basis with culturally diverse coworkers, clients, or customers can reap the rewards

of acquiring the awareness, knowledge, and skills of flexible intercultural communication. Intercultural communication knowledge and skills are needed to solve problems, manage conflicts, and forge new visions on both global and domestic levels (Bhawuk, Landis, & Munusamy, 2009; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

Adapting to Domestic Workforce Diversity

Even if we do not venture beyond our national borders, cultural diversity becomes a crucial part of our everyday work lives (see Blog Pic 1.1—Workplace diversity). The study of intercultural communication on the U.S. domestic front is especially critical for several reasons. First, according to U.S. Census Bureau, we are now a nation with increased multicultural complexities and nuances—of the nation's approximately 307 million people, 65 percent are whites/non-Hispanics, 16 percent are Latinos/Hispanics, 13 percent are African Americans/blacks, 4.5 percent are Asian Americans, 1 percent reported as American Indians/Alaskan Natives, and 0.2 percent identified themselves as Native Hawaiians and

Pacific Islanders. Note that 1.7 percent of the population chose to identify themselves as two or more races.

The most sweeping demographic change in the United States is occurring in the Latino/a population. It is projected that in the year 2050, the Latino/a population in the United States will more than double in size (to approximately 30% of the total U.S. population), followed closely by an increase in the Asian American population (to approximately 9%). The African American population will remain stable (estimated at 15%), whereas the non-Hispanic white population will decline significantly (to approximately 46%) on the national level (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Hawaii, California, and New Mexico are the three most racially diverse states in the United States. Conversely, Maine, Vermont, and West Virginia are listed as the three most homogeneous states, with non-Hispanic whites making up over 93 percent of those states' populations (check out Jeopardy Boxes 1.2 and 1.3). The highest percentage of individuals of mixed-race identifiers were reported to live in Hawaii, Alaska, and California.

Second, we are moving at an accelerated pace with increased foreign-born diversity in the nation. According



Blog Pic 1.1 Workplace diversity has become an inevitable part of our daily life.

JEOPARDY BOX 1.2 TOP FIVE MOST RACIALLY/ETHNICALLY DIVERSE STATES IN THE UNITED STATES

1. Hawaii	77.3% minority population
2. California	59.9%
3. New Mexico	59.5%
4. Texas	54.7%
5. New York	41.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFF-People?_submenuid=people_10&_sse=on (retrieved July 17, 2011).

JEOPARDY BOX 1.3 TOP FIVE MOST RACIALLY/ETHNICALLY HOMOGENEOUS STATES IN THE UNITED STATES

1. Maine	5.6% minority population
2. Vermont	5.7%
3. West Virginia	6.8%
4. New Hampshire	7.7%
5. North Dakota	11.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFF-People?_submenuid=people_10&_sse=on (retrieved July 17, 2011).

to U.S. Census data for 2010, 36.7 million people representing 12 percent of the total U.S. population are foreign-born nationals. Another 33 million (i.e., 11%) are native born with at least one foreign-born parent, making more than one in five people in the population either first- or second-generation U.S. residents or citizens. Among the foreign born, more than half were born in Latin America, and almost one-third were born in Mexico. Nearly one in three foreign-born individuals entered the country in 2000 or later. Other foreign born were either from Asia or Europe, and the remaining small percentage were born in other regions of the world. Basically, current and future generations in the United States include many individuals whose parents or grandparents were born in a Latin American or Asian region. Thus, the influence of multicultural and diverse customers is expanding in every industry. Auto makers, retailers, banks, and media and entertainment industries must learn to reach out to these multiethnic customers with increased intercultural sensitivity and skills.

Third, skilled and highly educated immigrants (especially in the areas of computer and engineering service industries) play a critical role in U.S. advanced technology industries. The payrolls of leading information technology (IT) companies such as Intel and Microsoft include many highly skilled and foreign-born employees. Many U.S. immigrants have also contributed positively to the social and economic development of the nation. The richness of cultural diversity in U.S. society has led to dramatic breakthroughs in the fields of physics, medicine, science, and technology. Attention to diversity issues bolsters employee morale, creates an inclusive climate in the workplace, and sparks creative innovation (Cortes & Wilkinson, 2009; Rink & Jehn, 2010).

Engaging in Creative Multicultural Problem Solving

Our ability to value different approaches to problem solving and mindfully move away from traditional "either/or" binary thinking can expand diverse options in managing team intercultural problems. According to creativity research (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Sternberg, 1999; Tharp & Reiter, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2010a), we learn more from people who are different from us than from those who are similar to us. At the individual level, creativity involves a process of taking in new ideas and of being thrown into chaos. If the uncertainty or chaos is managed with an open-minded attitude, team members can come up with a synergistic perspective that involves the best of all viewpoints. A synergistic perspective means combining the best of all cultural approaches in solving a workplace problem.

At the small-group level of research, results indicate that the quality of ideas produced in ethnically diverse groups has been rated significantly higher by experts than that in ethnically homogeneous groups (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996; Oetzel, 2009). Of course, culturally heterogeneous teams also have more conflicts or communication struggles than homogeneous work teams. However, if such conflicts are managed competently and flexibly, the outcome of heterogeneous team negotiations often results in a better-quality product than that produced by a

homogeneous team. Many recruiting experts say that they are launching aggressive campaigns to recruit top management candidates who have the leadership experience and the multicultural problem-solving skills in coordinating diverse team issues such as culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Workplace trend reports indicate that losing an employee can cost a company up to four times an employee's salary. Losing a vital employee with significant ties to a multicultural or diverse community can cost many missed business opportunities and fruitful outcomes.

Culturally and ethnically diverse teams have the potential to solve problems creatively because of several factors. Some of these factors include a greater variety of viewpoints brought to bear on the issue, a higher level of critical analysis of alternatives, and a lower probability of groupthink because of the heterogeneous composition of the group (Oetzel, 2005; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Comprehending the Role of Technology in Global Communication

As global citizens, we are moving at an incredible rate of speed thanks in large part to the Internet. The Internet is the central hub—the channel that offers us a wide-open space to communicate globally and to connect with individuals from diverse walks of life. More importantly, this hub pulses with a speed and efficiency never seen before. Would you like to connect with your preschool classmate? Within five seconds, you can transport yourself into one of the many social networks and find your long-lost friend. Consider the following startling facts:

1. It took radio more than thirty years to reach 60 million people, fifteen years for television to reach 60 million people, and the Internet three years to reach more than 90 million people;
2. In a one-month period, YouTube.com had 100 million viewers in the United States watching 5.9 billion YouTube videos;
3. Although Google and Yahoo! websites receive approximately 280 million visitors per month, the approximately 116 million Facebook members

spend much more time surfing this site (over seven hours per month);

4. Ninety-three percent of U.S. Americans use cell phones or wireless devices; one-third of those are on "smartphones."

Sources: Hof, McWilliams, & Saveri (1998); "Hulu continues ascent" (2009).

In this twenty-first century, both individualists and collectivists, regardless of what cultures they are from, are at a crossroads of redefining, exploring, and reinventing their identities (Ting-Toomey, 2010b). On a global scale, new generations of individuals are attempting to create a third identity—a hybrid identity that fuses the global and local cultures together. This global connection is so appealing, and so very persuasive, that it constantly shapes and makes us reexamine who we are or what we want to become. Technology allows us to develop relationships across the barriers of time, space, geography, and cultural-ethnic boundaries. Because 84 percent of U. S. children have home Internet access, spending an average of one and one-half hours per day on the Internet (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), when discussing important issues in intercultural and interracial communication, we can no longer afford to ignore the powerful influence of modern technology (see Blog Pic 1.2).

Technology drives what we listen to, what we download, and what we want to look like. It also forges a sense of global communal belonging when individuals do not relate to their particular cultural or ethnic group membership. While searching for a sense of belonging to a group, individuals end up finding each other in cyberspace. Understanding the impact of technology on every aspect of our lives will allow us to use communication productively—to engage in increased awareness, dialog, and collaboration between the local culture level and the global consumerism level.

By the way, do you know which countries have the highest ratio of Internet users? And which countries have the highest ratio of cellular mobile phone subscribers? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Boxes 1.4 and 1.5. As we communicate across the globe through various electronic or wireless media, flexible intercultural communication becomes critical in such a global connective environment.



Blog Pic 1.2 We can communicate and connect from anywhere.

JEOPARDY BOX 1.4 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST RATIO OF INTERNET USERS

Country	% of Population Penetration
1. United Kingdom	82
2. (South) Korea	80.9
3. Germany	79.9
4. Japan	78.4
5. United States	78.2

Source: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm> (retrieved March 2011)

Facilitating Better Multicultural Health Care Communication

As borders continue to merge and divide, one area rich in conversation is the state of multicultural health care (Anand & Lahiri, 2009). When Liliana was giving

birth to her daughter, the doctor was surprised that her husband, Senel, did not stand by Liliana. He did not coach her along or support her through the various stages of labor. In fact, he was not even in the delivery room to witness the delivery of a beautiful baby girl named Aryana. The doctor was quite perturbed and puzzled. Several months later, during a routine baby check-up, in chatting with Liliana, the doctor finally understood that Senel was not in the delivery room because of his Muslim faith and belief. For Muslims, birth comes through the "house" with a midwife in attendance, a very sacred place, and no man should be inside the room during the baby's delivery. Similarly, Native Indians in Belize and Panama also believe that the father should not be in the delivery room with the mother or the baby or else harm can come to both of them. If you were a trained nurse or health care professional, would you likely be aware of this religious tradition concerning childbirth?

JEOPARDY BOX 1.5 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST RATIO OF CELLULAR MOBILE PHONE USERS 2009

Country
1. Montenegro
2. Hong Kong
3. Saudi Arabia
4. Russia
5. Lithuania

Source: http://www.ofta.gov.hk/en/datastat/key_stat.html; <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-arabia-sees-mobile-broadband-users-increase-291245.html>; <http://www.delfi.lt/news/economy/ITbusiness/vel-augo-mobiliojo-rysiu-abonentu-skaicius.d?id=29326053>; <http://www.bit.prime-tass.ru/news/show.asp?id=79606&ct=news>; http://www.cgviesti.net/267703_Na-kraju-2009-vise-od-1-29-miliona-korisnika-mobilne-telefonije.html Retrieved on (retrieved July 17, 2011).

Many immigrants and multicultural citizens have high expectations that health care workers will respect their personal beliefs and health care practices. This is not always the case. For example, Fadiman (1997) documents a case in which a Hmong child became brain-dead after doctors in Merced, California, continuously miscommunicated with the parents. The clash between traditional Hmong beliefs and the role of Western medicine resulted in a tragic incident.

Multicultural health care in this global age is an additional concern because of the aging population. Many must agonize over the rising cost of providing quality care to aging parents and grandparents. They also must struggle with their own cultural and personal values of taking care of their aging parents at home or sending them away to a health care facility.

Additionally, immigrants with limited English skills must often struggle to communicate with the hospital staff, nurses, or doctors to convey a simple message. Many immigrants also use their children as translators—which easily tips the balance between the parental role and the child's role in a status-oriented family system. Worse, even if the child speaks English fluently, she or he may not know how to translate all the medical terms or medication prescriptions for a parent.

In addition, different cultural beliefs and traditions surround the concept of "death." For many U.S. Americans, death is a taboo topic. Euphemisms are

often used, such as "He is no longer with us," "She passed away peacefully," "She's in a better place," or "May he rest in peace." There are also a number of different cultural traditions in terms of burial practices. For example, the tradition among Orthodox Jews is to bury the deceased before sundown the next day and to have postdeath rituals that last for several days. When Muslims approach death, they may wish to face Mecca, their holy city in Saudi Arabia, and recite passages from the Qur'an (Purnell & Paulanka, 2008). Some Mexicans hold an elaborate ceremony known as a *velorio*, which may appear like a big party; in fact, they are celebrating the person's life because she or he has actually lived it fully. Likewise, the Irish hold a *wake*, and they eat and drink and celebrate the person's bountiful life. However, if you do not subscribe to any of the foregoing rituals, you would likely find it odd that some of these groups actually laugh and sing and dance during painful periods of grieving.

Concepts such as **ethnocentrism** and **ethnorelativism** and constructive intercultural conflict management skills such as **mindful listening** and **reframing** (as explored in the next few chapters) can serve as foundational building blocks for effective multicultural health care communication. Health care professionals and service providers can all benefit from mastering the knowledge and the skills of adaptive intercultural communication competencies.

Enhancing Intercultural Relationship Satisfaction

A meaningful life often entails deep relationship contacts with our families, close friends, and loved ones. However, with close contact often comes relationship disappointments and expectancy violations. If we already feel inept in handling different types of interpersonal relationships with people from our own cultural groups, imagine the challenges (plus, of course, the rewards) of dealing with additional cultural factors in our intimate relationship development process. Interpersonal friction provides a sound testing ground for the resilience of our intimate relationships.

According to expert researchers in interpersonal conflict (Canary & Lahey, 2006; Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010), it is not the *frequency* of conflict that determines whether we have a satisfying or

dissatisfying intimate relationship. Rather, it is the *competencies* that we apply in managing our conflicts that will move the intercultural-intimate relationship onto a constructive or destructive path.

Even if we do not venture out of our hometown, the places for people to meet, to socialize, and to date are changing. An interesting phenomenon is online dating, both domestically and globally. In the past, dating was considered a private affair. Now, online dating services, chat rooms, and other social networking services allow people to meet on the basis of criteria they find important. Some people may disclose their ethnicities, and some people may not, in the early stage of courtship and flirting. Brooks (2003) reports that 40 million U.S. individuals date online! With Match.com and other various dating services, the supply is definitely in demand in this "hook-up" age.

With the dramatic rise of intercultural marriages and dating relationships in the United States, intimate relationships are a fertile ground for culture shock and clashes. According to Rosenfeld (2007), more than 7 percent of the nation's 59 million married couples in 2005 were interracial, compared with less than 2 percent in 1970. Alaska is reported as the top-ranked U.S. state with a biracial heritage population, followed by Hawaii and California. The Pew Research Center ("*Almost all Millennials*," 2010) conducted a study of over two thousand members of the Y (or "Millennial") Generation, those born after 1980. Results indicate that an overwhelming majority, regardless of race, are fine with a family member's marriage to someone of a different racial or ethnic group. When asked about marriage into a group to which they do not belong, nine of ten say they would be fine with a family member's marriage to an African American (88%), a Hispanic American (91%), an Asian American (93%), or a white American (92%). Another finding is that 54 percent have an interracial friend. Teenagers of today are often more receptive to developing close friendships and dating relationships across all racial lines compared with when data tracking began.

On the topic of intercultural family relationship satisfaction, for many U.S. adoptive families, which countries do you think most foreign-born adopted children come from? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 1.6. The U.S. Census Bureau's very first

profile of adopted children reveals that 1.6 million adopted kids under age eighteen are now living in U.S. households. Although foreign adoptions are increasing and getting the most headlines, the report shows that 87 percent of adoptees from diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds under eighteen were born in the United States.

As more U.S. families are becoming families of color, the challenge is to grapple with issues of race, ethnicity, and even religion. For example, in a documentary entitled *Off and Running* (<http://offand-runningthefilm.com/>), Avery Klein-Cloud is your typical sixteen-year-old teenager—who happens to be an African American raised by Jewish adoptive mothers. Avery has two adopted brothers: Samuel, who is biracial (African American and white), and Zay-Zay, who is Korean. Raised with Jewish faith in a lesbian household, Avery goes on a quest to find her birth mother and, as a result, experiences a true identity crisis. At one point, as she struggles with her newfound black identity, she seeks help from a counselor and admits that "I don't know how to be black." Her identity crisis and challenges depict her struggle to find the answer to the question: "Who am I?" Beyond cultural and religious identity questions in many of these multicultural-multiracial family households, other relevant issues include where to live and raise a biracial family, reaching out and making connections with those ethnically similar to the adopted child, and understanding the dilemmas of a child's or an adolescent's multiracial-multietnic identity development stages.

Understanding the possible internal and external obstacles that affect an intimate intercultural

JEOPARDY BOX 1.6 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF BIRTH FOR FOREIGN-BORN ADOPTED CHILDREN UNDER EIGHTEEN IN THE UNITED STATES, 2010

1. China (Mainland)
2. Ethiopia
3. Russia
4. South Korea
5. Ukraine

Source: U.S. Department of State, 2010, http://adoption.state.gov/about_us/statistics.php (retrieved March 25, 2011).

relationship can increase our acceptance of our intimate partners and family members. Intercultural relationship conflict, when managed competently, can bring about positive changes in a relationship. It allows the conflict partners to use the conflict opportunity to reassess the state of the relationship. It opens doors for family members to discuss identity struggles and family dynamic issues. Culture-sensitive, respectful, and empathetic communication can increase relational and family closeness and deepen cultural self-awareness. The power of being understood on an authentic level can greatly enhance relationship quality, satisfaction, and personal insight.

Fostering Global and Intrapersonal Peace

The need for global peace has never been more apparent. A look at the headlines in any international news magazines or newspapers in early 2011 and the headline news spotted: "Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt, ... Libya" and the revolutionary protests staged by citizens across the Middle East. The role of technology galvanized the young and the old to come together and demand their citizenship rights, democracy, and freedom. As the famed journalist Fareed Zakaria (2011) notes, "It's too simple to say that what happened in Tunisia and Egypt happened because of Facebook. But technology—satellite television, computers, mobile phones and the Internet—has played a powerful role in informing, educating and connecting people in the region. Such advances empower individuals and disempower the state.... Today's technology are all many-to-many, networks in which everyone is connected but no one is in control. That's bad for anyone trying to suppress information" (p. 31).

Not to mention the fact that more than ten years ago, the United States had never experienced terrorism so close at hand as on September 11, 2001, when almost three thousand individuals perished in the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The death toll included individuals from many other countries, such as Australia, China, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, and Sweden (<http://cnn.com>).

In part because of this event, in the past five years interest in pursuing advanced college degrees in Peace

and/or Social Justice Studies has gained tremendous momentum around the world. There are currently over 450 bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs and concentrations in forty countries and thirty-eight U.S. states to obtain a degree in Peace and Justice (Harris & Shuster, 2007). Programs are varied, such as at Depauw University, where you can major or minor in Conflict Studies, or you can join the Citizen Peacebuilding Program at the University of California, Irvine, or head off to the School of Peace Studies at Kyung Hee University in South Korea, which has been established since 1984.

In addition, other organizations have been dedicated to promoting peace, cultural, and spiritual development, and betterment of humankind. The Kyoto Symposium Organization in California, for example, was founded in 2004 to organize and administer the Kyoto Prize, awarded to individuals who have made "outstanding contributions to the betterment of humanity" (<http://www.kyotoprize.org>). In 2008, one such recipient was McGill University's Professor Emeritus Charles Taylor. In the Kyoto awards booklet, a beautiful bio and quotation exemplifies why peace and humanitarian tolerance are so relevant in our twenty-first century life: "Dr. Taylor is an outstanding philosopher who advocates communitarianism and multiculturalism from the perspective of holistic individualism.... He has constructed and endeavored to put into practice a social philosophy that allows human beings with different historical, traditional, and cultural backgrounds to retain their multiple identities and to live in happiness with each other" (http://www.inamori-f.or.jp/laureates/k24_c_charles/ctn_e.html). This quote summarizes Dr. Taylor's vision, in which he believes that all people, and all groups of people, deserve recognition for their distinctive humanistic qualities despite historical rejections.

To practice global peacemaking, we must hold a firm commitment that considerations of fairness should apply to all identity groups. We must be willing to consider sharing economic and social resources with underprivileged groups to level the fear and resentment factors. We must start practicing win-win collaborative dialogs with individuals or groups we may currently consider our enemies. We must display a mindful listening attitude even if we do not like the

individuals or agree with their ideas or viewpoints. In displaying our respect for other nations or groups of individuals, we may open doors for more dialogs and deeper contacts. Human respect is a prerequisite for any type or form of intercultural or interethnic communication.

Global peacebuilding is closely connected to intrapersonal peacebuilding. If we are at peace with ourselves, we will hold more compassion and caring for others around us. If we are constantly angry and fighting against ourselves, we will likely spread our anger and resentment to others. The current spiritual leader of many Buddhists, the Holiness Fourteenth Dalai Lama, made comments on the importance of promoting world peace and thinking of the entire globe as a human family (<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/world-peace/a-human-approach-to-peace>; see Blog Post 1.1).

Let's also go visit Blog Post 1.2 and read the lyrics by John Lennon. Perhaps by listening to this song, we can engage in some imaginative peacebuilding work in our everyday lives—with our loved ones, families, close friends, classmates, teachers, neighbors, coworkers, and cultural strangers that come our way.

Deepening Self-Awareness and Other-Awareness

The late Tupac Shakur once rapped, *"Words of wisdom, they shine upon the strength of a nation. Conquer the enemy, on with education. Protect thy self, reach with what*

you wanna do. Know thy self, teach with what we've been through" (from Shakur's *2Pacocalypse Now*, 1991).

As we systematically acquire the building-block concepts and skills to deal with cultural differences, this knowledge base should challenge you to question your own cultural assumptions and primary socialization process. We acquire our cultural beliefs, values, and communication norms often on a very unconscious level. Without a comparative basis, we may never question the way we have been conditioned and socialized in our primary cultural system. Cultural socialization, in one sense, encourages the development of ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism means seeing our own culture as the center of the universe and seeing other cultures as insignificant or even inferior (see Chapter 8). As Charon (2004) describes the development of ethnocentrism, "Groups develop differences from one another, so do formal organizations, communities, and societies. *Without interaction with outsiders, differences become difficult to understand and difficult not to judge.* What is real to us becomes comfortable; what is comfortable becomes right. What we do not understand becomes less than right to us" (p. 156).

Without sound comparative cross-cultural knowledge, we may look at the world from only one lens—that is, our own cultural lens. With a solid intercultural knowledge base, we may begin to understand the possible value differences and similarities between our own cultural system and that of another cultural system. We may be able to explain

BLOG POST 1.1 "A HUMAN APPROACH TO WORLD PEACE"

Today we are so interdependent, so closely interconnected with each other, that without a sense of universal responsibility, a feeling of universal brotherhood and sisterhood, and an understanding and belief that we really are part of one big human family, we cannot hope to overcome the dangers to our very existence—let alone bring about peace and happiness.

One nation's problems can no longer be satisfactorily solved by itself alone; too much depends on the interest, attitude, and cooperation of other nations. A universal humanitarian approach to world problems seems the only sound basis for world peace. What does this mean? We begin from the recognition mentioned previously that all beings cherish happiness and do not want

suffering. It then becomes both morally wrong and pragmatically unwise to pursue only one's own happiness oblivious to the feelings and aspirations of all others who surround us as members of the same human family . . .

. . . The global population is increasing, and our resources are being rapidly depleted. Look at the trees, for example. No one knows exactly what adverse effects massive deforestation will have on the climate, the soil, and global ecology as a whole. We are facing problems because people are concentrating only on their short-term, selfish interests, not thinking of the entire human family. They are not thinking of the earth and the long-term effects on universal life as a whole. If we of the present generation do not think about these now, future generations may not be able to cope with them.

Source: <http://www.dalailama.com>

why people behave the way they behave from their culture's logic systems or value patterns. Whether you will be utilizing the knowledge and skills right on your own campus, in your classroom setting, in your workplace setting, and/or in your daily interpersonal relationship development contexts, we hope the knowledge building-blocks in this text will improve the quality of your everyday communication lives.

Intercultural knowledge can deepen our awareness of who we are, where we acquired our beliefs and values in the first place, and how we make sense of the world around us. To increase our self-awareness, we must be in tune with our own uncertainties and emotional vulnerabilities. We must understand our own cognitive filters and emotional biases in encountering cultural or ethnic differences. Knowledge brings the power of new insights. New insights, however, can be at times disconcerting and threatening. Confusion is part of the intercultural discovery journey. In this section, we have discussed eight practical reasons for why the study of intercultural communication is such an important topic. We are sure you can add other professional or personal reasons for why you should take a keen interest in this intercultural communication class. With the knowledge and skills gained as an intercultural student, and with imagination and creativity, we hope that you will find yourself applying these intercultural knowledge building blocks and these communication skills in diverse interaction settings. We now

turn to a discussion of the definitional elements of culture.

CULTURE: A LEARNED MEANING SYSTEM

What is culture? This question has fascinated scholars in various academic disciplines for many decades. As long ago as the early 1950s, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified more than 160 different definitions of the term *culture*. The study of culture has ranged from the study of its external architecture and landscape to the study of a set of implicit values to which a large group of members in a community subscribe. The term originates from the Latin word *cultura* or *cultus* as in "*agri culture*, the cultivation of the soil.... From its root meaning of an activity, culture became transformed into a condition, a state of being cultivated" (Freilich, 1989, p. 2).

To be a "cultivated" member of a cultural community, the implication is that you understand what it means to be a "desirable and ideal" member of that particular system. It means you have acquired the meanings of "right" and "wrong" actions that produce particular consequences in that cultural environment. It means you have been nurtured by the core values of that cultural community and understand what constitutes "desirable" and "undesirable" behaviors as sanctioned by members of that system.

Culture is basically a learned system of meanings—a value-laden meaning system that helps you to "make sense" of and explain what is going on in your everyday

BLOG POST 1.2 IMAGINE

Imagine there's no heaven,
It's easy if you try,
No hell below us,
Above us only sky,
Imagine all the people
Living for today . . .

Imagine there's no countries,
It isn't hard to do,
Nothing to kill or die for,
No religion too,
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace . . .

Imagine no possessions,
I wonder if you can,
No need for greed or hunger,
A brotherhood of man,
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world . . .

You may say I'm a dreamer,
but I'm not the only one,
I hope some day you'll join us,
And the world will live as one.

Source: Words and music by John Lennon.
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intercultural surroundings. It fosters a particular sense of shared identity and solidarity among its group members. It also reinforces the boundary of "we" as an ingroup and the "dissimilar others" as belonging to distant outgroups. *Ingroup identity* basically refers to the emotional attachments and shared fate (i.e., perceived common treatment as a function of category membership) that we attach to our selective cultural, ethnic, or social categories. *Outgroups* are groups from which we remain psychologically or emotionally detached, and we are skeptical about their words or intentions (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010a, 2010b).

In sum, *culture* is defined in this book as a *learned meaning system that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meanings, and symbols that are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community*. Members within the same cultural community share a sense of traditions, worldviews, values, rhythms, and patterns of life. We explore some of the key definitional ideas of culture—popular culture, meanings, symbols, norms, values, beliefs, and traditions—in the following subsections.

Culture is like an iceberg: the deeper layers (e.g., traditions, beliefs, and values) are hidden from our view. We tend to see and hear only the uppermost layers of cultural artifacts (e.g., fashion, pop music, and mass-appeal commercial films). We can also witness the exchange of overt verbal and nonverbal symbols (see Figure 1.1). However, to understand a culture—or a person in a cultural community—with any depth, we must match their underlying values coherently with their respective norms, meanings, and symbols.

It is the underlying set of cultural beliefs and values that drives people's thinking, reactions, and behaviors. Furthermore, to understand commonalities between individuals and groups, we must dig deeper into the level of universal human needs. Some universal human needs, for example, can include the needs for security, inclusion, love/connection, respect, control, and creating meaning. Although people in diverse cultures are dissimilar in many ways, they are also alike in many aspects—especially in the deep levels of the needs for human respect, connection, and security. Unfortunately, using the analogy of the iceberg, individuals usually do not take the time or effort to discover the deeper layers of universal human needs and connections.

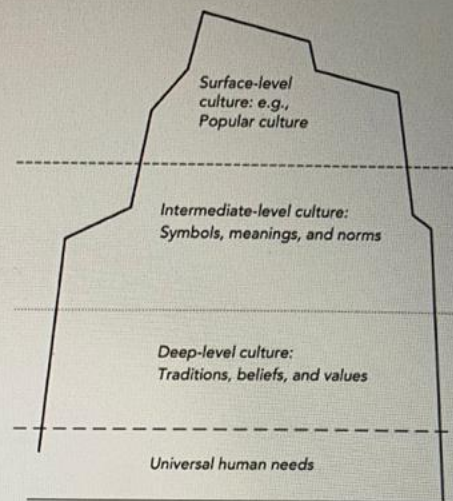


FIGURE 1.1 Culture: An Iceberg Metaphor

Surface-Level Culture: Popular Culture

On the most surface level, we often learn about another culture via the representation of its popular culture (for further examples, see Chapter 11). Popular culture is often referred to as "those cultural artifacts, processes, effects, and meanings that are popular by definition, derivation, or general understanding" (Zelizer, 2001, p. 299). Popular culture covers a wide spectrum of mediums—from pop music to pop gadgets, from pop karaoke to pop icons, and from global TV shows to global hip-hop fashion.

Popular culture (or *pop culture*) basically refers to cultural artifacts or systems that have mass appeal and that infiltrate our daily life. Popular images as portrayed in television, film, advertising, pop music, and even comic strips often reinforce cultural and gender ideologies in a society. The daily bombardment of television is one of our main sources of pop culture. Despite a limited number of women and ethnic minorities on television, for example, the media actually do offer sporadically some strong female gender roles (e.g., *Covert Affairs*, *Nikita*, and *The Good Wife*) and positive images of ethnic roles (e.g., *Hawaii Five-O*, *Modern Family*, and *The Game*). It is also important to

remember that all popular media are businesses that aim for mass consumption and profit-generating outcomes.

In this context, U.S. popular culture tends to dominate the global market. In 2010, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* won the prestigious International Television Audience Award for a Drama TV Series at the Fiftieth Monte Carlo TV Festival. *CSI* has won the award three times in the five-year history of the audience awards and is the highest rated global television show across five continents. The reasons for the global appeal of *CSI* could be because it is a fast-paced suspense drama, featuring attractive-looking actors, and depicting crimes committed and solved smartly within a one-hour span. Furthermore, many U.S. television shows are exported globally, such as *Glee*, *House*, *Lost*, and *The Big Bang Theory*. Contemporary television programming of reality shows (e.g., *American Idol*, *Jersey Shore*, and *Pawn Stars*) appeals widely across multiple national boundaries, especially with global online video streaming.

Furthermore, U.S. popular culture in the category of films also dominates on a worldwide level. Films like *Avatar* and *Inception* reflect the surface layer of U.S. commercial pop culture. Other films, such as *Iron Man*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and *The Bourne Identity*, promote sweeping adventure, romance, open frontiers, and a spirit of exploration—images that reinforce the notion of the United States as a carefree, action-packed, adventure-seeking culture. Although the United States is one of the highest movie-producing countries, do you know what is the top-ranked highest movie-making country? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 1.7, which lists the top five movie-

JEOPARDY BOX 1.7 TOP FIVE MOVIE-PRODUCING COUNTRIES IN 2009

Country	Features Produced
1. India	1,288
2. United States	677
3. China (Mainland)	456
4. Japan	448
5. France	158

Source: <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118012934?refCatId=13&query=france+feature+films+2009+BO> (retrieved March 25, 2011).

JEOPARDY BOX 1.8 TOP FIVE MOST POPULAR U.S. NEWSSTAND MAGAZINES

1. Cosmopolitan
2. People
3. Woman's World
4. First
5. US Weekly

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations, <http://www.accessabc.com> (retrieved March 25, 2011).

producing countries in 2009. Beyond films, people also receive images of another country via news magazines and television shows. Do you know what are the most popular U.S. newsstand magazines? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 1.8.

Furthermore, icons, such as Disneyland, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, and Nike brand names, in conjunction with pop music, television shows, and films, are some prime examples of global popular culture. Some forms of popular culture have a direct correlation with the culture's underlying values and norms, but other forms of popular culture have been created for sheer entertainment purposes and profit-making objectives. Popular culture is often driven by an economic industry with a money-making target audience in mind. Boosting global appeal is another aspect of popular culture driven by strong economic interests.

As the music industry continues to suffer a severe decline in revenue and rampant piracy issues, music labels are finding alternative ways to evolve and achieve success. Digital downloads are one way. Do you know the top five digital downloads of 2010? Check out Jeopardy Box 1.9. Another alternative is the unique manifestation of hip-hop and rap. Chile's Ana Tijoux was nominated in 2011 for her rap in Spanish in the Grammy category of Best Latin Rock, Alternative, or Urban Album. Korean pop's (K-pop) domination in Asia is slowly infiltrating the United States, with artists like Rain selling out in New York and the Wonder Girls opening up for the Jonas Brothers. Finally, the combinations of ethnic minorities singing hip-hop/rap and social networks (YouTube and Facebook) have appealed to the masses. Take, for example, the group Far East Movement. These Koreatown Los Angeles

JEOPARDY BOX 1.9 TOP FIVE DIGITAL DOWNLOADS FOR 2010

Singer/group	Song	2010 Sales
1. Katy Perry feat. Snoop Dogg	California Gurls	4,398,000
2. Train	Hey, Soul Sister	4,314,000
3. Eminem feat. Rihanna	Love the Way You Lie	4,245,000
4. Taio Cruz	Dynamite	4,083,000
5. B.O.B. feat. Hayley Williams	Airplanes	4,004,000

Source: <http://www.billboard.com/charts#> (retrieved March 25, 2011).

rappers hit platinum with their song "Like a G6." It was the first time an Asian American group had a No. 1 digital single, eliciting about 10 million views on YouTube.

Some individuals consume a particular form of popular culture (e.g., CNN) as a way to be informed and included in their cultural community. By commenting on the headline news as reported on CNN, for example, individuals have a common symbol to rally around and to trade reactions with one another. Although having some information is better than no information before we visit another culture, all of us must remain vigilant in questioning the sources of where we receive our ideas or images about another culture. For example, the images we have acquired about Colombia, China, Israel, Sweden, and South Africa are often derived from secondhand news media. We should ask ourselves questions such as the following: Who are the decision makers behind the production of these popular images, icons, or sounds? Have we ever had a meaningful conversation with someone directly from that particular culture concerning his or her specific cultural or personal viewpoints? Do we actually know enough people from that particular culture who are able to offer us multiple perspectives to understand the diverse reality of that culture? Do we actually have any acquaintances or close friends from that group who could help us to comprehend their culture on both a broad and a deep level?

In other words, we must be more watchful about how we process or form mental images about a large

group of people under the broad category of "culture" or "race." Although we can travel in time to many far-flung places through the consumption of various media, we should remain mindful that a culture exists on multiple levels of complexity. Popular culture represents only one surface slice of the embedded richness of a culture. For more popular culture discussions, see Chapter 11.

Intermediate-Level Culture: Symbols, Meanings, and Norms

A symbol is a sign, artifact, word(s), gesture, or nonverbal behavior that stands for or reflects something meaningful. We use language as a symbolic system (with words, idioms, and phrases), which contains rich culture-based categories to organize and dissect the fluctuating world around us. Naming particular events (e.g., "formal gathering" versus "hanging out") via distinctive language categories is part of what we do in everyday communication activities. Expressions such as "Where there's a will there's a way" (a U.S. expression) or "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down" (a Japanese expression) reveal something about that culture's attitude toward self-determination or group-value orientation. Intercultural frictions often arise because of the ways we label and attach meanings to the different expressions or behaviors around us.

The meanings or interpretations that we attach to a symbol (e.g., a national flag or a nonverbal gesture), for example, can cue both objective and subjective reactions. People globally can recognize a particular country by its national flag because of its design and color. However, people of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds can also hold subjective meanings of what the flag means to them, such as a sense of pride or oppression. Other symbolic meaning examples can include the use of different nonverbal gestures across cultures. An animated "OK" nonverbal gesture sign from the United States, for example, with the thumb and forefinger signaling a circle, can mean money to the Japanese, a sexual insult in Brazil and Greece, a vulgar gesture in Russia, or zero in France.

Cultural norms refer to the collective expectations of what constitutes proper or improper behavior

in a given interaction scene. For example, whether we should shake hands or bow to a new Japanese supervisor when being introduced reflects our sense of politeness or respect for the other individual in the scene. However, to enact a proper "getting acquainted" interaction script, we must take the setting, interaction goal, relationship expectation, and cultural competence skills into account.

The **setting** can include the consideration of cultural context (e.g., the interaction scene takes place in Japan or the United States) or physical context (e.g., in an office or a restaurant). The **interaction goal** refers to the objective of the meeting—a job interview meeting is quite different from a chance meeting in a restaurant. A meeting to "show off" that you are an expert about the Japanese culture (therefore, you bow appropriately) is quite different from a chance meeting with a Japanese supervisor in an American restaurant (therefore, maybe a slight head nod will do).

The **relationship expectation** feature refers to how much role formality/informality or task/social tone you want to forge in the interaction. Last, **cultural competence skills** refer to the cultural knowledge you have internalized and the operational skills you are able to apply in the interaction scene. For example, if you do not have a good knowledge of the different degrees of bowing that are needed in approaching a Japanese supervisor, you may make a fool of yourself and cause awkward interaction. You may end up with an improper performance in the "getting-acquainted bowing" scene. By not differentiating the different levels of bowing (e.g., lower bowing for supervisors and shallow bowing for low-ranking staff), you may have committed a cultural bump without conscious realization.

To understand a culture, we must master the operational norms of a culture. However, beyond mastering the prescriptive rules of what we "should" or "should not do" in a culture, we must dig deeper to understand the cultural logics that frame such distinctive behaviors. Although norms can be readily inferred and observed through behaviors, cultural beliefs and values are deep seated and invisible. Cultural traditions, beliefs, and values intersect to influence the development of collective norms in a culture.

Deep-Level Culture: Traditions, Beliefs, and Values

On a communal level, culture refers to a patterned way of living by a group of interacting individuals who share a common set of history, traditions, beliefs, values, and interdependent fate. This is known as the *normative culture* of a group of individuals. On an individual level, members of a culture can attach different degrees of importance to these complex ranges and layers of cultural beliefs and values. This is known as the *subjective culture* of an individual (Triandis, 1972, 1994, 1995). Thus, we can talk about the broad patterns of a culture as a group membership concept. We can also think about the culturally shared beliefs and values as subjectively subscribed to by members of a group, demonstrating varying degrees of endorsement and importance (Ting-Toomey, 2010a, 2010b, 2011).

Culturally shared traditions can include myths, legends, ceremonies, and rituals (e.g., celebrating Hanukkah or Thanksgiving) that are passed on from one generation to the next via an oral or written medium. They serve to reinforce ingroup solidarity, communal memory, cultural stability, and continuity functions. Culturally shared traditions can include, for example, the celebrations of birth, coming-of-age rituals, courtship rituals, wedding ceremonies, and seasonal change celebration rituals. They can also include spiritual traditions, such as in times of sickness, healing, rejuvenation, mourning, and funeral rituals for the dead (M.F. Bennett, 2009).

Culturally shared beliefs refer to a set of fundamental assumptions or worldviews that people hold dearly to their hearts without question. These beliefs can revolve around questions as to the origins of human beings, the concept of time, space, and reality, the existence of a supernatural being, and the meaning of life, death, and the afterlife. Proposed answers to many of these questions can be found in the major religions of the world, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Peering into U.S. culture, do you know what are the top five religions in the United States and which countries have the largest Christian and Jewish populations? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy

JEOPARDY BOX 1.10 TOP FIVE RELIGIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Religion	%
1. Christianity	78.4
2. Judaism	1.7
3. Buddhism	0.7
4. Islam	0.6
5. Hinduism	0.4

Source: <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> (retrieved March 25, 2011).

JEOPARDY BOX 1.11 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH LARGEST CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH POPULATIONS

Top Five Countries with Largest Christian Populations	
1. United States	
2. Brazil	
3. Russia	
4. China	
5. Mexico	
Top Five Countries with Largest Jewish Populations	
1. United States	
2. Israel	
3. France	
4. Argentina	
5. Canada	

Source: Ash (2011, p. 80, 82; based on World Christian Database).

JEOPARDY BOX 1.12 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH LARGEST BUDDHIST, HINDU, AND MUSLIM POPULATIONS

Top Five Countries with Largest Buddhist Populations	
1. China	
2. Japan	
3. Thailand	
4. Vietnam	
5. Myanmar	
Top Five Countries with Largest Hindu Populations	
1. India	
2. Nepal	
3. Bangladesh	
4. Indonesia	
5. Sri Lanka	
Top Five Countries with Largest Muslim Populations	
1. Indonesia	
2. Pakistan	
3. India	
4. Bangladesh	
5. Iran	

Source: Ash (2011, p. 80; based on World Christian Database).

Boxes 1.10 and 1.11. Do you know which are the top five countries with respect to the largest Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim populations? Take a guess and cross-check your answers with Jeopardy Box 1.12. People who subscribe to any of these religious philosophies tend to hang on to their beliefs on faith, often accepting the fundamental precepts without question. They also tend to draw from their deeply held beliefs to subscribe meanings and explanations for why certain things happen in the cosmic order of life itself.

Beyond fundamental cultural or religious beliefs, people also differ in what they value as

important in their cultures. **Cultural values** refer to a set of priorities that guide "good" or "bad" behaviors, "desirable" or "undesirable" practices, and "fair" or "unfair" actions. Cultural values (e.g., individual competitiveness versus group harmony) can serve as the motivational basis for actions (Stringer, 2003). For example, an Israeli psychologist, Shalom Schwartz (1990, 1992; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001), believes that we should understand the underlying motivational values that drive human actions. Those motivational values or basic value needs include the following: satisfying biological needs, social coordination needs, and the survival and welfare needs of the group.

From his various research studies in more than fifty countries, Schwartz has further identified ten value clusters that motivate people to behave the

way they do in different cultures. These motivational value clusters or value types include the following: self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism; security, tradition, and conformity; power and benevolence; achievement; and universalism. Although self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism appear to reflect individualistic value tendencies, security, tradition, and conformity appear to reflect group-based, collectivistic value patterns. Power and benevolence seem to reflect whether individuals crave social recognition or deeper meaning in life. Achievement and universalism reflect whether individuals are ambitious and crave material success or whether they are universalistic oriented in wishing for a world at peace and inner harmony. More important, Schwartz's research indicates that a clear structure of values does emerge in reflecting people's underlying needs. The value structure and the relationship between value types appear to be consistent across cultures. However, cultures vary in terms of how strongly or how weakly they endorse a particular cluster of values.

To understand various communication patterns in a culture, we must understand the deep-rooted cultural values that give meanings to such patterns. An in-depth discussion of the contents of cultural values appears in Chapter 3.

STAMPING YOUR INTERCULTURAL PASSPORT

Overall, culture is a complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meanings, and symbols that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community. Oftentimes, our ignorance of a different culture's worldviews or values can produce unintentional clashes between ourselves and people of that culture. We may not even notice that we have violated another culture's norms in a particular communication scene. The result may worsen the intercultural misinterpretation process.

In summary, this chapter discusses several reasons why we should study intercultural communication. In discussing the definition of culture, we explored the three levels of understanding a culture: surface-level, intermediate-level, and deep-level culture. If you have fully understood all the concepts of Chapter 1, you have now earned one stamp on your intercultural passport. You can continue on your journey mindfully—read, observe, notice, experience, and learn. The remaining chapters will address intercultural communication flexibility issues, value dimensions, multilayered identities, verbal and nonverbal communication competence issues, and much more.

CHAPTER 2

**WHAT IS INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION FLEXIBILITY?**



CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Defining Intercultural Communication: A Process Model
 - Intercultural Communication Process: Overall Characteristics
 - Intercultural Communication: Meaning Characteristics
- Practicing Intercultural Communication Flexibility
 - Three Content Components: Knowledge, Attitude, and Skills
 - Three Criteria: Appropriateness, Effectiveness, and Adaptability
- Developing Intercultural Communication Flexibility
 - A Staircase Model
 - An Essential Hook: A Mindful Perspective
- Deepening Intercultural Process Thinking
 - Process Consciousness: Underlying Principles
- Intercultural Reality Check: Do-Ables

I met my wife years ago in San Francisco. It was love at first sight. She was funny, energetic, and incredibly passionate about life. Lili was the last person I thought I would date, much less marry, and part of the reason was our faith. I was born and raised in Turkey and am a Muslim. Lili was a Peruvian native but Jewish. Muslim and Jewish?! Are you kidding me? We worked it out and her parents embraced me as their own child, despite our many differences, as did mine. The true test to our relationship started when we decided to have children. How do we raise our children? After many arguments, discussions, and "if" statements, Lili got pregnant. We had a girl and decided that girls in our family will be raised in the Jewish faith. Should Allah bring me a boy, he would be raised Muslim.

Four girls later, I never regretted that decision. The most amazing moment of my life came when my oldest daughter, Leyla, had her Bat Mitzvah. I went to the temple, wore a *yama-lu* (head cap), and became part of the service. Many people who attended could not believe I would do such a thing, but the most important gift I can give my daughter is compassion and love and the realization that religious faith will not divide our family. I was there for the next two Bat Mitzvahs and we have one more to go!

Last year, I took Lili and my family to Turkey. My parents had the opportunity to meet their grandchildren and the very special moment came when as a family we walked together to the Mosque. They were all dressed respectfully in Islamic attire.

—T. Senel, Father

To communicate adaptively with culturally different others, we must understand the major characteristics that make up the intercultural communication process. Although both culture and communication reciprocally influence one another, it is essential to distinguish between the characteristics of the two concepts for the purpose of understanding the complex relationship between them. Having already introduced the defining features of culture in Chapter 1, in this chapter we define the term "intercultural communication" for you. Although the idea of "culture" is an elastic concept that takes on multiple shades of meaning, similarly, the concept "communication" is also dynamic and subject to multifaceted interpretations.

In this chapter, we address the following three questions: What is the intercultural communication process? What is intercultural communication flexibility? What are the possible stages in developing intercultural communication flexibility? This chapter is developed in four sections: first, we introduce a culture-based process model to help you understand the "big picture" of the intercultural communication process. Second, we explore with you the concept of intercultural communication flexibility. Third, we introduce a staircase model of developing intercultural communication flexibility. Fourth, we outline general principles to help increase your understanding of the intercultural communication process. We end the chapter with a "Reality Check"—a set of recaps and checkpoints to guide you through your intercultural communication excursions.

DEFINING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A PROCESS MODEL

Intercultural communication takes place when cultural group membership factors (e.g., cultural values) affect our communication process. Intercultural communication is often referred to as a symbolic exchange process between persons of different cultures in their attempts to create shared meanings in a given context. In the symbolic exchange process, intentions are inferred and culture-based interpretations are formed.

To increase your alertness to the intercultural communication process, we identify the characteristics of the intercultural communication process in two subsections: the overall characteristics of the process and the specific meaning characteristics of the intercultural exchange process. Figure 2.1 is a graphic model that represents some of the key elements in an intercultural-based process model.

Intercultural Communication Process: Overall Characteristics

Intercultural communication is defined as the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or

more) different cultural communities attempt to negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation within an embedded societal system. The major characteristics of this definition include the following concepts: symbolic exchange, process, different cultural communities, negotiate shared meanings, an interactive situation, and an embedded societal system. Interestingly, the intercultural communication scholar Halualani (2010), in conducting eighty in-depth qualitative interviews, uncovered some interesting distinctions among U.S. students in their conceptualizations of the term "intercultural interaction."

For example, Asian American interviewees focus on the importance of "sameness" (e.g., making them feel equal and comfortable) among diverse individuals and the need to establish "common ground." Latino/a students emphasize the "cultural respect" aspect of intercultural interaction and the importance of recognizing "cultural roots" of the other memberships. African American interviewees focus on intercultural interactions as having "difficult conversations" and recognizing others' stereotypes and prejudices against them. Last, European American students emphasize having intercultural interaction encounters as reflecting their "open-mindedness" and "acceptance of all cultural groups" (Halualani, 2010).

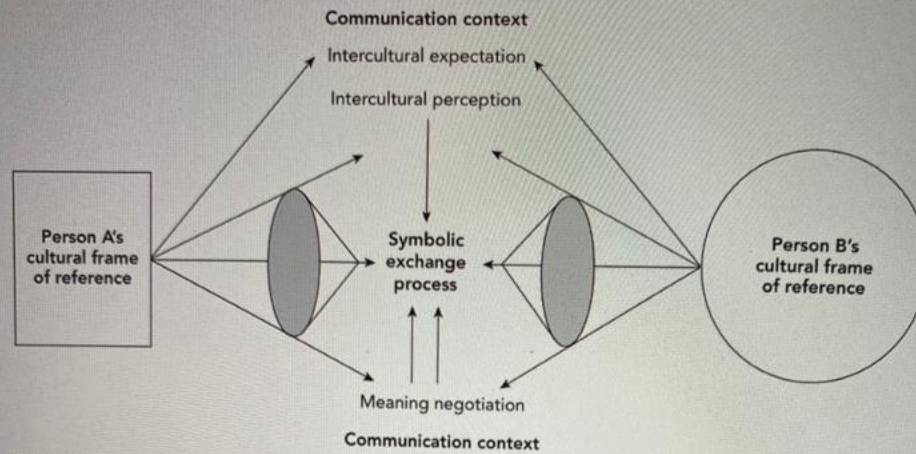


FIGURE 2.1 Intercultural Communication: A Process Model

On a broad-based level, in any intercultural encounter process, individuals use verbal and nonverbal messages to get their ideas across. The first characteristic, **symbolic exchange**, refers to the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols between a minimum of two individuals to accomplish shared meanings. Although verbal symbols represent the digital aspects of our message exchange process, nonverbal symbols or cues (i.e., the smallest identifiable unit of communication), such as smiles, represent the analogical aspects of our message exchange process. Digital aspects of communication refer to the content information that we convey to our listener. The relationship between a digital cue (e.g., the word *angry*) and its interpretation is arbitrary. The word *angry* is a digital symbol that stands for an intense, antagonistic emotional state. The word itself, however, does not carry the feeling; it is people, as symbol users, who infuse the word with intense emotions.

In contrast, analogical aspects of communication refer to the "picturesque" meanings or the affective meanings that we convey through the use of nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues are analogical because there exists a resemblance relationship between the nonverbal cue (e.g., a frown) and its interpretation (e.g., dislike something). Furthermore, although verbal cues are discrete (i.e., with clear beginning and ending

sounds), nonverbal cues are continuous (i.e., different nonverbal cues flow simultaneously with no clear-cut beginning and ending) throughout the message exchange process. Although verbal messages always include the use of nonverbal cues, such as accents and vocal intonations, we can use nonverbal messages, such as touch, without words. As babies, we acquire or soak up the nonverbal cues from our immediate cultural environment before the actual learning of our native tongue.

The second characteristic, **process**, refers to the interdependent nature of the intercultural encounter. Once two cultural strangers make contact and attempt to communicate, they enter into a mutually interdependent relationship. A Japanese businessperson may be bowing, and an American businessperson may be ready to shake hands. The two may also quickly reverse their nonverbal greeting rituals and adapt to each other's behavior. This quick change of nonverbal postures, however, may cause another awkward moment of confusion. The concept of process refers to two ideas: the transactional nature and the irreversible nature of communication (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967).

The **transactional** nature of intercultural communication refers to the simultaneous encoding (i.e.,

the sender choosing the right words or nonverbal gestures to express his or her intentions) and decoding (i.e., the receiver translating the words or nonverbal cues into comprehensible meanings) of the exchanged messages. When the decoding process of the receiver matches the encoding process of the sender, the receiver and sender of the message have accomplished shared content meanings effectively. Unfortunately, more often than not, intercultural encounters are filled with misunderstandings and second guesses because of language problems, communication style differences, and value-orientation differences.

Furthermore, intercultural communication is an *irreversible process* because the decoder may form different impressions even in regard to the same repeated message. Once an encoder has uttered something to a decoder, he or she cannot repeat the same exact message. The encoder's tone of voice, interaction pace, or facial expression will not stay precisely the same. It is also difficult for any encoder to withdraw or cancel a message once the message has been decoded. For example, if a sender utters a remark such as "I have friends who are Japs!" and then quickly attempts to withdraw the message, this attempt cannot succeed because the message has already created a damaging impact on the receiver's decoding field. Thus, the intercultural communication process is irreversible (Barnlund, 1962).

The third characteristic, **different cultural communities**, is defined as a broad concept. A **cultural community** refers to a group of interacting individuals within a bounded unit who uphold a set of shared traditions and way of life (see Blog Pic 2.1).

This unit can refer to a geographic locale with clear-cut boundaries, such as a nation. This unit can also refer to a set of shared beliefs and values that are subscribed to by a group of individuals who perceive themselves as united even if they are dispersed physically. For example, many Jews, who are dispersed throughout the world, tend to perceive themselves as a united cultural community via their shared religious traditions and beliefs.

Broadly interpreted, a cultural community can refer to a national cultural group, an ethnic group, or a gender group. It is, simultaneously, a group-level concept (i.e., a patterned way of living) and an individual's subjective sense of membership or an affiliation with a group. The term *culture* here is used as a frame of reference or knowledge system that is shared by a large group of individuals within a perceived bounded unit. The "objective" boundaries of a culture may or may not coincide with national or political boundaries. The term can also be used on a specific level to refer to a patterned way of living by an ethnocultural group (i.e., an ethnic group within a culture). Beyond the three characteristics of symbolic, process, and cultural communities,



Blog Pic 2.1 Celebrating with traditional dance is an inherent part of cultural communities.

the next section emphasizes the importance of paying close attention to negotiating shared meanings between members of different identity groups.

Intercultural Communication: Meaning Characteristics

The fourth characteristic, **negotiate shared meanings**, refers to the general goal of any intercultural communication encounter. In intercultural business negotiations or intercultural romantic relationships, a first level of concern is that we want our messages to be understood. When the interpretation of the meaning of the message overlaps significantly with the intention of the meaning of the message, we have established a high level of shared meanings in the communication process. The word *negotiate* indicates the creative give-and-take nature of the fluid process of human communication. For example, if both communicators are using the same language to communicate, they may ask each other to define and clarify any part of the exchanged message that is perceived as being unclear or vague.

Furthermore, every verbal and nonverbal message contains multiple layers of meanings. The three layers of meaning that are critical to our understanding of how people express themselves in a communication process are content meaning, relational meaning, and identity meaning. **Content meaning** refers to the factual (or digital) information that is being conveyed to the receiver through an oral channel or other communication medium. When the intended content meaning of the encoder has been accurately decoded by the receiver, the communicators have established a level of mutually shared content meanings. Content meaning is usually tied to substantive discussion or issues (e.g., business contract details) with verifiable, factual overtones (i.e., "Did you or did you not say that?"). It also involves what is appropriate to say in a particular cultural scene. For example, in many Asian cultures, it is impolite to say "no" directly to a request. Thus, people from traditional Asian backgrounds will tend to use qualifying statements such as "I agree with you in principle; however..." and "Maybe if I finish studying and if you still want to borrow my lecture notes..." to imply a "no" or "maybe"

answer. In most encounters, however, people are more aware of content meaning negotiation than relational or identity meaning negotiation.

Relational meaning offers information concerning the state of the relationship between the two communicators. Relational meaning is inferred via nonverbal intonations, body movements, or gestures that accompany the verbal content level. It conveys both power distance (e.g., equal-unequal) meanings and relational distance (e.g., friendly-unfriendly) meanings. For example, the professor says, "I want to talk to you about your grade in this class," which can be interpreted as either "You're in serious trouble—I can't believe you handed in such a sloppy paper!" or "I'm concerned about your grade in this class—let me know how I can help you." On the relational level, the professor's statement can be decoded as an intimidating-unfriendly request or a caring-friendly statement. The comment can also be decoded with compliance or resistance by the recipient of the message. The relational meaning of the message often implies how the relationship between the communicators should be defined and interpreted. It is closely linked with identity meaning issues.

Identity meaning refers to the following questions: "Who am I and who are you in this interaction episode?" "How do I define myself in this interaction scene?" and "How do I define you in this interaction scene?" (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). Identity meaning involves issues such as the display of respect or disrespect and identity approval or disapproval. Decoders typically infer identity meanings through the speaker's tone of voice, facial expressions, nonverbal postures, spatial distance, and selective word choices. Nonverbal tones or gestures, however, are highly culture dependent and are oftentimes easily misinterpreted.

For example, the statement: "Maria Montoya? Come over here!" can be rephrased as "Ms. Montoya, when you have a minute, I would really like to talk to you" or "Maria, don't you understand my English? I need to talk to you right now!" or "Dr. Montoya, please, when you have some time, I would really appreciate your advice on this." These different statements indicate different shades of respect accorded to the addressee—depending on the tone of voice and

whether the individual is addressed with her title—and also situational and cultural contexts.

The characteristics of content, relational, and identity meaning negotiation constitute the dynamic nature of the intercultural communication process. The process can take place in either a face-to-face or a mediated situation through e-mail, cellular phone, Twitter, blogs, or the teleconferencing context. Thus, the communication situation, the nature of the topical exchange, the relational features, the language use, the technological medium, and the cultural territory in which the exchange took place all have a profound influence on the symbolic exchange process itself.

The fifth characteristic, an **interactive situation**, refers to the idea that every communication episode occurs in a relational context, a psychological context, and a physical context. Throughout this book, we will use **relational context** examples of intercultural acquaintance relationships, friendships, dating relationships, and business relationships to illustrate diverse relationship contexts. A **psychological context**, in turn, refers to our psychological moods (e.g., anxious versus secure), meaning-making interpretations (e.g., perceived meanings of the formal or informal interactive setting), and normative role expectations of a given situation. Last, a **physical context** refers to the immediate physical features (e.g., furniture or seating arrangement in a room, temperature) and layouts surrounding the face-to-face or mediated interaction. We acquire the meanings to these situational features via the primary socialization process of our culture and family system.

The sixth characteristic, **societal embedded system**, refers to the multilayered contexts such as history, politics, economics, social class, formal institutions, and policies, as well as the community or organizational contexts that shape the process and the outcome of the actual intercultural communication encounter (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, & Rinderle, 2006). Transactional human communication always takes place within an interactive situation and is subjected to the influence of the multilayered factors in the larger societal environment.

We also encourage you to think of additional examples and questions to clarify your own understanding of important concepts that affect the intercultural

communication encounter's conditions, processes, and outcomes. The next section introduces the intercultural communication flexibility perspective.

PRACTICING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION FLEXIBILITY

What is intercultural communication flexibility? How do we know that the individuals in the communication process have communicated inflexibly or flexibly? Intercultural communication flexibility has three content components—knowledge, attitude, and skills. **Flexible intercultural communication** emphasizes the importance of integrating knowledge and an open-minded attitude and putting them into adaptive and creative practice in everyday communication. **Inflexible intercultural communication** stresses the continuation of using our own cultural values, judgments, and routines in communicating with culturally different others.

Whereas inflexible intercultural communication reflects an ethnocentric mindset, flexible intercultural communication reflects an ethnorelative attitude. An **ethnocentric mindset** means staying stuck with our own cultural worldviews and using our own cultural values as the baseline standards to evaluate the other person's cultural behavior. An **ethnorelative mindset**, however, means to understand a communication behavior from the other person's cultural frame of reference (M. Bennett, 1993; J. Bennett & M. Bennett, 2004). In an optimal state of ethnorelativism, a flexible mindset, an alert emotional awareness, and competent interaction behaviors come together and help us to become dynamic, flexible intercultural communicators. In the following sections, we first discuss the three components of flexible intercultural communication. We then discuss the three criteria for evaluating whether the cultural members in the process have behaved flexibly or inflexibly.

Three Content Components: Knowledge, Attitude, and Skills

Knowledge here refers to the systematic, conscious learning of the essential themes and concepts in intercultural communication flexibility. Conscious learning can be developed through formal studying and

informal immersion experiences. *Formal studying* can include taking classes in intercultural communication and ethnic-related studies. It includes attending intercultural communication seminars and diversity-related training. It could mean taking a foreign language class or a global history class. *Informal learning* experiences can include international traveling, studying abroad, volunteering for community service, and visiting ethnic neighborhoods, temples, or stores in our own backyard. It includes reading international newspapers and magazines. It could mean putting ourselves in constant contact with culturally different others and learning to be comfortable with the differences.

To digest the knowledge we have learned, we must develop an open mindset and an attentive heart. *Attitude* can include both cognitive and affective layers. The *cognitive* layer refers to the willingness to suspend our ethnocentric judgment and readiness to be open-minded in learning about cross-cultural difference issues. The *affective* layer refers to the emotional commitment to engage in cultural perspective-taking and the cultivation of an empathetic heart in reaching out to culturally diverse groups. It also means we have spent time reflecting on our own identity and emotional vulnerability issues in dealing with the changes within our own affective state. A receptive and responsive attitude serves as the basis to push us forward to communicate adaptively with people from diverse cultural communities.

In developing cognitive and affective openness, we try to intentionally put on a new pair of "glasses" or "lenses" (i.e., the practice of ethnorelative thinking and empathy). A flexible intercultural attitude means engaging in ethnorelative thinking to understand someone else's behavior from her or his cultural point of view. From an ethnorelative lens, we put our ethnocentrism on hold and suspend our hasty cultural judgments.

Skills are our operational abilities to integrate knowledge and a responsive attitude with adaptive intercultural practice. Adaptive communication skills help us to communicate mindfully in an intercultural situation. Many interaction skills are useful in promoting flexible intercultural communication. Some of these, for example, are value clarification skills, mindful tracking skills, attentive listening, verbal code

switching, nonverbal sensitivity skills, and intercultural conflict management tools (see the Intercultural Reality Check section at the end of this and each of the remaining chapters). These skills will be discussed under different topics in later chapters.

Three Criteria: Appropriateness, Effectiveness, and Adaptability

The criteria of communication appropriateness, effectiveness, adaptability, and creativity can serve as evaluative yardsticks of whether an intercultural communicator has been perceived as behaving flexibly or inflexibly (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2004, 2010c) in an interaction episode. A dynamic, competent intercultural communicator is one who manages multiple meanings in the communication exchange process—appropriately, effectively, and adaptively. All three criteria can also be applied developmentally to an individual who is attempting to increase her or his mastery of knowledge, an open attitude, and skills in dealing constructively with members of diverse cultures (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Wiseman, 2003).

Appropriateness refers to the degree to which the exchanged behaviors are regarded as proper and match the expectations generated by the insiders of the culture. Individuals typically use their own cultural expectations and scripts to approach an intercultural interaction scene. They also formulate their impressions of a competent communicator on the basis of their perceptions of the other's verbal and nonverbal behaviors in the particular interaction setting. The first lesson in communication competence is to "tune in" to our own ethnocentric evaluations concerning "improper" dissimilar behaviors. Our evaluations of "proper" and "improper" behavior stem, in part, from our ingrained cultural socialization experiences. If your friend has never eaten with a knife and fork, this does not mean your friend lacks good manners. Perhaps your friend eats with chopsticks, hands, a spoon, or a combination of these.

To understand whether appropriate communication has been perceived, it is vital to obtain competence evaluations from the standpoint of both communicators and interested observers. It is also

critical to obtain both self-perception and other-perception data. We may think that we are acting appropriately, but others may not concur with our self-assessment. Appropriate communication behaviors can be assessed through understanding the underlying values, norms, social roles, expectations, and scripts that govern the interaction episode. When we act appropriately in an interaction scene, our culturally proper behaviors can facilitate communication effectiveness. Instead of saying to your friend, "You're so weird!" you may ask him if he can teach you how to use a pair of chopsticks.

Effectiveness refers to the degree to which communicators achieve mutually shared meaning and integrative goal-related outcomes. Effective encoding and decoding processes lead to mutually shared meanings. Mutually shared meanings lead to perceived intercultural understanding. Interaction effectiveness has been achieved when multiple meanings are attended to with accuracy and when mutually desired interaction goals have been reached. Interaction ineffectiveness occurs when interpersonal goals are mismatched and intercultural noises and clashes jam the communication channels (Gudykunst, 2001, 2005a, 2005b).

Communication effectiveness can improve task productivity. Productivity is closely related to outcome factors, such as the generation of new ideas, new plans, new momentum, and creative directions in resolving the intercultural problem. In an unproductive interaction episode, both sides feel that they have wasted their time and energy in being involved in the interaction in the first place. Both sides feel they have lost sight of their original goals in the stressful interaction episode. In a productive communication exchange, both sides feel that they have mutual influence over the communication process and that they have devoted positive energy in creating the constructive outcome.

Communication adaptability refers to our ability to change our interaction behaviors and goals to meet the specific needs of the situation. It implies behavioral flexibility in dealing with the intercultural miscommunication episode. It signals our mindful awareness of the other person's perspectives, interests, goals, and communication approach, plus our willingness to modify our own behaviors and goals to adapt to the interaction situation. By mindfully tracking

what is going on in the intercultural situation, both parties may modify their nonverbal and verbal behavior to achieve a more synchronized communication process. In modifying their behavioral styles, polarized views on the intercultural content problem may also become depolarized or "softened."

Flexible intercultural communication requires us to communicate appropriately and effectively in different intercultural situations, which necessitates creativity, choices, change, and adaptation (Digh, 2008, 2011; Iyengar, 2010; Tharp & Reiter, 2003). By having an open-minded attitude that motivates our behaviors, we generate intercultural interest and curiosity in the intercultural relating process (Gannon & Pillai, 2010; Nwosu, 2009; Van Dyne, Ang, & Koh, 2009).

In sum, to be flexible intercultural communicators, we must be highly imaginative in our assessment of the intercultural contact situation. We also must be behaviorally nimble to decide whether to adapt, to maintain the same posture, or to expect the other person to adapt to our behaviors—depending upon the intentions, process, goals, and people involved in the interactive situation. It takes a flexible mindset to combine the best practices of both cultures to arrive at a creative, synergistic solution (Schaetti, Ramsey, & Watanabe, 2009; Ting-Toomey, 2009). It also takes a well-balanced heart to move beyond the practices of both cultures and utilize a third-culture approach to sensitively bridge the cultural differences. An individual with an open mindset and elastic communication skills is able to flex her or his communication muscles with good timing and can stretch intentionally to interact competently through a diverse range of intercultural terrains.

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION FLEXIBILITY

To understand intercultural communication flexibility from a long-term developmental viewpoint, we present the staircase model to reinforce your learning and stretch your imagination.

A Staircase Model

Flexible intercultural communication can be conceptualized along the following stages (see Figure 2.2): (1) unconscious incompetence—the blissfully ignorant

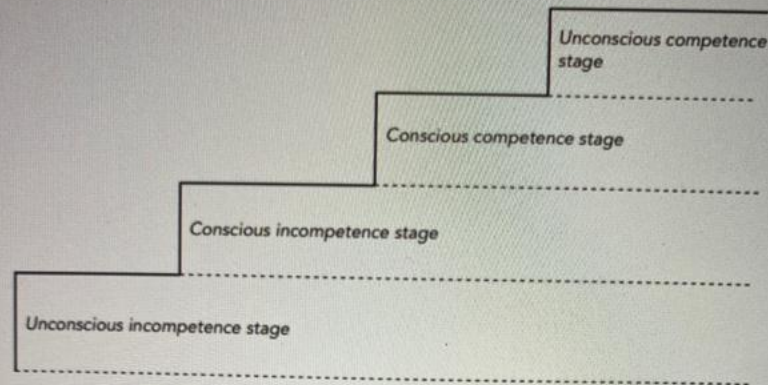


FIGURE 2.2 Intercultural Communication Competence: A Staircase Model

stage in which an individual is unaware of the communication blunders she has committed in interacting with a cultural stranger; (2) conscious incompetence—the semi-awareness stage in which an individual is aware of her incompetence in communicating with members of the new culture but does not do anything (or know how to) to change her behavior adaptively in the new cultural situation; (3) conscious competence—the “full mindfulness” stage when an individual is aware of her intercultural communication “nonfluency” and is committed to integrating the new knowledge, attitude, and skills into competent practice; and (4) unconscious competence—the “mindlessly mindful” zen stage when an individual can code switch so spontaneously and effortlessly that the interaction flows smoothly from an “out-of-conscious yet mindful awareness” rhythm (Howell, 1982; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

In the first stage, the **unconscious incompetence stage**, individuals have no culture-sensitive knowledge (nor do they have responsive attitudes or skills) to communicate competently with the host members of the new culture (see Blog Pic 2.1). This is the cultural obliviousness stage or cultural ignorance stage. Cultural members operate from a total ethnocentric worldview. For example, Esteban, who is Cuban American, likes to tell racial jokes about Cubans. Because he is Cuban American, he thinks it is totally acceptable to joke about his own ethnic ingroup. However, some of

his Cuban and non-Cuban friends do not appreciate the jokes at all. They send him nonverbal disapproval signals but he does not get those awkward signals.

In the second stage, the **conscious incompetence stage**, individuals have some notion (i.e., attitudinal openness) that they behave incompetently; however, they lack the knowledge or skills to operate appropriately in the new cultural setting. They do, however, start questioning their own ethnocentric lens and communication habits. For example, Esteban still admits to telling racial jokes out of habit—although he is aware of his terribly offensive behavior.

In the third stage, the **conscious competence stage**, individuals are actively pursuing new intercultural knowledge to improve their communication competencies. Given time and practice, they would probably move from the conscious semicompetence phase to the conscious full-competence phase. In the fully developed conscious competence phase, individuals are able to connect knowledge, a responsive attitude, and skills into competent applications. In the conscious competence stage, individuals try to stay in tune and be fully mindful of the communication process itself and also attend to the outcome goal. They use an ethnorelative lens, rather than an ethnocentric lens, in interpreting what is going on in the intercultural encounter process.

For example, if we decide to spend time in Spain, we must learn new behaviors conscientiously, from “el

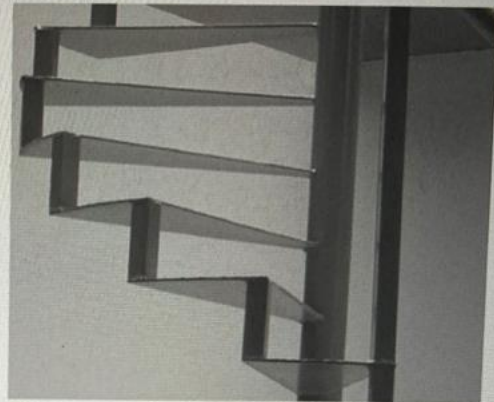
punto del sal" (a Spanish custom that says one should not add salt to a meal until after tasting it, because it shows you doubt the competency of the chef; the food should arrive at the table with the correct amount of salt) to "always wear shoes or slippers inside the house" (bare or stocking feet are unseemly and improper, according to the Spanish culture). Becoming consciously competent can allow you to pick up everyday intercultural meanings and also practice competent intercultural behaviors.

The fourth stage, the **unconscious competence stage**, is the "mindlessly mindful" zen-like stage in which individuals move in and out of spontaneous yet adaptive communication with members of the new culture. They can code switch effortlessly between the two different intercultural communication systems. Their effort appears to be very "seamless"—thus, the notion of "unconscious" competence. For example, once a person becomes conscious of the Spanish custom of always wearing shoes inside a Spanish house, with repeated practice it becomes a spontaneous habit—done without awareness. However, if the same person now travels to Japan, she must learn new rules of behaving (e.g., taking off her shoes before entering a traditional Japanese house and putting on a pair of nice, clean guest slippers). Thus, in any intercultural situation, the most flexible intercultural communicators often rotate between the conscious competence stage and the unconscious competence stage. Through such rotation between stages, the flexible intercultural communicator is constantly updating her knowledge about cultural difference issues and refreshing her attitude in dealing with culturally diverse situations (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1998, 2009).

If an individual stays in the unconscious competence stage for too long without a humble attitude, cultural arrogance may set in without notice. The individual may easily fall back into the unconscious incompetence stage because of overconfidence or cultural condescension (see Blog Pic 2.2).

An Essential Hook: A Mindful Perspective

Communication flexibility requires us to be sensitive to the differences and similarities between dissimilar cultures. It also demands that we be aware of our own ethnocentric biases when making evaluations



Blog Pic 2.2 Where do you envision yourself on these stairs?

of other people's communication approaches. It also asks us to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively in a culturally respectful manner. A flexible communicator is a well-trained individual with a vast amount of knowledge in the domain of intercultural communication. He is able to make creative connections among cultural values, communication styles, and situational issues.

A flexible communicator is also a mindful cultural scanner (Ting-Toomey 2009, 2010a). To engage in an inward state of mindfulness, an individual must turn inward and look into herself and realize that: (1) her state of identity is closely intertwined with her unconscious cultural conditioning process; (2) her reactive judgments of culturally unfamiliar behaviors are based on her own cultural and personal value priorities; (3) her perceptions and interpretations of culturally "bizarre" behaviors are often based on the insecure feelings of fear and colored by stereotypic images gained from the media; and (4) her lack of knowledge about the unfamiliar others creates further psychological and physical gaps (Ting-Toomey, 2010a).

In addition, to engage in an outward state of mindfulness, a flexible intercultural communicator must learn to: (1) engage in cultural frame switching and see things from the other person's cultural frame of values; (2) connect underlying value patterns with the unfamiliar cultural behaviors and understand

the cultural logic of why people behave the way they behave; (3) observe and notice complexity of identity issues and situational issues in any cultural community; and (4) focus on the present moment of the process and listen closely to the repeated words and nonverbal nuances that are being exchanged in the process (Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Canary & Lakey, 2006; Langer, 1989, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 2009).

To be flexible intercultural communicators, we must increase the complexity of our intercultural communication knowledge. We must develop a keen sense of alertness on two fronts—one is increasing self-awareness as a cultural and unique being and the other is increasing our awareness of others as complex cultural and unique beings. Furthermore, we must develop a more layered sense of understanding by realizing that many cultural, ethnic, situational, and personal factors shape and, in turn, affect an intercultural miscommunication episode. Being committed to applying divergent and differentiated cultural viewpoints means taking the time and patience to work out the cultural differences constructively. We will lay out some of these ideas in the coming chapters.

DEEPENING INTERCULTURAL PROCESS THINKING

The general goal of intercultural communication is to create shared meanings competently—so that what I intended to say or imply is accurately decoded by the culturally different other and, simultaneously, in a culturally appropriate manner. To communicate effectively and appropriately, a flexible intercultural communicator must develop a keen sense of adaptability and imagination in her or his intercultural connecting process.

Process Consciousness: Underlying Principles

The following guidelines are presented to increase your conceptual understanding of the intercultural communication process. On an everyday intercultural communication level, we must develop an astute sense of mindfulness of the following principles:

PRINCIPLE 1: *Intercultural communication often involves mismatched expectations that stem, in part, from cultural group membership differences.* When we encounter miscommunication in an intercultural interaction process, we experience emotional frustration. Some of the emotional frustration often stems, in part, from cultural differences, mismatched expectations, or ignorance. Intercultural miscommunication takes place when our cultural group membership factors affect, in part, our communication process on either an awareness or an unawareness level.

The cultural membership differences can include deep-level differences, such as cultural worldview differences and value differences. Concurrently, they can also include the mismatch of applying different norms and expectations in a particular communication scene. In practicing mindful intercultural communication, we can develop an understanding of the valuable differences that exist between different cultural groups. At the same time, we also must continuously recognize the commonalities that exist in all humans, across all cultures.

PRINCIPLE 2: *Intercultural communication often involves varying degrees of biased intergroup perceptions.* Biased intergroup perceptions often involve overgeneralizations or stereotypes. The term *intergroup* means viewing the person as a representation of a group membership category and deemphasizing the person's unique attributes. Thus, from an intergroup lens, stereotyping involves an overestimation of the degree of association between stereotypic-psychological traits (e.g., cantankerous, grumpy) and group membership categories (e.g., elderly population). Moreover, stereotyping is also about creating self-fulfilling prophecies. We tend to see behavior that confirms our expectations even when it is absent, and we ignore vital information (e.g., knowledgeable, wise advice) when it is incongruous with our expectations.

When we communicate mindlessly, we do not notice the distinctive qualities of the cultural person with whom we are communicating. Rather, we fall back on our stereotypes to reduce our guesswork and, perhaps, emotional vulnerability level. Although the contents of our stereotypes can be positive or negative, rigidly typecasting selective members of a cultural

group into "triangles" and "squares" can perpetuate inaccurate impressions and myths. If we are unwilling to question our rigidly held stereotypes, our intergroup relationships will stay only at a superficial level of contact. Stereotyping, together with an ethnocentric attitude and a prejudiced mindset, can often perpetuate misinterpretation spirals and intergroup conflict cycles.

PRINCIPLE 3: *Intercultural communication involves the simultaneous encoding and decoding of verbal and non-verbal messages in the exchange process. This is the key assumption to understanding the concept of "process" in intercultural communication. From a transactional model viewpoint, both intercultural communicators in the communication process are viewed as playing the sender and receiver roles. Both are responsible for synchronizing the conversational process and outcome. An ineffective encoding and decoding process leads to shared meanings. An ineffective encoding and decoding process by one of the two "transceivers" can lead to intercultural misunderstanding.*

However, beyond the accurate encoding and decoding of messages on the content level, communicators need to cultivate additional sensitivity along multiple levels (such as relational, identity, and situational meanings) of intercultural understanding. Without a keen sense of cultural decoding competence, we

are likely to misjudge our intercultural partners' intentions and find ourselves in serious trouble. Without a mindful sense of message encoding, we may say the wrong things in the wrong context and with bad timing. With mindful alertness, we can conscientiously choose words and behaviors that make dissimilar others feel affirmed, included, and listened to.

PRINCIPLE 4: *Intercultural communication involves multiple goals, and the goals people have are largely dependent on how they define the interaction episode. Echoing the various layers of meaning negotiation, three types of goals are important in an intercultural encounter process: content goals, relational goals, and identity goals. Content goals refer to external, substantive issues in the communication process. Some questions we may want to consider are these: What do we want to accomplish in the intercultural negotiation session? What are the content or instrumental interaction goals? What are the potential obstacles and the necessary steps to accomplish our goals effectively? For example, a clear content goal discussion can involve asking a professor to postpone the deadline of a group project or requesting a pay raise from your international boss. We need to think ahead in terms of the cultural or interpersonal obstacles that lie in the path of content goal attainment. We also need to decide whether we should pursue our content goals in an individualistic, assertive manner or in a relational, tactful manner.*

Relational goals refer to the socioemotional issues or relational role expectations that are involved in the intercultural negotiation session. We need to examine questions such as the following: What are my role expectations and the other person's role expectations in the intercultural encounter episode? What are the situational conditions that shape the dynamics of the role-encountering process? What are the behavioral requirements, and what is "off limits" in this intercultural interaction scene? A professor from a small power distance value culture (e.g., the United States) may be comfortable with informal discussions with his students in the classroom environment. A professor from a large power distance value culture (e.g., Iran) may expect more formality from students in the classroom setting. However, the same Iranian professor may relax her role expectations at a student-sponsored picnic in the park. To be flexible com-



Blog Pic 2.3 Intercultural incompetence.

nunicators across cultural lines, we must recognize the interconnected nature of norms, roles, and situations.

Identity goals refer to the projected self-image or self-worth issues in the interaction scene. Identity goals can involve identity respect/disrespect or approval/disapproval postures. It can also be interpreted in connection with our desires to have our cultural, ethnic, gender, disability, professional, and personal images respected in the communication episode. The ability to project a desired self-image or "face" and to have this projected "face" be validated are critical skills in any intercultural negotiation session. *Face* is basically about identity respect issues and other consideration issues within and beyond the intercultural encounter process. In a mindful facework negotiation process, honoring others' face and helping others to save face are ways to manage favorable interactive identities across cultures (see Blog Post 2.1).

PRINCIPLE 5: *Intercultural communication calls for understanding and acceptance of diverse communication approaches and styles.* For example, in an intercultural conflict episode, parties often utilize different communication styles that are consistent with their culture-based values. For some cultures, a conflict with another party should be confronted directly and assertive steps should be taken to resolve the conflict in a clear win-lose direction. In other cultures, a conflict should be avoided at all costs to preserve relational harmony. Mutual face-saving and face-honoring moves may supersede the need to arrive at a clear win-lose

resolution. In fact, conflict negotiators may want to cultivate the image of a win-win conflict process so that both parties can maintain some face, or dignity, before returning to their home cultures.

The cultural preferences for certain communication styles are, of course, mediated by many situational and relationship expectation factors. To embark on an inclusive communication approach, we must learn to be flexible in our verbal and nonverbal styles in dealing with diverse groups. We also must pay close attention to mediating factors—such as situational parameters and interaction goals—in shaping our different communication modes.

PRINCIPLE 6: *Many intercultural encounters involve well-meaning culture bumps or clashes.* Individuals of different cultural communities have learned different interaction forms, for example, eye contact maintenance or avoidance, in everyday conversations. They also tend to use their own cultural scripts to evaluate the competencies of cultural strangers' behaviors. Many intercultural miscommunication episodes start off from culture bumps or clashes. A **culture bump** is defined as a cultural violation on the behavioral level when our meanings do not overlap with one another in viewing the same behavior, which creates communication awkwardness or embarrassment (Archer, 1991). Let us look at Blog Post 2.2.

In this particular story, although David acted in an "unconscious incompetent" manner in the beginning, he caught his own culture bump and moved to the

BLOG POST 2.1

As a Mexican American young woman, I've experienced the push and pull of my identity. I feel like half of my life I've been adopting and adapting to the dominant American culture while selectively choosing certain aspects of my Mexican culture to nurture and celebrate.

Growing up, I did not interact much with other Hispanic classmates. In fact, I didn't know how to talk to them. I was constantly surrounded by Caucasians and determined at that time in my young life that this was how everything should be. This was the time that I began to disregard my Hispanic identity. I remember acting aloof when my mother attempted to speak Spanish and I pretended I didn't understand her. Soon thereafter, I remember seeing gardeners (who are stereotypically Mexican

in Southern California) and thinking to myself, I may be Mexican, but I'm not a gardener.

It wasn't until college that I was exposed to the reality of social circumstances, prejudice, stereotypes, and heteronormativity. I realized then how empty my identity had become and how rich it could be with a reacquaintance of my Mexican roots. Yes, I will take up anything and everything that is related to being Hispanic as part of my identity now, it is who I am. To not embrace my Mexican heritage is to not embrace me. I guess that's why I favor diversity in the schools I've attended, and I now have a better perspective on what I want my life to be like as I raise my children up in a world where every ethnicity should be welcomed.

—Jennifer, college student

BLOG POST 2.2

In a Poly Sci[ence] class during a group discussion, I was sitting to the right of a man from Saudi Arabia. As I was talking to him, I placed my right ankle on my left knee. I noticed a definite change in his demeanor toward me. After class, I approached him and asked if I had done or said something that offended him. He told

me that in the Arab culture, exposing the soles of your shoes while directly speaking to someone is tantamount to giving them "the finger." I apologized for my ignorance; he apologized for his ignorance of my ignorance. We ended up being friendly to one another for the remainder of the semester.

—David, college student

"conscious incompetent" stage to inquire about his own communication mistake. A culture bump often ends in more miscommunications and frustration when the two communicators continue to misinterpret each other's behavior as rude or even insulting. A culture bump is about violating another person's cultural norms without malicious intent. More often than not, we commit unintentional culture bumps in a new culture because we have not mastered the norms and the meaning fluency of that new system.

Well-meaning clash basically refers to misunderstanding an encounter in which people are actually behaving in a "socially skilled manner" and with "good intentions" according to the norms in their own culture (Brislin, 1993). Unfortunately, the behaviors that are considered proper or effective in one culture can be considered improper or ineffective in another culture. For example, using direct eye contact is considered a sign of respect in U.S. culture, whereas direct eye contact can signify disrespect in the Thai culture. The term *well-meaning* is used because no one in the intercultural encounter intentionally behaves obnoxiously or unpleasantly. Individuals are trying to be well-mannered or pleasant in accordance with the politeness norms of their own culture. Individuals behave ethnocentrically—often without conscious realization of their automatic-pilot verbal or nonverbal routines.

PRINCIPLE 7: *Intercultural communication always takes place in a context.* Intercultural communication does not happen in a vacuum, but is always context bound. Patterns of thinking and behaving are always interpreted within an interactive situation or context. To understand intercultural communication from a contextual viewpoint, we must consider how the physical and psychological settings of the communicators establish the climate or mood of their interaction.

The physical setting can include furniture arrangement, props, color of the room, temperature of the room, and who is in the room. However, and more important, we must understand the psychological or emotional meanings that are attached to the physical setting by the different cultural participants. Additionally, the expected roles of the participants, their relational distance, conversational topics, interaction goals, implicit communication rules, and culture shock factors can all influence the interaction climate. Last, the degree of cultural knowledge, past cultural visiting experience, and competent performance of communication skills form the overall patterns of the communication context.

PRINCIPLE 8: *Intercultural communication always takes place in embedded systems.* A system is an interdependent set of components that constitutes a whole and, simultaneously, influence each other. Our enculturation process (i.e., our primary socialization process at a young age) is influenced by both macro- and microlevel events in our cultural environment. On a macro level, we are programmed or enculturated into our culture via our family and educational systems, religious and political systems, and government and socioeconomic systems, as well as by the paramount influence of media in our everyday life (Oetzel, 2009; Oetzel et al., 2006).

On a microlevel, we are surrounded by people who subscribe to similar worldviews, values, norms, and expectations. We are the recipients and also the preservers of our culture via the daily messages that we trade. However, culture is not a static web. It is a dynamic, evolutionary process. Human beings are also not static individuals—they are changeable. In learning about another culture or dissimilar groups, we can expand our mental landscape and emotional horizon. Through

the lens of another culture, we may be able to reinterpret our own identity and culture with fresh visions and insights.

INTERCULTURAL REALITY CHECK:

DO-ABLES

In this chapter, we defined intercultural communication and intercultural communication flexibility. In exploring the definition of intercultural communication, we emphasized the importance of using a meaning-centered approach to look at the intercultural communication process. We also covered the components and criteria of intercultural communication flexibility. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of a staircase learning model—from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence—and the role of mindfulness in achieving intercultural communication flexibility.

To be a dynamic, flexible intercultural communicator, you must start practicing some of the ideas you have read in this chapter in your everyday intercultural encounters. Let the learning journey begin. We also urge you to develop a strong “process consciousness” in dealing with cultural strangers. More specifically, we would like you to build on what you’ve learned so far, keeping the following checkpoints in mind when, in the next chapter, you learn about the value dimensions of a culture:

- A flexible intercultural communicator emphasizes a process-focused approach to intercultural communication.
- A flexible intercultural communicator recognizes the separate, ethnocentric realities that divide individuals and groups.
- A flexible intercultural communicator is willing to suspend evaluative, snap judgments concerning culture-based verbal and nonverbal style differences.
- A flexible intercultural communicator can deal with ambiguities and paradoxes in uncertain intercultural situations.
- A flexible intercultural communicator can communicate appropriately, effectively, adaptively, and creatively through the use of a variety of constructive verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

Intercultural knowledge opens doors to the diverse richness and breadth of the human experience. It reveals to us multiple ways of experiencing, sensing, feeling, and knowing. It helps us to start questioning our own stance regarding issues that we once took for granted. It widens our vision to include an alternative perspective of valuing and relating. By understanding the worldviews and values that influence others’ communication approaches, we can understand the logic that motivates and propels their actions or behaviors. The next chapter will discuss some key value patterns around the globe.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT IS CULTURE SHOCK?



CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Unpacking Culture Shock
 - Characteristics of Culture Shock
 - Pros and Cons of Culture Shock
 - Approaching Culture Shock: Underlying Factors
 - Initial Tips to Manage Culture Shock
- Intercultural Adjustment: Developmental Patterns
 - The U-Curve Adjustment Model
 - The Revised W-Shape Adjustment Model
 - Culture Shock: Peaks and Valleys
- Reentry Culture Shock
 - Reentry Culture Shock: Surprising Elements
 - Resocialization: Different Returnees' Profiles
- Intercultural Reality Check: Do-Ables

When I found out I got accepted into the JET program in Japan to teach, I was super excited. Even though I spoke no Japanese, I was motivated to learn as much as I could—I craved any kind of adventure. But I never realized how “western” I was until I sat down with three Japanese teachers and tried to plan my first lesson. My mind was functioning in a linear pattern of “first, next, last,” while the Japanese teachers were discussing, thinking in silence, examining every single detail, and consensus building. Just as I was contemplating shoving a sharp pencil into my skull, a consensus was reached and the lesson plan was finished—three hours later!

After the lesson (first time EVER conducting a class!), I asked one of my Japanese colleagues for some constructive criticism regarding a specific activity. Was it good? Should I do it again? Should I make some changes? “Maybe.”

“Maybe” was the extent of the feedback I received. And then it dawned on me: I had been living in Japan for almost two months now and I was yet to hear the Japanese word “no” (no). For two solid months, absolutely no one has said “no” to me directly. What an adventure!

—K. Abbott, Graduate Student

Millions of global citizens cross cultural boundaries every year to work, to study, to engage in government service, and to volunteer their time in global humanitarian work. Likewise, millions of international students, cultural exchange teachers, artists, scientists, and business people come to the United States to learn, to teach, to perform, to experiment, and to conduct business. When individuals move from their home cultures to a new culture, they take with them their cultural habits, familiar scripts, and interaction routines. For the most part, these old cultural habits may produce unintended clashes in the new culture.

Culture shock is about the stress and the feeling of disorientation you experience in a new culture. If you are temporarily visiting (sojourning to) a new culture for the first time, it is likely that you will experience some degree of cultural shock. Even if you do not plan to go overseas to work in the next few years, international classmates and coworkers may be sitting right next to you—working side by side with you. By learning more in depth about their culture shock experiences, you may develop new knowledge, display more respectful attitudes, and learn to apply more flexible intercultural skills in communicating with your international coworkers or classmates. This chapter asks three questions: What is culture shock? Can we track meaningful patterns of the intercultural adjustment process? What are some creative strategies we can use when we are crossing cultural boundaries and encountering culture shock problems?

This chapter is divided into four sections. We first address the role and definition of culture shock. We then explain two intercultural adjustment models that many sojourners or international students find useful. Third, we explore the concept of reentry culture shock. Finally, we present a set of do-able checkpoints to guide you through your international discovery journey.

UNPACKING CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is an inevitably stressful and disorienting experience. Let's check out the story in Blog Post 5.1.

People encounter culture shock whenever they uproot themselves from a familiar setting and move to an unfamiliar one (e.g., relocating from Lima, Peru, to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, or making the transition as a high school senior to a college freshman). Because culture shock is unavoidable, just how we manage culture shock will determine the adaptive process and outcome.

Culture shock is, first and foremost, an emotional experience. Intense emotions are involved in combination with behavioral confusion and inability to think clearly. Both short-term sojourners and long-term immigrants can experience culture shock at different stages of their adaptation. Sojourners, such as cultural exchange students, businesspersons, diplomats, journalists, military personnel, and Peace Corps volunteers, often play temporary resident roles with a short to medium span of stay. This section covers the definitional characteristics

of culture shock, discusses the pros and cons, describes factors that affect the culture shock experience, and provides some initial helpful tips to manage the culture shock experience.

Characteristics of Culture Shock

Before you read this section, work through my.blog 5.1 and check out your culture shock index when you encounter an unfamiliar environment.

Culture shock basically refers to a stressful transitional period when individuals move from a familiar environment into an unfamiliar one. In this unfamiliar environment, the individual's identity appears to be stripped of all protection. Previously familiar cues and scripts are suddenly inoperable in the new cultural setting. Let's check out a brief story in Blog Post 5.2.

For many international students or sojourners, the previously familiar cultural safety net has suddenly vanished. Communication scripts have changed. From how to say a proper "hello" to how to say a proper "goodbye" in the new culture, every interaction moment could create unintentional awkwardness or

BLOG POST 5.1

Three American universities accepted my undergraduate applications—one in Hawaii, one in Ohio, and one in Iowa. Because I had no clue as to how one university differed from another, I wrote down the names of the universities on three pieces of paper and asked my then nine-year-old brother, Victor, to pick one with his eyes closed. He picked Iowa. I decided fate had called me to the University of Iowa. Iowa City, in those days, was an all-white campus town. The university campus was huge—spread out and

cut off by a river running through it. I was one of the first group of international students being admitted to the university from Asia.

Life was composed of a series of culture shock waves in my first few months there. From overdressing (I quickly changed my daily skirts to jeans to avoid the question: "Are you going to a wedding today?") to hyperapprehension (e.g., the constant fear of being called upon to answer questions in the "small power distance" classroom atmosphere). I experienced intense loneliness and homesickness at times. The months flew by quickly, however.

—Stella, college instructor

stress. Unfamiliarity creates perceived threat, and perceived threat triggers fear and emotional vulnerability.

An anthropologist named Oberg (1960) coined the term *culture shock* over five decades ago. He believed that culture shock produces an identity disorientation state, which can bring about tremendous stress and pressure on the well-being of an individual. Culture shock involves (1) a sense of identity loss and identity deprivation with regard to values, status, profession, friends, and possessions; (2) identity strain as a result of the effort required to make necessary psychological adaptation; (3) identity rejection by members of the new culture; (4) identity confusion, especially regarding role ambiguity and unpredictability; and (5) identity powerlessness as a result of not being able to cope with the new environment (Furnham, 1988). An identity disorientation state is part of the culture shock experience.

my.blog 5.1

Recall the last time you traveled to an entirely new place or an unfamiliar environment. Think of that initial experience and put a check mark by the words that best capture your feelings:

Awkward	_____	Bizarre	_____
Disoriented	_____	Energized	_____
Excited	_____	Exhausted	_____
Embarrassed	_____	Surprised	_____
Alive	_____	Anxious	_____
Insecure	_____	Intense	_____
Challenged	_____	Rewarded	_____

In fact, Ward et al. (2001) discuss the *ABC's of culture shock* in terms of the affective, behavioral, and cognitive disorientation dimensions. *Affectively*, sojourners in the initial culture shock stage often expe-

BLOG POST 5.2 CULTURE SHOCK: AN INTERVIEW FOR A CUP OF TEA

My first visit abroad was to Missoula, Montana, USA. I was a visiting Tibetan Buddhist Scholar at a small Tibetan Buddhist Center. One day Carleen, my friend, took me to Starbucks in the downtown. I had to go through an interview to get a cup of tea. I stood in the line to order a cup of tea and the girl at the counter asked me, "What kind of tea?" She listed a couple of teas, including herb tea that I had no clue about. She had no Lipton Tea which I wanted so I settled with English Breakfast Tea. I assumed she would provide milk in my tea but she did not. So I asked for milk to which she said, "Do you want half and half, whole milk, or 2 percent?" I had never heard these choices in my life so I asked for regular milk. She looked baffled and waited for my answer. I looked at Carleen who said half and half would be fine. I like

sweet tea so I asked if I can get some sugar and she asked me, "Would you like sweetener or this or that?" I had no idea of these choices so I said, "Sugar, please." Finally, I sat at a table with Carleen who had gotten her coffee. When Carleen finished her coffee, the girl refilled her cup but she did not ask me if I wanted more tea. I said, "Could you give me some more tea?" She said, "You need to pay first." I was a bit shocked and frustrated. I told Carleen that I would rather buy tea materials and make good tea for myself than go through this "tea interview and discrimination experience." We both had a good laugh. She took me to Safeway to buy tea materials and I could enjoy my tea in peace. (In India, "tea" is understood as sweet tea with milk. I did not know all the American choices for tea, milk, etc.).

—Tenzin, college instructor

rience anxiety, bewilderment, confusion, disorientation, and perplexity as well as an intense desire to be elsewhere. *Behaviorally*, they are at the confusion stage in terms of the norms and rules that guide communication appropriateness and effectiveness. They are often at a loss in terms of how to initiate and maintain smooth conversations with their hosts and how to uphold themselves in a proper manner with the proper nonverbal cadences. *Cognitively*, they lack cultural interpretive competence to explain many of the "bizarre" behaviors that are occurring in their unfamiliar cultural settings.

Culture shock is sparked by the anxiety that results from "losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social discourse. These signs or cues include a thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips" (Bochner, 1986, p. 48). Despite having repeated practice in these interactions in our own culture, we are not aware of its taken-for-granted significance until we are away from our culture. When we start feeling very inept in the new cultural environment and when our peace of mind is jolted suddenly, we start realizing the importance of intercultural learning and intercultural competence skills (Berg & Paige, 2009).

Pros and Cons of Culture Shock

Culture shock can have both positive and negative implications. Negative implications include three major issues: (1) psychosomatic problems (e.g., headaches, stomachaches) caused by prolonged stress; (2) affective upheavals consisting of feelings of loneliness, isolation, depression, drastic mood swings, and interaction awkwardness caused by the inability to perform optimally in the new language; and (3) cognitive exhaustion caused by difficulty in making accurate attributions.

On the other hand, culture shock, if managed effectively, can have the following positive effects on the newcomer: a sense of well-being and heightened positive self-esteem, emotional richness and enhanced tolerance for ambiguity, behavioral competence in social interaction, cognitive openness and flexibility, and an enhanced optimism about self, others, and the everyday surroundings. Culture shock creates an

environment and an opportunity for individuals to experiment with new ideas and coping behaviors. It forces individuals to stretch beyond the usual boundaries of thinking and experiencing.

Approaching Culture Shock: Underlying Factors

The following factors have been found to influence why people manage their culture shock experience differently: motivational orientations, personal expectations, cultural distance, psychological adjustment, sociocultural adjustment, communication competence, and personality attributes.

Sojourners' **motivational orientation** to leave their home countries and enter a new culture has a profound influence on their culture shock attitudes. Individuals with voluntary motivations (e.g., Peace Corps volunteers) to leave a familiar culture and enter a new cultural experience tend to manage their culture shock experience more effectively than do individuals with involuntary motivations (e.g., refugees). Furthermore, sojourners (e.g., international students, tourists) encounter less conformity pressure than do immigrants because of their temporary visiting role. Host cultures often extend a more friendly welcome to sojourners than to immigrants or refugees. Thus, sojourners tend to perceive their overall international stay as more pleasant and the local hosts as more friendly than do immigrants or refugees.

Personal expectations have long been viewed as a crucial factor in the culture shock management process. Expectations refer to the anticipatory process and predictive outcome of the upcoming situation. Two observations have often been associated with such expectations: The first is that realistic expectations facilitate intercultural adaptation, and the second is that accuracy-based positive expectations ease adaptation stress (Pitts, 2009; Ward, 1996). Individuals with realistic expectations are psychologically prepared to deal with actual adaptation problems more than are individuals with unrealistic expectations. Furthermore, individuals with positive expectations tend to create positive self-fulfilling prophecies in their successful adaptation (e.g., believing relocation is a great move and your positive thinking affects your

actions); negative expectations tend to produce the opposite effect.

Most international students tend to carry positive expectation images concerning their anticipated sojourn in the new culture (Sias, Drzewiecka, Meares, Bent, Ortega, & White, 2008; Ward et al., 2001). Overall, realistic and positively oriented expectancy images of the new culture can help to facilitate intercultural adaptation for both business and student sojourners. Expectations influence newcomers' mindsets, sentiments, and behaviors. A positively resilient mindset helps to balance the negative stressors a newcomer may encounter in his or her adaptive efforts.

Overall, sojourners tend to encounter more severe culture shock when the cultural distance between their home cultures and the host society is high. **Cultural distance** factors can include differences in cultural values, language, verbal styles, nonverbal gestures, learning styles, decision-making styles, and conflict negotiation styles, as well as in religious, sociopolitical, and economic systems. Interestingly, however, when sojourners expect low cultural distance, they may actually encounter more intercultural frustration. These individuals become less culturally astute in dealing with the hosts from a perceived similar language/cultural background (e.g., British dealing with Aussies in Australia; Columbians from Columbia dealing with Mexicans in Mexico). Because of this "assumed similarity" factor, cultural differences may be glossed over; guests may overlook the vast differences in political or business practices or they may start using disparaging remarks in attacking the personality traits of their new cultural hosts. Both hosts and guests may encounter more frustrations without realizing that they are caught up in an understated culture clash spiral.

Psychological adjustment refers to feelings of well-being and satisfaction during cross-cultural transitions (Ward et al., 2001). Chronic strain, low self-esteem, and low mastery have a direct effect on adjustment depression. As cultural distance widens and stress level increases, newcomers must use different strategies to deal with such differences.

To counteract psychological stress, researchers recommend the use of positive self-talk strategies and positive situational appraisal strategies (Chang, Chua,

& Toh, 1997; Cross, 1995). Positive self-talk strategies (e.g., giving yourself a pat on the back for being so adaptive in the new culture, rewarding yourself with a nice treat for mastering all the intricacies of saying "no" in this new culture without actually saying "no!") can create a more resilient mindset. A resilient mindset can deal with the bombarded stimuli more effectively (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Positive situational appraisal strategies involve changing perceptions and interpretations of the stressful events or situations. For example, you start to talk yourself into taking more Italian-speaking classes from the "mean" teacher and reframe the situation: the "mean and demanding" teacher is actually helping you to master your Italian faster than the "nice" teachers. Research indicates that the use of cognitive coping strategies (i.e., positive self-talk and situational reinterpretation) is associated with lower levels of perceived stress and fewer symptoms of depression in East Asian students in Singapore (Ward, 2004). Thus, cognitive reframing appears to soften the psychological stress level for East Asian students who are attempting to adapt to a collectivistic cultural environment. The nature of the stressful event and the degree of control and success that the students can assert on the distressing situation may explain this finding.

Sociocultural adjustment refers to the ability to fit in and execute appropriate and effective interactions in a new cultural environment (Ward et al., 2001; see Table 5.1). It can include factors such as the quality or quantity of relations with host nationals and the length of residence in the host country (Gareis, 2000; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Mortensen, Burleson, Feng,

TABLE 5.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT VERSUS SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Psychological adjustment	Sociocultural adjustment
Stress management	Relationship management
Psychological-related	Network-related
Perceptual interpretation	Relationship quality
Intrapersonal control	Host culture receptivity
Digging in	Reaching out
Cognitive reframing	Sociocultural climate

& Liu, 2009). International students, for example, report greater satisfaction with their host culture when host nationals take the initiative to befriend them. It has also been revealed that international students' friendship networks typically consist of the following patterns: (1) a primary, monocultural friendship network that consists of close friendships with other compatriots from similar cultural backgrounds (e.g., Nigerian international students developing friendship ties with other African students) (Brown, 2009; Matusitz, 2005); (2) a bicultural network that consists of social bonds between sojourners and host nationals, whereby professional aspirations and goals are pursued (Holmes, 2005; Lee, 2006); and (3) a multicultural network that consists of acquaintances from diverse cultural groups for recreational activities (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). Research further indicates that greater sociocultural adjustment and social support in the new cultural environment are associated with lower levels of

depression and hopelessness in international students (Lee, 2006, 2008; Lin, 2006; Paige & Goode, 2009; see my blog 5.2).

Overall, culture-specific knowledge, language fluency, more extensive contact with host nationals, and a longer period of residence in the host culture are associated with lower levels of sociocultural difficulty in the new culture (Kohls, 1996; Ward, 1996). In addition, the host culture's receptivity to new arrivals, the degree of cultural conformity expected, and the current political climate of open-door versus closed-door attitudes toward international students and visitors can also either facilitate or create roadblocks to sojourners' sociocultural adjustment process.

In the intercultural communication competence field, researchers have identified the following components as critical to sojourners' adjustment process (Deardorff, 2009; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009): culture-sensitive knowledge, motivation to adapt, the

my.blog 5.2 ASSESSING YOUR SOCIAL SUPPORT CIRCLE

Think of a stressful situation in which you have made a major transition (e.g., from high school to college; from an old job to a new job; from home to living on your own), read each item, and circle T = True or F = False. In this new environment, you actually have friends or acquaintances:

- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 1. | To listen to you and talk with you whenever you feel lonely or depressed. | T or F |
| 2. | To reassure you that you are supported and cared for. | T or F |
| 3. | To explain things and to make your situation clearer and easier to understand. | T or F |
| 4. | To spend some quiet time with you whenever you do not feel like going out. | T or F |
| 5. | To explain and help you understand the local culture and communication issues. | T or F |
| 6. | To provide necessary information to help orient you to your new surroundings. | T or F |
| 7. | To help you interpret things that you don't really understand. | T or F |
| 8. | To tell you about available choices and options. | T or F |
| 9. | To show you how to do something that you didn't know how to do. | T or F |

Scoring: Add up all your answers on TRUE.

Decoding: 1–3 = low social support; 4–6 = moderate social support; 7–9 = high social support.

Interpreting: The higher your score, the greater your social support circle. The greater the social support circle, the easier it is for you to adjust to your transitional phase in a new environment.

Source: Adapted from Ong (2000). "The Construction and Validation of a Social Support Scale for Sojourners: The Index of Sojourner Social Support." Unpublished master's thesis, National University of Singapore, as cited in Ward et al. (2001), p. 89.

activation of appropriate and effective communication skills, the mastery of culture-based contextual rules, and the achievement of conjoint outcomes between the intercultural communicators. On the behavioral tendency skills level, intercultural competence scholars also emphasize the following mindset tendencies and skillset (Gudykunst, 2005a, 2005b; Pusch, 2009): mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, behavioral flexibility, and cross-cultural empathy.

According to Pusch (2009), *behavioral flexibility* refers to "the ability to adapt and accommodate one's own behavior to people from other groups," and *cross-cultural empathy* means "being able to participate in another person's experience in your imagination; thinking it intellectually and feeling it emotionally. The ability to connect emotionally with people and showing compassion for others, and being able to listen actively and mindfully" (p. 70). Whereas intercultural scholars emphasize the importance of communication competence skills and then sociocultural and psychological adjustment factors, cross-cultural psychologists tend to emphasize the importance of psychological adjustment and then sociocultural adjustment and communication competence skills (Gudykunst, 2005b, 2005c; Matsumoto, Yoo, & LeRoux, 2010).

In regard to **personality attributes**, such personality traits as high tolerance for ambiguity (i.e., high acceptance of ambiguous situations), internal locus of control (i.e., inner-directed drives and motivations), personal flexibility, and mastery can contribute to generally good adjustment and positive psychological well-being. Interestingly, Ward (2004) also suggests a "cultural fit" proposition, which emphasizes the importance of a good match between personality types (e.g., extraversion and introversion) of the sojourners and the host cultural norms. For example, we can speculate that independent-self sojourners may be more compatible with individualistic cultural norms, whereas interdependent-self sojourners may be more compatible with collectivistic cultural norms. The synchronized match between a particular personality type and the larger cultural norms produces a "goodness of fit" and possibly cultivates a positive adaptive experience for the visiting residents.

Initial Tips to Manage Culture Shock

The fundamental need for newcomers in an unfamiliar culture is addressing the sense of emotional insecurity and vulnerability. The more competent newcomers are at managing their identity threat level, the more they are able to induce effective adaptation outcomes (Matsumoto, Yoo, & LeRoux, 2010).

New arrivals can defuse their perceived threat and, hence, anxiety level by (1) increasing their motivations to learn about the new culture; (2) keeping their expectations realistic and increasing their familiarity concerning the diverse facets of the new culture (e.g., conducting culture-specific research through readings and diverse accurate sources, including talking with people who have spent some time in that culture); (3) increasing their linguistic fluency and learning why, how, and under what situations certain phrases or gestures are appropriate, plus understanding the core cultural values linked to specific behaviors; (4) working on their tolerance for ambiguity and other flexible personal attributes; (5) developing strong ties (close friends) and weak ties (acquaintanceships) to manage identity stress and loneliness; and (6) being mindful of their interpersonal behaviors and suspending ethnocentric evaluations of the host culture.

INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT: DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS

The term **intercultural adjustment** has been used to refer to the short-term and medium-term adaptive process of sojourners in their overseas assignments. Tourists are different from sojourners in that tourists are visitors whose length of stay exceeds twenty-four hours in a location away from home and who have traveled for voluntary, recreational holiday-enjoyment purposes. Sojourners, on the other hand, are temporary residents who voluntarily go abroad for a set period of time that is usually related to task-based or instrumental purposes. Both tourists and sojourners can, of course, experience culture shock—especially when the country they visit is very different from their own (see Blog Pic 5.1). In fact, do you know where the top five worldwide tourist destinations are? Take a guess and then check out Jeopardy Box 5.1. Where do you think



Blog Pic 5.1 Does this bowl of "goodness" look appetizing?

JEOPARDY BOX 5.1 TOP FIVE WORLDWIDE TOURIST DESTINATIONS, 2010

Country
1. France
2. United States
3. Spain
4. China
5. Italy

Source: World Tourism Organization (August, 2010), http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/highlights/UNWTO_Highlights10_en_HR.pdf (retrieved April 23, 2011).

most tourists to the United States come from (i.e., their countries of origin)? What do you think are the top five tourism cities in the United States? Take a quick guess and check out Jeopardy Boxes 5.2 and 5.3. A tourist, while visiting another country, can be a welcome guest, a nuisance, or a downright intruder in a sacred land. Tourists, their hosts, and businesses/service providers all weave together interdependently to form impressions, to trade, and to share some memorable moments through brief encounters and amusing contacts.

Sojourners, however, are typically individuals who commit to a temporary residential stay in a new culture as they strive to achieve both their instrumental and their socioemotional goals. *Instrumental goals* refer to task-based or business or academic goals that sojourners would like to accomplish during their stay in a

JEOPARDY BOX 5.2 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF VISITORS TO THE UNITED STATES, 2010

Country
1. Canada
2. Mexico
3. United Kingdom
4. Japan
5. Germany

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (March, 2010), http://www.tinet.ita.doc.gov/outreachpages/download_data_table/Fast_Facts_2010.pdf (retrieved April 23, 2011).

JEOPARDY BOX 5.3 TOP FIVE TOURISM CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES, 2008–2009

City	State
1. New York	New York
2. Miami	Florida
3. Los Angeles	California
4. Orlando	Florida
5. San Francisco	California

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (2009), http://www.tinet.ita.doc.gov/outreachpages/download_data_table/2009_States_and_Cities.pdf (retrieved April 23, 2011).

foreign country. *Socioemotional goals* refer to relational, recreational, and personal development goals during their sojourning experience. Thus, a Peace Corps volunteer might take an overseas assignment for a year or two for both task and personal enrichment purposes. A business person might accept an international posting for between three and five years. A missionary might go for a longer period, and military personnel are often posted overseas for shorter "tours of duty." Each year, for example, over 1.3 million students worldwide choose to study outside their countries. Right now, there are approximately 690,000 international students studying in different U.S. colleges with the explicit aim of getting their college degrees here. They also bring \$20 billion into the U.S. economy via out-of-state tuition and living expenses. In fact, do you know where most of the international students come from? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 5.4. Do you know what are the top pick countries for U.S.

JEOPARDY BOX 5.4 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO THE UNITED STATES, 2009–2010

Country
1. China
2. India
3. South Korea
4. Canada
5. Taiwan

Source: Institute of International Education. (2010). *Top 25 Places of Origin of International Students, 2008/09–2009/10: Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2008-10> (retrieved April 23, 2011).

JEOPARDY BOX 5.5 TOP FIVE STUDY ABROAD LEADING DESTINATIONS FOR U.S. COLLEGE STUDENTS, 2008–2009

Country
1. United Kingdom
2. Italy
3. Spain
4. France
5. China

Source: Institute of International Education. (2010). *Top 25 Destinations of U.S. Study Abroad Students, 2007/08–2008/09: Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Leading-Destinations/2007-09> (retrieved April 23, 2011).

student-abroad programs? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 5.5.

Indeed, most of the international students come from communal-oriented cultures, such as China, India, South Korea, Canada, and Taiwan, and they study in California, New York, and Texas (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2011). There are also approximately 260,330 U.S. students nationwide who embark on one-year study-abroad programs. The favorite study-abroad destinations of U.S. college students are the UK, Italy, Spain, France, and China (IIE, 2011). However, the number of U.S. students studying in Chile, South Korea, and Peru increased by more than 25 percent, whereas the top four destinations dropped in popularity. Students surveyed cited personal growth, new perspectives on world affairs, and career enhancement as some of the reasons for why they opt to go abroad to study. Beyond instrumental goals, international exchange sojourners also pursue socioemotional goals or fun activities, such as developing new friendships with the local students and hosts, visiting local marketplaces and museums, and learning about local histories, sports, and folk crafts (check out Hits-or-Misses 5.1, 5.2, 5.3).

In the remainder of this section, we explore the developmental models of the short- to medium-term adjustment process of sojourners. By understanding the developmental phases of intercultural adjustment, we can increase our competencies in dealing with our own and others' change process.

HIT-OR-MISS 5.1 TOP FIVE U.S. UNIVERSITIES ENROLLING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

See if you "Hit" or "Miss" as you name the top five U.S. universities that enroll the highest numbers of international students:

- _____ (California)
- _____ (Illinois)
- _____ (New York)
- _____ (Indiana)
- _____ (New York)

Answers: 1: USC (University of Southern California); 2: University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign; 3: NYU (New York University); 4: Purdue University; 5: Columbia University.

Source: International Institute of Education. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from <http://www.iie.org>

The U-Curve Adjustment Model

A number of researchers have conceptualized the sojourner adjustment process from various developmental perspectives. An interesting consequence of these stage-oriented descriptive models centers on whether sojourners' adaptation is a U-curve or a W-curve process. In interviewing over two hundred Norwegian Fulbright grantees in the United States, Lysgaard (1955) developed a three-phase intercultural adjustment model that includes (1) initial adjustment, (2) crisis, and (3) regained adjustment:

HIT-OR-MISS 5.2 TOP FIVE FIELDS OF STUDY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

From the list below, see if you "Hit" or "Miss" as you identify the top five fields of study for international students studying in the United States.

- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Business and Management
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Engineering
- ☐ Fine and Applied Arts
- ☐ Health Professions
- ☐ Humanities
- ☐ Math and Computer Science
- ☐ Physical and Life Sciences
- ☐ Social Sciences

Answers: 1: Business and Management (145,514); 2: Engineering (127,441); 3: Physical and Life Sciences (61,285); 4: Math and Computer Science (60,780) 5: Social Sciences (59,865).

Source: International Institute of Education, *Open Doors 2010 Fast Facts*. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from <http://www.iie.org>

HIT-OR-MISS 5.3 TOP FIVE FIELDS OF STUDY FOR U.S. STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD

From the list below, see if you "Hit" or "Miss" as you identify the top five fields of study for U.S. students studying abroad:

- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Business and Management
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Engineering
- ☐ Fine and Applied Arts
- ☐ Health Professions
- ☐ Humanities
- ☐ Math and Computer Science
- ☐ Physical and Life Sciences
- ☐ Social Sciences

Answers: 1: Social Sciences (53,888); 2: Business and Management (50,764); 3: Humanities (32,020); 4: Fine and Applied Arts (19,004); 5: Physical and Life Sciences (19,000).

Source: International Institute of Education, *Open Doors 2010 Fast Facts*. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from <http://www.iie.org>

(1) is the optimistic or elation phase of the sojourners' adjustment process, (2) is the stressful phase, when reality sets in and sojourners are overwhelmed by their own incompetence, and (3) is the settling-in phase, when sojourners learn to cope effectively with the new environment.

Drawing from the above ideas, Lysgaard (1955; see also Nash, 1991) proposed the U-curve model of the sojourner adjustment process, suggesting that sojourners pass through an initial honeymoon phase, then experience a "slump" or stressful phase, and finally pull themselves back up to an effective phase in managing their assignments abroad. In extending the U-curve model, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) proposed a six-stage W-shape model, with successive honeymoon, hostility, humorous, at-home, reentry culture shock, and resocialization stages. Expanding the ideas of Gullahorn and Gullahorn, we have developed the following seven-stage revised W-shape adjustment model to explain

sojourners' short-term to medium-term adjustment process (see Figure 5.1).

The Revised W-Shape Adjustment Model

The revised W-shape adjustment model consists of seven stages: the honeymoon, hostility, humorous, in-sync, ambivalence, reentry culture shock, and resocialization stages. The model applies especially to international students' experience abroad. Take a look first at Blog Post 5.3 and check out the experience abroad of one college student, Laleh.

In the **honeymoon stage**, individuals are excited about their new cultural environment. This is the initial landing phase in which everything appears fresh and exhilarating. Sojourners perceive people and events through pleasantly tinted (or rose-colored) glasses. Nonetheless, they do experience mild bewilderment and perplexity about the new culture; they also experience bursts of loneliness and homesickness. However, overall, they are cognitively curious about the new culture and emotionally charged up at meet-

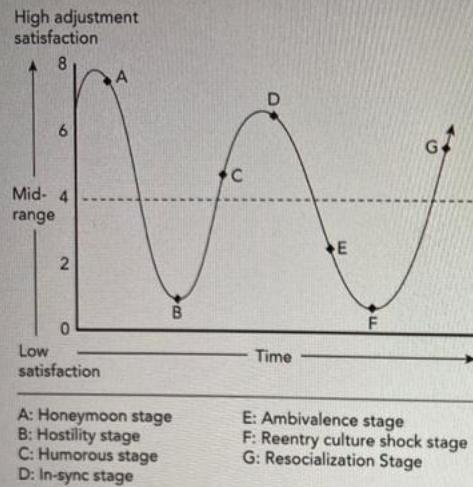


FIGURE 5.1 Revised W-Shape Adjustment Model

ing new people. They may not completely understand the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that surround them, but they are enjoying their initial "friendly" contacts with the locals.

Check out the story in Blog Post 5.4.

In the **hostility stage**, sojourners experience major emotional upheavals. This is the serious culture shock stage in which nothing works out smoothly. This stage can occur rapidly, right after the glow of the honeymoon phase is over and reality sets in sooner than expected. At this stage, sojourners experience a major loss of self-esteem and self-confidence. They feel consciously incompetent and emotionally drained in many aspects of their life. Many of these sojourners

can either become very aggressive/hostile or totally withdrawn. Anderson (1994), for example, identifies three types of "culture shockers" as follows: (1) the early returnees—those who tend to use aggressive or passive aggressive strategies to deal with the "hostile" environment and exit prematurely back to their home cultures; (2) the time servers—those who are doing a minimally passable job with minimal host contact and who are emotionally and cognitively "serving their time," but eagerly looking forward to returning home; and (3) the participators—those who are committed to adjust in an optimal manner and participate fully in their new culture and who take advantage of both instrumental and socioemotional learning in the new environment.

The "early returnees" tend to use *pounce* strategies or passive aggressive strategies and blame all the problems on the new culture. They constantly use their ethnocentric standards to compare and evaluate the local practices and customs. They exit their overseas assignments prematurely because of their interpretations of a stressful "hostile" environment and the "uncivilized" people they have to deal with on a daily basis (Brown, 2009). Yiping, a young woman from China who had been studying in the United States for seven months, complained to her friends and Chinese international classmates: "This semester, you must *talk* to earn your participation points in the classroom. We have three parts of the grade in this class. One third is discussion participation, the other two-thirds is writing articles. So if you don't talk, you lose one third of your points. So you have to talk. Talking is so exhausting! And it's not just talk, you know, from the material. You need to say what you *think* about it. But in China, you just

BLOG POST 5.3 INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT— HONEYMOON STAGE

W-Shape Model Narrative . . .

I feel like I went through several of the stages of culture shock while I was doing a Junior [Year] Abroad study program in Spain. The honeymoon stage was great. This was right when I got there. I thought that everything was wonderful. I didn't really miss being at home because I was doing so many new and exciting things.

I was traveling through the south of Spain, who would ever think that there was something better than that? I was having such a good time and didn't really seem to even notice that I was so far away. I thought that Spain was a great place. I wasn't able to see any of the downfalls. I would practice my Spanish with as many people as I could find. It was a very exciting time. I would say that this period lasted for about two weeks, while I was traveling through Spain.

—Laleh, college student

BLOG POST 5.4 INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT— HOSTILITY STAGE

Then the *hostility stage* hit. I think that the turning point was the first night when I was at my *señora* house. This experience was a huge shock to me. The apartment that I was living in was about a sixth of the size of my house. I was sharing a room that was the size of a shoebox. Needless to say I was really unhappy, at first. The minute that I got there it really hit me that I was living in another country for a long time without my family. To make things even worse, the room had no windows. All I wanted to do was go home. I didn't want to be in this little apartment with some woman that I didn't know, who didn't speak a word of English. I immediately called my dad crying. I told him that I wanted to come home and that I wasn't going to stay in Spain for a whole semester. After about a half an hour of listening to me whine and

cry, my dad told me that I had to stay because he knew that that was what I really wanted and that this was just a bump in the road. He told me that I would get used to things and that everything would be all right. I thought that he had gone crazy.

The following few weeks were full of ups and downs. I was in an environment [in which] I didn't know what to do. I didn't even know where to buy the basic things that I needed. I felt like I was in a whole other world that didn't exist to me before. I had to learn how to take public transportation, which is something that I had never done before. After countless times of getting on the wrong bus, I finally figured it out. I would get frustrated because I wasn't able to express what was going on, because I was able to put together only the most basic of sentences.

—Laleh, college student

remember the expert answer.... We have one, and only one correct answer. That's my educational experience in China. But here it's like, okay, no right answers. Everyone is good. Every answer is correct. You just need to give your own perspective loudly and with back-up evidence. I'm so worn-out from talking and stressed all the time. I'm here to learn from the expert professors, why do they care about my opinions? I'm so ready to go home to China now!"

The "time servers" tend to use *avoidance strategies*. They use either physical avoidance or psychological withdrawal strategies to avoid interacting with host members. They do their job or fulfill their role in moving ahead in attaining their instrumental goals. However, they are fairly dissatisfied in the socioemotional connection area and feel quite isolated. They also tend to engage in wishful-thinking strategies and counting the days until they can go home. In an interview, Mariko, who had been studying in the United States for seventeen months, described her problem with her roommate and how she handled it: "Sometimes when I'm tired or not feeling very well, it appears on my face. And my American roommates started to tell me how small my eyes are. 'You are Japanese, and your eyes are usually small, but it's getting smaller, and smaller, and I couldn't see them.' I took it as a joke at first. But she kept telling me this stuff. I kind of get used to that, because she usually does that. But the problem is, she couldn't stop. Even though I tried to show that I was becoming annoyed, like, 'Please stop

it. I'm too tired right now.' ... I don't know but she always says those kinds of things without being afraid of being misunderstood.... Whenever I tried to tell her about my problems, she started telling me it's my cultural background, or tried to talk about her own problems instead.... But she was never really respectful or caring of me. I now tried to avoid my roommate and stayed in the library more. I'm secretly trying to look for a new place to stay and looking for a new roommate to room with. I'm now counting down my months when I can go home and sleep on my own cozy futon bed."

The "participants," on the other hand, use active commitment strategies to realign their identities with the new culture. They try to engage in positive self-talk and positive situational appraisal strategies. They also intentionally develop new communication competence practices to connect with their new culture. They are committed to using an *ethnorelative lens* to view things from the other culture's frame of reference (Iyer, 1989). With the help of supportive networks, incremental task goal progression, and their personal emotional resilience, many sojourners can pull themselves out from the hostility stage and arrive at the recovery curve. Natalia, a Colombian student who has been in the United States for eighteen months, talked about how her attitude changed to become more of a participant in U. S. culture: "I think it changed when I started applying (for the master's program). Because I see that I will stay here for two years or more. So that's a lot of

BLOG POST 5.5 INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT— HUMOROUS STAGE AND IN-SYNC STAGE

The humorous stage was a little bit more enjoyable. I did have many times when I found myself doing something wrong and was able to laugh at myself. Once I was able to laugh about it and not worry so much about what I was doing, I felt a lot better. However, I still haven't gotten the hang of the whole kissing on both cheeks when you meet. I will still offer them my hand and they will be leaning in to kiss me. It is like an awkward first date goodbye. I do not think that I fully experienced that in-sync stage. I feel like I became more accustomed to what was

going on, but I was never completely comfortable with many of the "strange" cultural situations. The longer I stayed there the more I got used to things. However, I was still wishing that things could have been more like home. I never understood why you couldn't just go in somewhere and order a nice turkey sandwich. There were little things that would get on my nerves on a daily basis, but I was able to work through them. I guess I became more in sync with what was going on around me. I knew what I needed to do to get what I wanted, which was a big accomplishment.

—Laleh, college student

time. Then in this process, I have to start to make new American friends, and not to talk too much with the same friends in Colombia.... I make a decision to participate more in the American culture—watch more American news, talk more to American students in class, and learn to visit Professors in their office which I'm not used to back home. I want to really know how the American mind ticks, why they all seem so confident and carefree!"

Now let's check out Blog Post 5.5, the humorous stage description.

At the **humorous stage**, sojourners learn to laugh at their cultural *faux pas* and start to realize that there are pros and cons in each culture—just as there are both good and evil people in every society. They experience a mixture of stress–adaptation–growth emotions (Y. Y. Kim, 1988, 2005), such as small frustrations and small triumphs. They are able to compare both their home and their host cultures in realistic terms, and they no longer take things as seriously as in the hostility stage. They can now take a step backward and look at their own behavior and reactions objectively. Taskwise, they are making progress in attaining their instrumental goals (e.g., achieving their MBA degree or acquiring new business skills). They are beginning to form new friendships and social networks. These sojourners eventually arrive at the next stage.

At the **in-sync adjustment stage**, sojourners feel "at home" and experience identity security and inclusion. The boundaries between outsiders and insiders become fuzzier, and sojourners experience social acceptance and support. They are now easily able to interpret "bizarre" local customs and behaviors. They

may be savvy enough to speak the local language with flair, even catching some verbal jokes and puns and perhaps responding with a one-up joke. They may now even act as role models or mentors to incoming sojourners from their home cultures. During the in-sync adjustment stage, sojourners develop a sense of trust and empathy and a wide spectrum of other positive emotions. They become much more creative and adaptive in the new environment. They are capable of making appropriate choices in connection with any new situations that may arise, just as they arrive at a "comfort level" of their sojourn. However, they must get ready to pack their bags and go home.

Let's check out Laleh's ambivalent feelings in Blog Post 5.6.

In the **ambivalence stage**, sojourners experience grief, nostalgia, and pride, with a mixed sense of relief and sorrow that they are going home. They recall their early awkward days when they first arrived and they count all the new friends they have made since then. They also look forward eagerly to sharing all their intercultural stories with their family members and old friends back home. They finally say goodbye to their newfound friends and their temporarily adopted culture.

At the **reentry culture shock stage**, sojourners face an unexpected jolt (see the "Reentry Culture Shock" section that follows). Because of the unanticipated nature of reentry shock, its impact is usually much more severe, and returnees usually feel more depressed and stressed than they did with entry culture shock. There is a sharp letdown (e.g., their friends or family members have no interest in hearing all their

BLOG POST 5.6 INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT— AMBIVALENCE STAGE

I had two different experiences with the ambivalence stage. When I was leaving to come home for Christmas, I had a feeling like I hadn't accomplished everything that I wanted to, which was why I decided to stay for another semester. There were so many things that I still wanted to do, and I felt that if I didn't stay for another semester that I would be cheating myself out of more wonderful

cultural experiences. The second experience that I had with the ambivalence stage was quite different. When it was getting to the end of the second semester, I was totally ready to go home. I was ready to get out of there three weeks before school was over. I was tired of not being able to communicate like I wanted to. I had all my bags packed and [was] ready to take off and share all my wonderful stories with my family and friends.

—Laleh, college student

wonderful intercultural stories) and identity chaos: the greater the distance (i.e., on the cultural values and communication dimensions) between the two cultures, the more intense the reentry shock. Additionally, the more integrated into and time spent in the abroad country, the more difficult this stage becomes. By now, however, most sojourners have become resourceful and resilient individuals. They can recycle some of the commitment strategies they used abroad to pull themselves through to the next stage.

In the **resocialization stage**, some individuals (i.e., the resocializers) may quietly assimilate themselves back to their old roles and behaviors without making much of a "wave" or appearing different from the rest of their peers or colleagues. They bury their newly acquired ideas and skills together with the pictures on their Facebook page and try not to look at them again. Looking at these pictures can only cause identity dissonance and disequilibrium. Other individuals (i.e., the alienators) can never "fit back" into their home cultures again. They are always the first to accept an overseas assignment. They feel more alive abroad than at home. For example, Jenny, a college junior, has been to Spain, Italy, Mexico, and Hong Kong on study-abroad programs. She confessed feeling unease and restlessness at her own university and will spend the next semester in Argentina. Jenny, an alienator, may eventually become a global nomad who claims the global world as her home base rather than any single place as her national cultural affiliation.

Finally, yet other individuals (i.e., the "transformers") are the ones who act as agents of change in their home organizations or cultures. They mindfully integrate their new learning experience abroad with what is positive in their own culture (Brown & Brown, 2009;

Brown & Holloway, 2008). They apply multidimensional thinking, enriched emotional intelligence, and diverse angles to solve problems or to instigate change for a truly inclusive learning organization. Geeta, from India, studied in the United States for two and one-half years and reflects on the experience as she returns to her home culture: "The U.S. has helped me become more assertive in a respectful way, not aggressive though. The ways of the U.S., this whole concept about space, about individualism versus collectivism, that certainly has merits. Although it has its demerits, it has some merits, too. And I think I'm inculcating those, because I think that makes me a stronger person. Saying 'no' cordially and not feeling guilty about it, that is something I've learned after coming here. And placing my own needs as important as the needs of others, and considering my own wants and needs as a priority is an eye-opening experience for me."

Transformers are the change agents who bring home with them a wealth of personal and cultural treasures to share, actively and responsibly, with colleagues, friends, and families. They do so with interpersonally sensitive skills—something they've learned in the foreign environment. They have no fears of acting or being perceived as "different" or being situated in the "outgroup" category; they now have a "taste" of what it means to be different (however, this taste of difference is qualitatively different from the "difference" that many minority members experience in their everyday lives). They are comfortable in experiencing the cultural frame-shifting process, for example, being individualist and becoming collectivist, interacting in low context style with one set of individuals and switching to a high-context approach with another set of folks (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez,

2010). They practice a "third culture" approach in integrating and activating the best practices of both cultures and creatively fuse them into a third culture perspective outlook in decision making and problem solving. They are more compassionate and committed than before about social injustice issues and human rights issues on a global scale. Transformers are the individuals who have acquired (and are always in the process of acquiring) mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom.

Culture Shock: Peaks and Valleys

In sum, the revised W-shape adjustment model basically emphasizes the following characteristics, which can influence the progress of the sojourners' identity change process: (1) They must understand the peaks and valleys, and positive and negative shifts, that constitute identity change in an unfamiliar environment, realizing that the frustration-and-triumph roller coaster ride is part of the change-and-growth process. (2) They must be aware and keep track of their instrumental, relational, and identity goals in the new culture; success in one set of goals (e.g., making new friends) can affect triumph in another set of goals (e.g., newfound friends can help to solve a school-related problem). (3) They must give themselves some time and space to adjust; they should keep a journal or blog to express their daily feelings and random thoughts, and they should also keep in touch with people in their home culture via Facebook, letters, e-mails, and Skype. (4) They must develop both strong ties (meaningful friendships) and weak ties (functional social connections, e.g., with supportive teachers, caring counselors, or friendly grocers) to cushion themselves and seek help in times of crisis. (5) They must reach out to participate in the host culture's major cultural events—art and music festivals, parades, local museums, or national sports—and immerse themselves in this once-in-a-lifetime experience and learn to enjoy the local culture as much as possible.

The patterns of the revised W-shape adjustment model consist of back-and-forth looping movements within and between stages. Length of sojourn, alone or with family, degree of adaptation commitment, degrees and types of communication competence (e.g., linguistic competence), first-time visit versus

repeated visit, and realistic versus unrealistic goals are some other factors that will propel either progressive or regressive loops along the W-shape model. Remember the story from the opening chapter? Let's explore more of Ms. Abbott's experiences in Blog Post 5.7 to understand the flow of choppy waters of the model.

Church (1982) and Ward (2004), in reviewing the literature on these developmental models, comment that both the U-curve and the W-shape models appear to be too general and do not capture the dynamic interplay between sojourners' and host nationals' factors in the adjustment process. In addition, sojourners adapt and learn at different rates. The support for both models is based on one-time cross-sectional data (i.e., one-time surveys of sojourners) rather than longitudinal data (i.e., collection of surveys at different points during sojourners' two-year adjustment). More controversial is the debate as to the initial phase (i.e., the *honeymoon stage*) of adjustment. Research (Adler, 1997; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Osland, 1995; Rohrlach & Martin, 1991) indicates that international students and managers both tend to experience severe identity shock (i.e., the *hostility stage* comes very early, side by side with the fleeting *honeymoon stage*) in the early phase of their sojourn abroad. However, the overseas stressors also motivate them to become more resourceful and resilient in their search for new knowledge and skills in managing the alien environment.

Despite some of the limitations of the developmental models, their positive implications are that they offer us a developmental portrait of the culture shock experience, illustrate that the culture shock process is filled with peaks and valleys, and contribute to a holistic understanding of the psychological, affective, and identity changes in the new arrivals. Additionally, in the W-shape model, we are made aware of the importance of understanding the role of *reentry culture shock*.

REENTRY CULTURE SHOCK

The phenomenon of reentry culture shock has received increased attention from intercultural researchers (Martin & Harrell, 1996, 2004; Sussman, 1986). Reentry shock involves the realignment of one's new identity with a once-familiar home environment. After

BLOG POST 5.7 BACK AND FORTH ALONG THE W-SHAPE ADJUSTMENT MODEL

After graduating from the university, I moved to Japan to teach English in Japanese public school as a member of the JET Program. Upon my arrival to Japan, I spoke no Japanese, knew nothing about Japanese culture, and had no formal experience teaching children. My true purpose in coming to Japan was to escape the reality of getting a 9–5 job in America and to continue on my adventurous quest to see as much of the world as I possibly could.

I graduated with a degree in Political Science with a minor in Communication, got high marks, and considered myself a fairly intelligent person. But moving to the Japanese countryside rendered me an illiterate mute, unable to read even the simplest signs or communicate with the second graders I taught. It was an incredibly humbling experience to walk into a grocery store and not be able to read a single label, or have your third grade students check the penmanship of your hiragana characters.

What proved to be the real challenge in my daily life in Japan was communicating across cultures with the teachers I work with. Although the language barrier is an obvious hurdle, the many layers of Japanese culture and the context in which they conduct business was the most fascinating aspect of my experience. I found myself surrounded by a tangled web of unspoken rules, titles, hierarchy, formality, and cultural idiosyncrasies. Every day was a puzzle that I could not solve, but appeared easy and natural through the eyes of my coworkers. It was the process of solving this puzzle that left me either laughing hysterically or crying alone in a rice patty at the end of each day (mood depending).

I taught a class of fifth graders one day that were particularly unruly, difficult to control, and boisterous. The homeroom teacher willingly helped me gain control of the classroom, calmed the children down, and we finished up the lesson. She thanked me profusely for the lesson and I carried on my day, assuming it was a success. It wasn't until a few days later that my supervisor told me that the fifth grade teacher was displeased with the class activity and wanted me to make several changes to my lesson plan before the next session. I felt bad about the lesson, but I was confused as to why the teacher didn't just tell me herself, or why my supervisor waited three whole days to discuss this and what I perceive as now ancient history with me. And I realized the lessons I learned.

I always considered myself a highly logical person, working and thinking in a linear pattern, moving quickly from A to B and on to C; I assumed that this was the only logical way to do things. But the Japanese way of thinking moves in circles, darting from one end to the other, forming a web that is impossible to follow, moving forward and back, up and down, with seemingly no end in sight. It is a different type of logic and thinking all together, but it works if one is willing to observe closely, and with patience.

The reason that I haven't heard anyone say "no," or the reason that the supervisory teacher did not approach me with her concern up front, is because being frank and direct is a Western communication value—something so rude that a Japanese person would never consider doing. I realized that the teacher was afraid to offend me by telling me I was wrong. I now finally understand the difference between the direct, low-context and the subtle, high-context communication style by this cultural immersion process.

—K. Abbott

living abroad for an extensive period of time, reentry culture shock is inevitable.

Let's check out Kari's reentry feelings in Blog Post 5.8.

This identity realignment process can sometimes be more stressful and jolting than entry culture shock because of the unanticipated nature of one's own identity change and the accompanying change of one's friends and family.

Reentry Culture Shock: Surprising Elements

According to research (e.g., Chang, 2009; Osland, 1995), the often unanticipated, surprising elements that affect reentry culture shock include the following:

1. Sojourners' identity change—the newly acquired values, emotions, cognitions, role statuses, managerial methods, and behaviors are, surprisingly, not a "good fit" with the once-familiar home culture;
2. Sojourners' nostalgic and idealized images of their home culture—sojourners tend to remember the positive aspects of their culture and forget its negative aspects during their experience abroad, and thus, the reentry reality often produces a strong jolt;
3. Sojourners' difficulty in reintegrating themselves into their old career pathway or career roles because of their new cultural lenses;
4. Sojourners' letdown in their expectations as to close ties with family members and friends who

BLOG POST 5.8 REENTRY CULTURE SHOCK

I had problems readapting after spending a year in Italy. I have been feeling stuck in this reentry period for a little longer than normal. I feel like there is no one else who feels like I do; everyone else seems to transition effortlessly. But in a way, I feel bad for those people. I think that the reason that I feel the way I do is because I absorbed so much when I was there. I completely

opened myself up to whatever new culture I came across, and this had a direct impact on how I look at things. . . . Though I seem to be temporarily stuck in the depression phase of it all, I would rather feel like this than to have let the experience pass me by with no impact at all.

—Kari, college student

have become more distant because of the long separation;

5. Family and friends' lack of interest in listening to the sojourning stories of the returnee and their growing impatience with her or him;
6. The home culture's demand for conformity and expectations for old role performance;
7. The absence of change in the home culture (e.g., the old system or workplace looks stale and boring in comparison with the overseas adventure) or too much change (e.g., political or corporate upheavals), which can also create immense identity disjunction for the recent returnees.

Thus, reentry culture shock can be understood from three domains: the returnees' readiness to resocialize themselves in the home environment, the degree of change in the returnees' friendship and family networks, and the home receptivity conditions. Sussman (1986) recommends that on the individual level, awareness of change should be a major component of reentry training as individuals face a wide range of psychological and environmental challenges. Pusch and Loewenthal (1988) further recommend that preparation for a successful return should include (1) the recognition of what sojourners are leaving behind and what they have gained in their assignments abroad; (2) the emotional costs of transition; (3) the value of worrying (i.e., anticipating and preparing for difficulties that may occur); (4) the need for support systems and ways to develop them; and (5) the necessity of developing one's own strategies for going home.

Resocialization: Different Returnees' Profiles

Adler (1997) identifies three profiles of returnee managers in relationship to the specific transition strategies

they employ: resocialized returnees, alienated returnees, and proactive returnees. *Resocialized returnees* are the ones who do not recognize having learned new skills in the new culture. They are also psychologically distant from their international experience. They try to use the fit-back-in strategy and resocialize themselves quietly into the domestic corporate structure. They typically rate their reentry experience as quite satisfactory.

The *alienated returnees*, on the other hand, are aware of their new skills and ideas in their experience abroad. However, they have difficulty in applying their new knowledge in the home organizations. Rather, they try to use the "distance-rejective" strategy of being onlookers in their home culture. Of all the three types, they are the most dissatisfied group.

The *proactive returnees* are highly aware of changes in themselves and the new values and skills they have learned overseas. They try to integrate the new values and practices learned from the sojourning culture into the home culture and develop an integrated outlook in their reentry phase. While abroad, the proactive managers tend to use proactive communication to maintain close ties with the home organization via formal and informal means. They also have a home-based mentor to look after their interests and pass on important corporate information. Their mentor keeps the home-based headquarters informed of the sojourner's achievements while abroad.

Proactive managers might report the acquisition of the following skills in their assignments abroad: alternative managerial skills, tolerance of ambiguity, multiple reasoning perspectives, and ability to work with and manage others. They further report that the new skills improve their self-image and self-confidence. Not surprisingly, returnees who receive validation (e.g., promotions) from their bosses and recognition

from their colleagues report higher reentry satisfaction than do returnees who receive no such validation or recognition (Adler, 1997).

INTERCULTURAL REALITY CHECK:

DO-ABLES

In this chapter, we explored culture shock as we crossed cultural boundaries. We explained the pros and cons and looked at some of the factors of why people manage culture shock differently.

We also talked about the developmental ups and downs of culture shock and suggested tips to manage culture shock adaptively. Last, we emphasized the importance of paying attention to reentry culture shock issues.

Overall, here are some practical tools for managing sojourners' culture shock effectively:

- Newcomers should realize that culture shock is inevitable. It is an unavoidable experience that most people encounter when relocating from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one.
- New arrivals should understand that culture shock arises because of the unfamiliar environment, when one is bombarded and saturated with unfamiliar cues. Developing a realistically positive outlook in viewing their one-time experience as a precious adventure and doing some positive reframing of surprising events may help to lower their stress level.
- Making an effort to establish broad-based contacts with members of the host culture and learning to communicate with them can increase local knowledge and reduce such feelings of vulnerability. Cultivating a deeper, supportive friendship network and easing themselves into the new setting can also help to restore the identity equilibrium state.
- Likewise, the more members of the host culture extend a helping hand and the more they attempt to increase their familiarity with the new arrivals, the more they can increase the newcomers' sense of security and inclusion.
- Culture shock is induced partly by an intense feeling of incompetence. By seeking out positive role models or mentors, newcomers may be able to find reliable and competent cultural bridge persons in easing the stress level of their initial culture shock experience.
- Newcomers should realize that culture shock is a transitional affective phase of stress that ebbs and flows from high to low intensity. New arrivals must hang on to a resilient sense of humor and emphasize the positive aspects of the environment rather than engaging in prolonged concentration on its negative aspects, realizing that these "growing pains" may lead to long-term personal and professional growth and development.

CHAPTER 6

**WHAT IS THE CONNECTION
BETWEEN VERBAL COMMUNICATION
AND CULTURE?**



CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Human Language: Distinctive Features and Rule Patterns
 - Distinctive Language Features
 - Multiple Rule Patterns
- Appreciating Diverse Language Functions
 - The Cultural Worldview Function
 - The Everyday Social Reality Function
 - The Cognitive Shaping Function
 - The Group Membership Identity Function
 - The Social Change Function
- Verbal Communication Styles: A General Framework
 - Defining Low-Context and High-Context Interaction Patterns
 - Direct and Indirect Verbal Styles
 - Self-Enhancement and Self-Humbling Verbal Styles
 - Beliefs Expressed in Talk and Silence
- Intercultural Reality Check: Do-Ables

Around the world, languages are disappearing. In the past five hundred years, an estimated half of the world's languages, from Etruscan to Tasmanian, from Alaska to Australia, hundreds of languages around the world are teetering on the brink of extinction—some being spoken by a single person. More than half of the world's seven thousand languages are expected to die out by the end of the century, often taking with them irreplaceable knowledge about the natural world. There are five hotspots where languages are vanishing most rapidly: eastern Siberia, northern Australia, central South America, Oklahoma, and the U.S.

Pacific Northwest. To identify the five hotspots, three main criteria are used:

1. The diversity of languages spoken,
2. The level of endangerment to the tongue,
3. The scientific documentation of a language.

Languages die a slow death because people simply abandon their native tongues when they become surrounded by people speaking a more common language.

—Stefan Lovgren, *National Geographic News*, 2007

Indigenous people refer to groups who are rooted to a particular place by history, traditions, legends, rituals, and language. According to expert linguists, an indigenous language dies every two weeks. For example, you will never again hear anyone speaking Laghu of the Solomon Islands or signing in Old Kentish Sign Language used by the Kamilaroi tribe of New South Wales (Tobin, 2011). With the death of a language comes the death of a people's way of thinking, living, and relating, their traditions, folklore, legacies, and centuries of irreplaceable knowledge and wisdom.

We use language to communicate, to agree and disagree with people, to make and decline requests, or to enforce politeness and defuse tension. Language frames our perceptions and interpretations of everyday events that are happening in our cultural community. It is a taken-for-granted aspect of our cultural lives. Without language, we cannot make sense of the cultural world around us. We cannot pass on the wisdom of our culture from one generation to the next.

We acquire meanings for words (e.g., "winning," "relational karma") or phrases (e.g., "that's what I think I deserve") from the value systems of our culture. Although language can easily create misunderstandings, it can also clarify misunderstandings and reduce tension. The "linguistic categories" we use every day serve as a kaleidoscope that captures our multiple realities.

In this chapter we explore the relationships among language, verbal communication, and culture. This chapter is organized into four main sections: the first section explores the basic features and rule patterns of human language; the second section examines the different functions of languages across cultures; the third section identifies low-context and high-context communication characteristics; and the last section offers checkpoints and do-ables of how to deal with language and verbal communication difficulties when crossing cultural boundaries.

HUMAN LANGUAGE: DISTINCTIVE FEATURES AND RULE PATTERNS

Language is an arbitrary, symbolic system that labels and categorizes objects, events, groups, people, ideas, feelings, experiences, and many other phenomena. Language is also governed by the *multilayered rules* developed by members of a particular sociocultural community. Although broad similarities exist among languages, variations remain in the sounds, written symbols, grammar, and nuances of meaning of an estimated 6,700 language varieties across world-wide cultures. This section examines the four distinctive features of language: arbitrariness, abstractness, meaning-centeredness, and creativity. It also examines the multilayered rules of language usage in relationship to culture.

To do a quick check, do you know what are the top five countries that have the most native English and Spanish speakers, respectively? Take a quick guess, and check out the answers in Jeopardy Boxes 6.1 and 6.2.

JEOPARDY BOX 6.1 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

Country	Approximate number of speakers*
1. United States	215,423,557
2. United Kingdom	58,100,000
3. Canada	17,694,830
4. Australia	15,581,329
5. Ireland	4,122,100

*People for whom English is their native tongue.

Source: Adapted from Aah (2011, p.104; based on Ethnologue Database).

Distinctive Language Features

Arbitrariness

Human language is arbitrary in phonemic (i.e., sound unit) and graphic representation (i.e., alphabet or characters). Language is viewed as an arbitrary symbolic system because the words that are strung together have

JEOPARDY BOX 6.2 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST NATIVE SPANISH-LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

Country	Approximate number of speakers*
1. Mexico	106,770,268
2. USA	50,000,000
3. Spain	46,184,857
4. Colombia	44,937,600
5. Argentina	40,275,837

*People for whom Spanish is their mother tongue.

Source: Adapted from Ash (2011, p. 104; based on Ethnologue Database)

no innate meaning. It is people in a speech community who attach shared sounds and common meanings to words that they use in their everyday lives. For example, the word "player" has no real meaning in its sounds and letters, yet in English we interpret these sounds and letters as having a particular intimate meaning. Even sign language, as "spoken" by deaf people, is arbitrary in nature in terms of the use of different nonverbal gestures. There are many different culture-specific sign language varieties (e.g., American, British, and Chinese).

By three months, infants have acquired the ability to imitate some aspects of vowel sounds that they hear (Kuhl & Meltzoff, 1996). Through continuous reinforcement, children learn to retain sounds that are most familiar to their ears and tongues and drop off other nonessential sounds. Universally, children first acquire speaking and comprehending skills, then reading and writing skills. Whereas all children have the capacity to utter all the sounds in all languages, this linguistic competence tapers off as they reach puberty.

Abstractness

Language, however, also allows humans to engage in abstract thoughts or hypothetical thinking. Because of this unique feature, we can plan for our intercultural journey, daydream, and fantasize about the infinite possibilities of our potential experience abroad. Our ability to use different linguistic categories to imagine ourselves in different locations, in different time zones, and in different social interaction scenes is truly a unique human language feature.

The more we move away from concrete, external phenomena, the more we engage in the process of language abstraction. In many instances, language creates intercultural friction because it is such an abstract, imprecise instrument. We can use language to provoke tension, create conflict, reduce stress, flirt with others, and also uplift the spirit of others (Farb, 1973; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005).

When we perceive that the use of our language causes anxiety and uncertainty in our intercultural interaction, we may want to force ourselves to go "down the ladder" of symbolic abstraction—to use more concrete wordings or alternative verbal approaches to discuss the problematic interaction. Likewise, we should also develop a sense of cultural sensitivity when we communicate with individuals from a linguistic system that values tactful, "abstract" verbal styles.

Meaning-Centeredness

To understand a cultural stranger's language usage, we must acquire both the dictionary meaning of a word and the subjective meaning of a word or phrase. In any language, two levels of meaning exist: denotative meaning and connotative meaning. The *denotative meaning* of a word emphasizes its objective, dictionary definition shared and recognized by the majority members of a linguistic community. The *connotative meaning*, on the other hand, stresses the subjective, interpretive meanings of a word constructed by individual members based on their cultural and personalized language experience.

For example, the word *hook up* can have the objective, denotative meaning of "an arrangement of mechanical parts" or "an alliance or cooperation." However, from the connotative meaning construction level of informal U.S. English usage, cultural members may interpret the meaning of *hook up* as a casual sexual encounter or dealing drugs.

In addition, translation problems and jokes that involve different meaning misunderstandings abound at the global level: "Things come alive with Pepsi" has been translated into German as "Pepsi can pull you back from your grave!" Mazda's car "Laputa" has been translated into Spanish as *la puta*, which means "the prostitute." The American Dairy Association's "Got

milk?" campaign in Spanish was changed after it was realized that "¿Tienes leche?" translates as "Are you lactating?" In 2009, the debut of the "Audi RS6 White Power" automobile from Germany was renamed "Audi RS6 Avant" after complaints, accusations, and negative publicity flooded car blogs, news sites, and forums across the Internet. Take a look at Blog Pics 6.1.a and 6.1.b.

These translation problems or jokes often occur because of the crossover confusion between literal or denotative translation emphasis and cultural connotative inaccuracy. Even if the literal or denotative translation were accurate, the "objective" meaning often creates a very strange or even hilarious effect. The challenge for translators is to understand the specific intention and meaning of the original phrase and then to adjust appropriately the meaning of the phrase with regard to the cultural context and the situational appropriateness of the other language application (see also, Kwon, Barnett, & Chen, 2009).

Creativity

There are three distinctive elements in the linguistic creativity feature: productivity, displacement, and the meta-communicative feature (Crystal, 2010). The productivity element refers to the immense creative capacity children and adults have—to say things never spoken before once they have mastered the basic "recipe" of a language. By the time children with normal language development

patterns reach their fourth birthday, they have already internalized the exceedingly complex structure of their native tongue. Add a couple more years and children will possess the entire linguistic system, allowing them the ability to utter and understand sentences they have never heard before. Parents do not have to teach their children every sentence in their language system. Once they have mastered the common vocabulary and grammatical structure of their native tongues, children can creatively spit out coherent sentences from their mouths via a creative reconfiguration of words.

Furthermore, individuals in all linguistic communities also have the capacity to talk about things far away in time and space (i.e., the displacement element) and to use language (e.g., via oral history, poetry, parables, stories, or songs) to pass on their heritage, lessons learned, memories, and wisdom from one generation to the next. It also means that individuals can garner their creative potential to use language mindfully (i.e., meta-communication) for mutual collaboration and understanding. Alternatively, language can be used to disseminate hate-filled propaganda, bully others, express prejudice, wage war, and engender destruction. Let's check out Blog Post 6.1—an original poem, "Words," by Win Garcia.

Can you relate to this poem? Can you visualize his experience? Can you picture the hurting image of the word *wetback* versus the healing image of the word *love*? Language can be a healing and a hacking instrument. It can be used mindfully to uplift and support others' desired identities; it can also be used to "cut



Blog Pic 6.1.a Sometimes the meaning gets lost in translation.



Blog Pic 6.1.b Brand name confusion?

BLOG POST 6.1 WORDS

All their words were weapons
and they were aimed at me
"Wetback" was the chosen word
that others shot at me

I can feel the humiliation
I do remember the pain
how could an entire nation, I thought,
call me by an evil name?

Now the tide has shifted
for many of us "meek,"
we seem to be uplifted
by our refusal to be weak

I see their offspring walk about
attempting to hold on,
to their ideal of "sameness"
that is forever gone

Though I sometimes reminisce
about those painful years,
the words for me are different now
they range from "sir" to "dear"

I know that words are weapons
for many I have heard,
there are no needs for weapons here
only needs for loving words

Source: From Win Garcia, "Words" (an original poem).
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down" or degrade others' primary identities. The bottom line is that language is the key to the heart of a culture.

Multiple Rule Patterns

What are the top five languages spoken by most inhabitants of the world? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 6.3. All languages are constructed with words or symbols that are arranged in patterned ways, that is, they are rule governed. Most native speakers have difficulty clearly articulating the rules of their own language. Native speakers often operate on the unconscious competence stage of language usage because they can converse fluently within their own linguistic community without needing to overworry about the

JEOPARDY BOX 6.3 TOP FIVE MOST WIDELY SPOKEN LANGUAGES WORLDWIDE

Country (language)	Approximate number of speakers
1. Chinese (Mandarin)	845,000,000
2. Spanish	329,000,000
3. English	328,000,000
4. Hindustani*	242,000,000
5. Arabic ^a	221,000,000

*Hindi and Urdu are essentially the same language: Hindustani. As the official language of Pakistan, it is written in modified Arabic script and called Urdu. As the official language of India, it is written in the Devanagari script and called Hindi.

^aIncludes sixteen variants of the Arabic language.

Source: Adapted from http://www.ethnologue.com/ethno_docs/distribution.asp?by=size#2 (retrieved March 28, 2011).

rule patterns of their everyday language usage (see, for example, Bolden, 2008). We introduce the following rule patterns of language here: phonology, morphology, syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics.

Phonological Rules

The **phonological rules** (or **phonology**) of a language refer to the different accepted procedures for combining phonemes. **Phonemes** are the smallest sound units of a word. For example, some of the phonemes in English are [k], [sh], [t], and [b]. Native speakers of English, for example, may possess an intuitive sense of how to utter these sounds, such as *kick*, *shame*, *tree*, and *butter*; however, they may not be able to articulate the how and why of the phonetic rules for producing these sounds. Although the English language has forty-five phonemes, other languages have a range of phonemes spanning anywhere between fifteen and eighty-five.

Linguistically speaking, everyone who communicates speaks with an accent because **accent** means the inflection or tone of voice that is taken to be characteristic of an individual. Our inflection and tone of voice are unique. Members of subcultures who are native speakers of the same language can also be identified as having accents. In such cases, the distinctive accent is attributed to shared group membership interacting within a common space (Wyatt, 1995). Many Bostonians, for example, claim that they can differentiate

the Italian, Irish, and Jewish groups in their city by the way they articulate their /o(r)/ vowel sound (e.g., in words like "start" and "park").

The issue of accents becomes apparent because technology has been in the forefront of speech and speech-to-text recording. Cell phones have the "voiceprint" app, which allows you to record your own unique voice saying the names in your address book and instead of dialing, you just say, "Call Catanzaro." In our modern times, speech-to-text technology is becoming rampant, where a person can speak into a device that then produces written text of what was said, thus justifying the use of "accent-free" language. In 2011, Sprint was the first U.S. cell phone carrier to integrate Google Voice across its entire handset lineup, which allows a Google search by speaking the search term into the phone.

Morphological Rules

The term **morphological rules** (or **morphology**) refers to how combinations of different sounds make up a meaningful word or part of a word (e.g., "lead" and "er-ship" form "lead-er-ship"; or words such as "caff-eine" and "flow-er"). In English and many other European languages, morphemes that are required by grammar are often put at the end of words as suffixes (i.e., "is going" and "is sleeping" contain the morpheme "ing," which indicates that an activity is currently in progress; or in adverb form as in "worth-less" and "mind-less").

Languages develop different rules on the basis of cultural conventions that are passed down from one generation to the next. Once we have internalized the language sound habits of our culture, it is much more difficult to learn another set of linguistic conventions. In Swahili, the grammatical information indicating verb tense appears at the beginning as a prefix (*law* = "to go," and *nalaw* = "is going"; or *sun* = "to sleep," and *nasun* = "is sleeping"). Thus, in the Swahili morphological system, individuals are in a state of preparation before actually doing something. Interestingly, well-trained Russians who speak fluent English will still give themselves away when they pronounce the letter "t" in the English sentence such as "Tomorrow is a town hall meeting." The Russian "t" is pronounced by contact between the tip of the tongue and the upper teeth, unlike English, which pronounces "t"

by making contact between the tongue, just back of its tip, and the upper gum ridge.

When we hear nonnative speakers chatting, we often view the morphological sounds of their foreign language as undetermined patter and may even get annoyed when their intonations sound unfamiliar and out of the range of our language tones. Again, we should practice linguistic empathy in many intercultural occasions because we should remember that once a child reaches four years old, she may have internalized the sound habits of her native-tongue language. Instead of evaluating harshly the "off-kilter" sound system of a foreign speaker, we should extend respect for any individual who tries to master and practice a second or third language in her later years.

Syntactic Rules

The **syntactic rules** (or **syntactics**) of a language refer to how words are sequenced together in accordance with the grammatical practices of the linguistic community. The order of the words helps to establish the meaning of an utterance. It is also reflective of the cultural notions of causality and order.

In English grammar, for example, explicit subject pronouns are used to distinguish self from other (e.g., "I cannot give you the report because Manuela is still working on the conclusion section."). In Chinese grammar, explicit pronouns, such as "I" and "you," are deemphasized. Instead, conjunctive words, such as "because" (*yinwei*), "so" (*suoyi*), and "then" (*jiao*), appear early in the sentence to pave the way for the rest of the story. For example, the following statement illustrates this point: "Because of so many snow storms, so the report has then not been handled properly, then we're now one week behind the deadline."

Chinese syntax establishes a context and contingent conditions and then introduces the main point, but English syntax establishes the key point and then lays out the reason (Young, 1994). Likewise, in Spanish, there are two different verb forms to address the past tense, depending on how the action occurred in the past, whereas English is a "matter-of-fact" language with fewer ways to address the past tense. The syntactic rules of a language—in interaction with the cultural value system—assert tremendous power on people's thinking and reasoning patterns within a culture.

Semantic Rules

The **semantic rules** (or **semantics**) of a language concern the features of meaning we attach to words. Words themselves do not have self-evident meanings. It is people within a cultural language community who consensually establish shared meanings for specific words and phrases.

The concept of "meaning" is tied closely to how we interpret the incoming verbal message in a culturally relevant and situationally relevant manner. To truly understand what someone is saying from another linguistic community, we must understand three affective (or connotative) features of meaning: the evaluative feature (i.e., good–bad), the potency feature (i.e., strong–weak), and the activity feature (i.e., fast–slow) (Osgood, Suci, & Tanenbaum, 1957).

For example, your cultural classmate says, "I am totally committed to this project" with the affective connotations of "good, strong, and fast." This particular cultural member thinks that the project will be completed before spring break. The other cultural member echoes the same phrase, but with the affective connotations of "good, strong, *but slow*" (i.e., I will mull over our project, meet a couple more times, and we'll do it after break). Although both teammates have similar meaning reactions concerning the "good and strong" portions of the concept concerning "commitment," they differ significantly on the activity feature of "fast versus slow."

Further culture-based meaning misunderstandings could take place, for example, if both U.S. and Russian conflict negotiators cannot agree on the semantic meaning of words such as "compromise" or "collaboration." U.S. American negotiators generally regard compromise as inevitable and desirable. Russian diplomats, on the other hand, consider compromise a sign of weakness, a retreat from a correct and morally justified position. Russian conflict negotiators, therefore, are prepared to "wait out their opposite numbers in the expectation that time and Russian patience will produce more concessions.... Chess is a Russian national pastime, and Russians negotiate in the same way they play chess, planning several moves ahead" (Richmond, 1996, pp. 150–151).

Pragmatic Rules

The **pragmatic rules** (or **pragmatics**) of a language refer to the contextual rules that govern language usage in a particular culture. Pragmatics concerns the rules of "how to say what to whom and under what situational conditions" in a speech community (Hymes, 1972). A **speech community** is defined as a group of individuals who share a common set of normative expectations and communication rules regarding appropriate or inappropriate interaction practices in a community (Byram, 2009; Carbaugh, 1996; Lee & Park, 2011; Philipsen, 1997, 2010).

Let's check out the following critical incident in Blog Post 6.2.

BLOG POST 6.2

Amaya works in the English Tutorial Lab on campus at Seoul University and spends a lot of time discussing the subtleties and intricacies of English with Korean students. She loves her job and finds each day she learns something new from the students who stop by for some advice. For the last year, Amaya had worked closely with Seung-Ho on improving his writing skills in his English technical papers. She felt at ease with Seung-Ho and felt she could tell jokes and make observations about Korean life in general and Seung-Ho would respond back with a hearty laugh.

One day in the cafeteria, Amaya saw Seung-Ho and his guy friends eating lunch. She stopped by to say hello and see how he was doing. Seung-Ho introduced his friends to Amaya and said, "Amaya, my girlfriend is coming here soon and I want you to meet her. She will be writing her first English analytical paper and I encouraged her to talk with you. Will you be at work later?"

Amaya smiled and replied, "Of course, Seung-Ho, no problem. If I can change the way you use the word from 'totally' to 'completely' in your research papers then I can work with any hot mess! Come by before five." Seung-Ho was visibly upset by this comment. He excused himself with as much politeness as possible and left the table with a sullen face. Amaya left the cafeteria in complete confusion.

If Amaya asked for your help to understand this communication episode, how would you analyze the intercultural interaction? Your analysis could include any of the following possible explanations: (1) Seung-Ho was testing Amaya to see if she was interested in him—Amaya's enthusiasm to meet his girlfriend irritated him and caught him off guard; (2) In South Korea the politeness norm is to pay attention to the gender hierarchy—Amaya did not show enough cultural sensitivity to Seung-Ho and his guy friends; (3) Seung-Ho interpreted Amaya's remarks as offensive and insulting.

What would be your analysis of this communication incident? You can answer number (1), (2), or (3). However, if you choose (3), congratulations! Amaya's remark (i.e., "I can work with any hot mess!") was negatively interpreted by Seung-Ho. The term "hot mess" can have at least two meanings. "Hot" has a feature of temperature and "mess" has a feature of organization. When we combine "hot + mess," the concept takes on a whole new meaning. Amaya used the idiomatic term "hot mess," as in the context of having thoughts being in disarray but maintaining some beauty in a very informal, American English way. However, "hot mess" also describes a situation, behavior, or someone's appearance that is disastrously distasteful. Seung-Ho must have thought that this was the meaning Amaya had in mind. He probably felt that the remark sounded patronizing and also caused him to lose face in front of his Korean guy friends.

Amaya and Seung-Ho actually have two language problems here: the semantic problem and the pragmatic problem. The semantic problem is caused by the different meaning interpretations of the term "hot mess." The pragmatic problem is that Seung-Ho perceived Amaya's remark about his use of "totally" and "hot mess" as out of context and insulting, especially in front of his friends.

What can Amaya do now? After hearing your language analysis, Amaya may want to use a perception check with Seung-Ho. She may want to approach Seung-Ho and apologize for her unintended unconsciously incompetent behavior. Amaya may ask probing questions about Seung-Ho's sudden exit and sullen expression. Seung-Ho may also take the initiative to reflect on his own confusion concerning Amaya's rude comment. Seung-Ho may raise his own awareness and realize perhaps he misinterpreted the term "hot mess." Seung-Ho may tell Amaya that he doesn't mind that she jokes with him in English on a one-to-one basis in the English Tutorial Lab setting; however, in the public cafeteria setting, he doesn't want his friends or professors to witness their casual bantering style.

Someone learning a new language will have difficulty understanding something so subtle as what happened between Amaya and Seung-Ho—unless a culturally sensitive language tutor can explain the semantic meaning and the pragmatic rule of the

phrase. Furthermore, Amaya may really need to polish her understanding of the pragmatic rule of whether to use informal English in front of ingroup or outgroup members when interacting with Seung-Ho. The truth is that most people learning or even teaching the language do not have this kind of opportunity to reflect so carefully on these rules.

Paying close attention to the multilayered rules of everyday language usage in a new culture may be a good start to move you from conversing at the unconscious incompetence stage to the conscious incompetence stage and, hopefully, lead to the conscious competence staircase level. Linguistic rules give rise to the diverse functions of languages across cultures and answer the question of why language plays such a critical role within each culture (Dougherty, Mobley, & Smith, 2010; Park & Guan, 2007, 2009). Language is an integral part of both a sense of identity and the mindset that goes with it.

APPRECIATING DIVERSE LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

Cultural value orientations drive language usage in everyday lives. If a culture has a high individualism value index (e.g., Canada and Ireland), words and phrases such as "I," "me," "my goal," "my opinion," "self-help," and "self-service" tend to appear as part of everyday parlance. If a culture has a high collectivism value index (e.g., Costa Rica and Nigeria), phrases such as "our work team," "our goal," "our future together," and "we as a group" are part of the everyday lexicon.

In this section, we identify the diverse functions of languages across cultures as the cultural worldview function, the social reality function, the cognitive shaping function, the group identity function, and the social change function.

The Cultural Worldview Function

To really connect with a culture, we must understand the language of a cultural group. To understand language in context, we must understand the fundamental worldview that drives particular language reasoning processes in particular situations. **Worldview** refers to our larger philosophical outlook or

ways of perceiving the world and how this outlook, in turn, affects our thinking and reasoning patterns. Intercultural experts have proposed two worldviews that divide Western and non-Western cultures: the linear worldview and the relational worldview (Stewart & Bennett, 2005).

A *linear worldview* emphasizes rational or analytical thinking that is based on an objective reality. A *relational worldview* emphasizes holistic or connected thinking that is based on a contextual reality. The language systems of the linear worldview tend to emphasize beginning with either facts and figures or models and theories and uses two reasoning patterns: inductive and deductive reasoning (see Table 6.1).

Inductive reasoning refers to the importance of facts and evidence to make a claim. Facts are important because they are objective. A claim is not valid until proven with concrete facts and tangible figures. The U.S. American reasoning process has been identified as following an inductive reasoning pattern or a linear inductive persuasion style. For example, any case that goes to trial in a U.S. court follows such a persuasion style in court. **Deductive reasoning**, on the other hand, refers to the primacy of conceptual models or big principles to start and then moves on to specific analytical points of inferences and factual conclusions. The European (e.g., France) to East European styles (e.g., Russia) of reasoning have been identified as reflective of a broadly deductive reasoning pattern (Stewart & Bennett, 2005). For example, the Russians will start with an agreement in principle (i.e., the big picture) and then fill in the details step

by step based on linear deductive reasoning process (Glenn, 1981).

Alternatively, the language systems of the *relational worldview* emphasize the importance of concerns about relational loyalty and trust, extended family connections, and ingroup membership dignity and honor. Thus, individuals operating from the relational worldview language system avoid the use of extreme polarized and direct wordings in their everyday interactions. For example, the Chinese language and worldview pattern avoids using the polarized ends (e.g., love-hate, good-evil, rich-poor) to comprehend the nature of the universe. Instead, the Chinese language pays close attention to the quality of the spectrum of emotional expressions (e.g., "not that bad," "I like," "I very like," "I not too like"), which in English are polarized (e.g., *like* and *dislike*).

The relational worldview language patterns also reinforce the notion of different forms of spiral reasoning styles—from the dramatic to the subtle. Members in many Arab cultures, for example, tend to use the **dramatic spiral reasoning** style such as effusive metaphors, stories, parables, and a wide range of flowery adjectives to reinforce a point. Thus, the dramatic conversation styles of many of the Arabic cultures often tend to emphasize image over digital content and form over function. Members of Italian, Slavic, Jewish, and many African cultures, for example, also have a tendency to use demonstrative speeches, vivacious similes, and spirited narratives to dramatize the emotional impact of their message. Many Asian and Native American cultures, however, may resort to using the **understated spiral reasoning** style, including subtle messages, implied hints, reserved talks, relational reasons, and tactful nonverbal gestures to convey an intended meaning and context. Blog Post 6.3 is a Zen story (Pearmain, 1998, p. 119) that illustrates an understated mode of storytelling.

The Everyday Social Reality Function

Everyday language serves as a prism or mirror through which individuals emphasize "important" versus "unimportant" events out there or "interesting" versus "uninteresting" value priorities in a cultural speech community. For example, in Mexico, Spanish words such as *machismo* (i.e., masculinity, physical

TABLE 6.1 LINEAR WORLDVIEW AND RELATIONAL WORLDVIEW: A COMPARISON

Linear worldview	Relational worldview
Rational thinking	Connected thinking
Objective reasoning	Context-based reasoning
Facts and evidence	Context and relationship
Polarized interpretation	Continuum interpretation
Analytical dissecting mode	Holistic big-picture mode
Tangible outcome	Long-term relational outcome

BLOG POST 6.3 A ZEN STORY

Once upon a time, two Buddhist monks were on a journey to a distant monastery when they came to a river. There on the bank sat a young woman. "I beg you," she asked, "could you carry me across? The current is strong today and I'm afraid I might be swept away."

The first monk remembered his vows never to look at or touch a woman, and so, without so much as a nod, he crossed through the heavily flowing currents and soon reached the other side. The other monk showed compassion and bent down so that the woman could climb upon his back to cross the river. Although she was slight, the current was strong and the rocky bottom made it difficult crossing. Reaching the other side, he let the woman down and went on his way.

After some hours journeying down the dusty road in silence, the first monk could no longer contain his anger at the second for breaking their vows. "How could you look at that woman?" he blurted out. "How could you touch her, let alone carry her across the river? You've put our reputation at stake."

The first monk looked at his companion and smiled. "I put that woman down way back there at the river bank, but I see that you're still carrying her."

What do you think of the above story? Can you rewrite the story to reflect a more linear mode of storytelling? Which persuasive mode do you prefer, the linear mode or the spiral mode? Why? In addition to the linear versus the spiral mode of persuasion, we can also consider the implications of the self-credialling and self-humbling modes of persuasion.

strength, sexual attraction), *marianismo* (i.e., a woman's submissiveness, dependence, gentleness, and remaining a virgin until marriage), *respeto* (i.e., showing proper respect for authority, such as parents and elders), and *familismo* (i.e., the importance of family and the extended family network) infiltrate individuals' everyday social experiences, and they are used as yardsticks to measure self and others' appropriate role performance.

Our everyday language has repeated categories that capture our social experience and ultimately shape our cultural and gendered expectations (Brabant, Watson, & Gallois, 2010; Lee & Park, 2011). For example, the usage of everyday English idioms in the U.S. corporate world or in conflict context such as "That was a slam dunk," "This will be a game changer," and "Wow you hit that out of the park," reflect a strong doing and gaming metaphor in corporate U.S. culture.

Moreover, on the personal level, English speakers tend to use explicit pronouns of "I," "you," and "my" to express an opinion or solicit an idea such as "I totally disagree with you," "What do you think?" "I'm doing a fact check," or "My bad!" Furthermore, the term "self" is common in daily English, for example, self-service, self-help, self-made, self-regard, self-importance, self-interest, etc. which reflects the individualistic value motif. In contrast, Korean speakers use more implicit and ambiguous words. Instead of appearing to be assertive, they use more qualifiers such as "maybe,"

"perhaps," "probably," "excuse me," or "sorry" at the beginning of a sentence in substitution for the explicit use of the "I" pronoun in an up-front manner.

The Cognitive Shaping Function

Language also serves as a strong filter between what we think and how our thinking pattern is shaped by the grammatical structure of our language system. Benjamin Whorf (1952, 1956), drawing from the work of his mentor, Edward Sapir (1921), tested the "language is a shaper of ideas" hypothesis. By comparing the Hopi Indian language with European languages, Whorf (1952) found that language is not only a vehicle for voicing ideas but also "the shaper of ideas." He further emphasized that the grammatical structure of a language shapes and constitutes one's thought process. This grammatical structure is entirely culture based and, as such, language, thinking, and culture are integral parts of a mindset system.

Whorf cited several examples from the Hopi language: (1) The Hopi language does not possess a discrete past-present-future grammatical system as in most European languages; instead, it has a wide range of present tenses based on the observations of the speaker, such as "I know that she is sleeping at this very moment" or "I am told that she is sleeping." (2) The Hopi language does not use a cyclic noun, such as "days" or "years," in the same manner as countable quantities, such as eight women or eight men; instead,

it emphasizes the concept of "duration" when conceiving time. Thus, the Hopi equivalent for the English statement "They stayed eight days" is "I know that they stay until the seventh day." (3) English speakers tend to use spatial metaphors in their sentences (e.g., "time is up," "I'm on top of it," or "I'm running low"), but the Hopi language tends to emphasize events that are happening in the here and now.

By linking cultural worldview and thought pattern together, one achieves the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also known as the *linguistic relativity hypothesis*. The grammars of different languages constitute separate conceptual realities for members of different cultures. We experience different thoughts and sensations via our linguistic systems. For example, the structure of the future tense in Spanish tells us a great deal about the notion of the future in Spain. In Spanish, statements made about the future signal probability rather than certainty. A Spanish speaker will prefer the statement closer to the English "I may go to the market" ("*Puedo ir al mercado*") instead of "I will go to the market" to indicate the probability of an action in the future rather than the certainty of that action. The future, for many Spanish-speaking people, represents an unknown in time and space: many things can happen later this afternoon or tomorrow—they are beyond the control of individuals.

After reviewing extensive studies on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Steinfatt (1989) concluded that although the *weak* form (i.e., language helps to shape our thinking patterns) of the linguistic relativity hypothesis received some support, no conclusive evidence can be drawn to support the *strong* form (i.e., language completely determines our thinking patterns). Sapir and Whorf were trailblazing pioneers in linking language with culture and, as such, they left a major contribution to the study of intercultural communication.

The Group Membership Identity Function

Language represents a rallying point for evoking group sentiment and shared identity. Language serves the larger cultural-ethnic identity function because it is an emblem of group solidarity. In speaking a common

tongue, members signal ingroup ties and outgroup separation. The core symbols and linguistic categories of a group often express ethnic and nationalistic sentiment. By virtue of its powerful and visible symbolism, language maintenance issues are worth fighting and dying for—from many ethnic groups' perspectives. For example, the disputes between Anglophones and Francophones over the use of English or French in Canada's Quebec province and the heated debates over whether Pidgin and Ebonics (i.e., Hawaiian English and Black English) are languages or dialects in the United States reflect the significant role of the group membership function of language. The debate over Ebonics recently reignited in 2010 when the U. S. Drug Enforcement Administration announced it was hiring nine Ebonics translators to assist them with their drug enforcement efforts in the southeastern United States. "Unfortunately, the use of the term 'Ebonics' in the public sphere raises a red flag," said Walt Wolfram, linguistics professor at North Carolina State University. "(T)he term has been politicized and racialized" (McDonald, 2010).

Some cultural members develop enormous membership loyalty to and pride in speaking their native tongue, but other members derive tremendous flexibility in their ability to code-switch. Code-switching means switching to another language or dialect to increase or decrease intergroup distance. For example, many African Americans have developed different verbal strategies to deal with the stigma attached to Black English (or Ebonics—*ebony* and *phonics*) by the dominant group. Black English is a distinctive rule-governed language (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984) that gained public attention in 1996 as a result of a proposal by the Oakland California School Board to use African American English in teaching Standard English in the Oakland School District (Applebome, 1996). Many African Americans are able to code-switch using mainstream American English in formal or work-related settings and then switch to Black English with familiar others in casual settings for the purpose of forging group identity and connection (Helms, 1993; Parham & Helms, 1985).

On purely linguistic grounds, all languages are created equal. However, in all linguistic struggles, a fierce

competition exists: "Not between languages themselves but, rather, between language communities or linguistic interest groups" (Edwards, 1994, p. 205). Matters of group membership, power, and status interlock with societal perceptions to form attitudes toward different language varieties in the larger cultural context.

The Social Change Function

Twenty years ago, we did not have words like *texting*, *ipad*, and *refudiate* or use *Facebook* or *Google* as verbs. They are now part of our everyday vocabulary. As innovative social beings, we are the creators of the social tool of human language. We are also at times trapped by the habits of our own linguistic system.

Let's do the my.blog 6.1 poll here before you read on.

Although some people may assume that women are included in such male generic terms as *man-kind*, research has demonstrated conclusively that "masculine generics are perceived as referring predominantly or exclusively to men. When people hear them, they think of men, not women" (Wood, 2004, p. 152). For example, the use of male generic language in English—words such as *businessman* or *fireman* used in Western society or the use of "man" in the Bible that refers to gender inclusivity—tends to elevate men's experience as more valid and make women's experience less prominent. To the extent that the language of a culture makes men appear more visible and concurrently makes women seem

invisible, the perceptions generated from such biased language usage create biased thinking. By flexibly changing some of our linguistic habits (e.g., changing *fireman* to *firefighter*, *mankind* to *humankind*), we can start transforming our thinking patterns through the use of gender-equitable terms.

Beyond language habit change, two interesting trends are taking place. The first interesting trend is the language change in the U.S. sports and global social scenes. For example, in the United States, it is common for a sports fan to hear one minute left to go as "a buck" and seconds as "change." With 1:12 left in a game, you can say "there is a buck and change left in the game." On the international language change scene is the issue of language borrowing. For example, in Malaysia, "gwei-lo size" refers to a very large "Western size" portion of food. In the indigenous communities around the town of Juchitán, Mexico, local Zapotec people have made room for a third category of sexual orientation, which they call "muxes" (pronounced MOO-shays). Muxes, derived from the Spanish "mujer," or woman are men who consider themselves women and live in a socially sanctioned netherworld between the two genders (Lacey, 2008). Or if one is on the Internet, Germans will say "im Internet surfen" ("Pukku German," 2011). Global language borrowing can indicate an ingroup connection and solidarity function, an added status, or a necessary convenience.

The second interesting trend under the social change heading is integrating brand names into everyday language and, as a result, you cannot tell the product from the brand. In the South (Texas, Oklahoma), ordering a Coke refers to any soft drink. In Latin America, when people want a pack of razors, they ask for "Gillettes;" if they want a whirlpool bath, they ask for a "Jacuzzi" (Bianchi & Sama, 2003). Domestically, with an increase in the popularity of rap music, English is now up for grabs. Called a new "bilingual" English, this is a way for street kids, or the music industry, to promote the inclusion of the slang and jargon of rap music into everyday vocabulary.

To close this section, let's check out how much social change has occurred in your Internet linguistic literacy. Do you know what the following abbreviations ALAP, 420, FTW, and NSFW stand for in cyberspace? Check out the answers in Hit-or-Miss 6.1.

my.blog 6.1

Using your gut-level response, whom do you picture when you read the following words? Circle your answer quickly.

Businessman?	Man	Woman
Nurse?	Man	Woman
Technician?	Man	Woman
Cook?	Man	Woman
Mailman?	Man	Woman
Librarian?	Man	Woman
Fireman?	Man	Woman
Stewardess?	Man	Woman
Freshman?	Man	Woman
Mankind?	Man	Woman

HIT-OR-MISS 6.1 ABBREVIATED INTERNET LANGUAGE

See if you "Hit" or "Miss" as you identify the meanings of the following Internet abbreviations:

1. 420 _____
2. ALAP _____
3. F2F _____
4. FTW _____
5. GTG _____
6. IME _____
7. JAM _____
8. NSFW _____
9. TNX _____
10. TTYL _____

Answers: 1: Marijuana; 2: As Late as Possible; 3: Face-to-Face; 4: For the Win; 5: Got to Go; 6: In My Experience; 7: Just a Minute; 8: Not Safe for Work; 9: Thanks; 10: Talk to You Later.

**VERBAL COMMUNICATION STYLES:
A GENERAL FRAMEWORK**

Before you continue reading, let's do my.blog 6.2 to check out your verbal style preference.

Why did you find some of the behaviors irritating? Where did you acquire your own verbal habits or rituals? What cultural or personal values influence your verbal styles? Do you notice any style differences between females and males in your culture? How so? Do you communicate very similarly in different situations? Or do you switch your verbal styles to adapt to different interaction situations?

**Defining Low-Context and High-Context
Interaction Patterns**

Hall (1976) claimed that human interaction, on a broad level, can be divided into low-context and high-context communication systems. In **low-context communication**, the emphasis is on how intention or meaning is expressed through explicit verbal messages. In **high-context communication**, the emphasis is on how intention or meaning can best be conveyed

my.blog 6.2

Check off any of the following behaviors that you find irritating or frustrating when you interact with individuals who talk that way.

- | | |
|--|-------|
| Not answering questions directly: | _____ |
| Talking bluntly: | _____ |
| Insisting on calling you Ms. or Mr.: | _____ |
| Making a request directly: | _____ |
| Using lots of silence in conversation: | _____ |
| Talking about themselves constantly: | _____ |
| Speaking slowly: | _____ |
| Speaking really fast: | _____ |
| Asking personal questions: | _____ |
| Speaking softly: | _____ |
| Speaking loudly: | _____ |
| Constantly apologizing: | _____ |

through the embedded contexts (e.g., social roles or positions, relationship types, intergroup history) and the nonverbal channels (e.g., pauses, silence, tone of voice) of the verbal message (see Table 6.2).

In general, low-context communication (LCC) refers to communication patterns of direct, matter-of-fact tone, transparency, assertiveness, and sender-oriented values (i.e., the sender assumes the responsibility to communicate clearly). In the LCC system, the speaker is expected to be responsible for constructing a clear, persuasive message that the listener can decode easily. The value priority in the LCC style is "say what you mean, mean what you say" as a mode of respect for verbal honesty and personal accountability. In comparison, high-context communication (HCC) refers to communication patterns of indirect, tactful nonverbal tone, diplomatic talk, self-humbling speech, and receiver-sensitive values (i.e., the interpreter of the message assumes the responsibility to infer the hidden or contextual meanings of the message [Ting-Toomey, 1985]). In the HCC system, the listener or interpreter of the message is expected to "read between the lines" and infer the nonverbal subtleties that accompany the verbal message. The value priority in the HCC style is "don't say anything that will hurt the other's feelings" as a mode of interpersonal sensitivity for other-centric consideration (see country examples of LCC and HCC in Table 6.3). Of course, the broad-based LCC and HCC communication style

TABLE 6.2 LOW-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION (LCC) AND HIGH-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION (HCC): VERBAL PATTERNS

LCC patterns	HCC patterns
Individualistic values	Collectivistic values
Linear logic	Spiral logic
Direct verbal style	Indirect verbal style
Matter-of-fact tone	Understated or animated tone
Informal verbal style	Formal verbal style
Verbal assertiveness or talkativeness	Verbal reticence or silence

TABLE 6.3 COUNTRY EXAMPLES OF LOW-CONTEXT AND HIGH-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION

LCC examples			HCC examples
Germany	USA	Saudi Arabia	Japan
Switzerland	Canada	Kuwait	China
Denmark	Australia	Mexico	South Korea
Sweden	UK	Nigeria	Vietnam

usage also varies—dependent strongly also on generational ethnic identity issues, individual-level personality traits, relationship types, interaction goals, and situational contexts.

LCC is illustrated by the following dispute between two European American neighbors in L-Chat 6.1.

In contrast, the following interaction in L-Chat 6.2 involving two Japanese housewives illustrates their use of HCC.

In L-Chat 6.1, Kalene and Kainoa spell out everything that is on their minds with no restraints. Their interaction exchange is direct, to the point, bluntly contentious, and full of face-threat verbal messages. L-Chat 6.1 represents one possible low-context way of approaching a disagreement. Although the first example represents an unproductive scenario, Kalene and Kainoa might actually turn their dialog around and obtain a more productive outcome by identifying their common interests (e.g., urgency of the job search or rent payment due) and exploring other constructive options (e.g., closing the windows or practicing in another room). They can use the strengths of

L-CHAT 6.1

KALENE (knocks on her neighbor's screen door): Excuse me, it's past 11 o'clock already, and your loud music and dancing around are really disturbing my sleep. Please stop your jumping and banging around right away! I have an important job interview tomorrow morning, and I want to get a good night's sleep. Some of us do need to pay rent!

KAINOA (resentfully): Well, this is the only time I can rehearse! I have an important audition coming up tomorrow. You're not the only one that's starving, you know. I also need to pay my rent. Stop being so petty!

KALENE (frustrated): I really think YOU'RE being VERY ANNOYING and INTRUSIVE! There is an apartment noise ordinance, you know. And if you don't stop banging around immediately, I'm going to file a complaint with the apartment manager and he could evict you . . .

KAINOA (sarcastically and turning up the music louder): Whatever! Do what you want. I'm going to practice as loud as I want. Don't bother to ask for my autograph when I become a Hollywood star!

L-CHAT 6.2

MRS. TRAN: Hello, Mrs. Nguyen. . . . Your son Minh-Ha is entering his high school karaoke contest, isn't he? I envy you, because you must be so proud of his talent. You must be looking forward to his future as a pop singer. . . . I'm really impressed by his enthusiasm—every day, he practices so hard, for hours and hours, until late at night . . .

MRS. NGUYEN: Oh, I'm so sorry . . . Minh-Ha is just a beginner in karaoke singing. We don't know his future yet. . . . He is such a silly boy singing so late. We didn't realize you can hear all the noise next door. I'll tell him to stop right away. I'm so sorry about all your trouble, it won't happen again.

low-context, "explicit talk" in dealing with the disagreement openly and nonevaluatively.

In L-Chat 6.2, Mrs. Tran has not directly expressed her concern over Minh-Ha's singing with Mrs. Nguyen because she wants to preserve her face and friendship. Mrs. Nguyen correctly "catches the drift" and

apologizes appropriately and effectively before any real conflict with Mrs. Tran escalates. L-Chat 6.2 represents one possible high-context way of approaching a disagreement because even a minor disagreement is perceived as a major face-threat situation. If Mrs. Tran were the neighbor of Kainoa in L-Chat 6.1, Kainoa might not be able to read between the lines of Mrs. Tran's verbal and, more important, nonverbal message. Kainoa might be clueless that a disagreement was simmering between them and might actually take Mrs. Tran's verbal message literally as a compliment—and continue late-night practices!

Overall, LCC patterns emphasize direct talk, self-enhancement, informal interaction, and the value of talkativeness. In comparison, HCC patterns stress indirect verbal style, verbal self-humbling pattern, status-sensitive formal interaction, and the importance of silence (see, for example, Park & Guan, 2006, 2009; Park, Lee, & Song, 2005). The following sections discuss in detail some of these low-context and high-context verbal habits in different cultures

Direct and Indirect Verbal Styles

Mannerism of speaking frames how a message should be interpreted or understood on a continuum. Individuals in all cultures use all of these verbal styles to a certain degree, depending on assumed identities, intentions, interaction goals, relationship types, and the situation. However, in individualistic cultures, people tend to encounter more situations that emphasize direct talk. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, people tend to encounter more situations that emphasize the use of indirect talk.

The direct and indirect styles differ in how they reveal the speaker's intentions through tone of voice and the straightforwardness of the content in the message. In the *direct style*, statements tend to reveal the speaker's intentions with clarity and are enunciated with a forthright tone of voice. In the *indirect style*, statements tend to camouflage the speaker's actual intentions and are carried out with a softer tone. For example, the overall U.S. American style often calls for clear and direct communication. Phrases such as "give me the bottom line," "call it like you see it," and "what's your point?" are some examples. In contrast, in a request situation, U.S. Americans tend to use a

straightforward form of request, but Koreans tend to ask for a favor in a more roundabout and implicit way to sound not so imposing or demanding. The Koreans are not the only indirect group. Let's demonstrate a pair of contrastive "airport ride request" scenes in L-Chats 6.3 and 6.4 between two Irish Americans and two Latinas:

In the Latina conversation, requests for help are likely to be implied rather than stated explicitly and directly. Indirect requests can help both parties to save face and uphold smooth harmonious interaction. When Daniela detects a request during a conversation with Essie, she can choose to offer help, pretend she does not understand the request, or apologize that she cannot take Essie to the airport with a good reason. An implicit understanding generally exists between

L-CHAT 6.3

ALAINE: We're going to the Orange Bowl in Miami this weekend.

PATRICK: What fun! I wish I were going to the game with you. How long are you going to be there? [*If she wants a ride, she will ask.*]

ALAINE: Three days. By the way, we may need a ride to the airport. Do you think you can take us?

PATRICK: Sure. What time?

ALAINE: 10:30 p.m. this coming Saturday.

PATRICK: All right. No problem.

L-CHAT 6.4

ESSIE: We're going to the Orange Bowl in Miami this weekend.

DANIELA: What fun! I wish I were going to the game with you. How long are you going to be there?

ESSIE: Three days. [*I hope she'll offer me a ride to the airport.*]

DANIELA: [*She may want me to give her a ride.*] Do you need a ride to the airport? I'll take you.

ESSIE: Are you sure it's not too much trouble?

DANIELA: It's no trouble at all.

two high-context communicators. They do not need to overtly state their request or use an overt "no" to state their opinion overtly, thus hurting the feelings of the other high-context collectivist.

Intercultural misunderstanding, however, becomes highly probable when Essie communicates with Patrick. They each rely on their own cultural scripts to inform them of what to expect in the interaction. Let's look at L-Chat 6.5 of the "airport ride request" dialog, this time between Essie and Patrick (adapted from Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 77).

It should be obvious that Essie emphasizes the indirect verbal style and Patrick emphasizes direct verbal style. Because neither has knowledge of high-context and low-context differences, a misunderstanding is inevitable. In high-context conversations, negative responses, such as "No," or "I disagree with you," or "I cannot do it" are not stated overtly. Instead, apologetic expressions with qualifying reasons, delayed decisions, or indirect expressions are used.

If the conversational patterns of people from different cultural or ethnic groups at some point annoy you, think about the stylistic level of conversation. For example, although the British are indirect in comparison with U.S. Americans, the Japanese would not find them to be in the least bit indirect. Becoming flexible intercultural communicators means fluid code-switching between the low-context and high-context message system on both the verbal and the nonverbal

levels and in accordance with the situational norms and rules of the cultural context.

Self-Enhancement and Self-Humbling Verbal Styles

Another verbal pattern is the spectrum between self-enhancement and self-humbling verbal style. The **self-enhancement style** emphasizes the importance of drawing attention to or exaggerating one's credentials, outstanding accomplishments, and special abilities. The **self-humbling style**, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of downplaying oneself via modest talk, restraint, hesitation, and the use of self-deprecation message concerning one's performance or effort. For example, let's check out L-Chat 6.6, a conversation between Bernardo Lara, who is from Puerto Rico, and Pierre LaFont, who is from Switzerland.

Verbal self-humbling or self-effacement is a necessary part of Puerto Rican American politeness rituals. In Swiss or U.S. culture, we encourage individuals to "sell themselves and boast about their achievements." Otherwise, in a performance review or job interview session, who would notice the accomplishments from a self-effacing individual? However, the notion of merchandising oneself does not sit well with many Latin American, Asian, and Native American groups. "After 25 years working for California Transportation," says Dai, a retired worker, "I thought I would be given a window when we moved offices. I never got one. I assumed my supervisors would see that I deserved it. I never asked." Dai believed that if his performance is exceptional, his supervisors will notice his stellar performance and take appropriate, appreciative action. However, from the Western cultural standpoint, an exceptional performance must be documented with concrete evidence and in an explicit manner to catch the attention of busy supervisors. This difference is probably caused by the observational-centric value of the collectivistic HCC pattern, as opposed to the sender-centric value of the Western LCC pattern.

All cultural characterizations and comparisons are in the eye of the beholder more than with the behavior of the beheld—these are relative differences

L-CHAT 6.5

ESSIE: We're going to the Orange Bowl in Miami this weekend.

PATRICK: What fun! I wish we were going to the game with you. How long are you going to be there?

ESSIE: Three days. [I hope he'll offer me a ride to the airport.]

PATRICK: [If she wants a ride, she'll ask me.] Well, have a great time.

ESSIE: [If he had wanted to give me a ride, he would have offered it. I'd better ask somebody else.] Thanks. I'll see you when I get back.

L-CHAT 6.6

BERNARDO LARA: Thanks for making the time to see me, Mr. LaFont.

PIERRE LaFONT: What's on your mind?

BERNARDO: Well, I heard from Haeme, the production assistant, that there will be open auditions for the new play *But Can He Dance?*

PIERRE: Yes, this is true.

BERNARDO: Well, I think this is good. It's an excellent play.

PIERRE: Yes?

BERNARDO: Well, I've been working on designing sets for the past four years, and all have been well received. My work in this theater has never faltered, and I never missed work. [pause] See, I was hoping to get a chance to audition. And since this play is so close to my experience...

PIERRE: Oh! You want to audition. I understand. Why do you want this part?

BERNARDO: Well, as I said, I enjoyed the play. And I always wanted to get my foot into the acting business...

PIERRE: But you're an amazing set designer. Why are you qualified for this role?

BERNARDO: Actually, the role would give me more money. I have my sister's children who will come to live with me. They need to attend a better high school and college. With more money, I can at least afford to have them both stay in my house.

PIERRE: Bernardo, are you serious? You want this role because you have kids coming to live with you? There are many people who have qualifications in acting, such as degrees and training. So this doesn't make any sense to me at all!

BERNARDO: But Mr. LaFont, I've worked overtime, triple time, covered people who were sick, and never shrugged off any of my duties. I just wanted a chance to audition for this role.

PIERRE: Bernardo, who will design the set?!

between cultural and ethnic groups, not absolute differences. By understanding such nuanced and layered differences, we can learn to accept or even to adapt to some of these culture-based verbal style differences.

Beliefs Expressed in Talk and Silence

*Words like violence
Break the silence
Come crashing in
Into my little world
Painful to me
Pierce right through me
Can't you understand...*

Depeche Mode, "Enjoy the Silence," 1991

This British single of 1991 captures the momentary need for peace and quiet that will be ruined with words. Silence can oftentimes say as much, if not more, than words. Although silence occurs in interaction contexts in cultures around the world, how silence is interpreted and evaluated differs across cultures and between persons. Hall (1983) claims that silence, or *ma*, serves as a critical communication device in many Native American and Asian communication patterns. *Ma* is much more than pausing between words; rather, it is like a semicolon that reflects the inner pausing of the speaker's thoughts. Through *ma*, interpersonal understanding is made possible in many high-context cultures. Although silence may hold strong contextual meanings in high-context cultures, prolonged silence is often viewed as "empty pauses" or "ignorant lapses" in the Western rhetorical model.

From the high-context perspective, silence can be the essence of the language of superiority and inferiority, affecting such relationships as teacher-student, male-female, and supervisor-employee. The process of refraining from speaking can have both positive and negative effects. In some situations, such as members in the Apache, Navajo, and Papago Indian tribes, silence is appropriate in contexts where social relations between individuals are unpredictable, role expectations are unclear, and relations involve high levels of ambiguity (Basso, 1970; Covarrubias, 2007).

Do you use talk to "break the ice" and reserve silence for your most intimate relationships? If so, this is typical of European American styles. In France people tend to engage in animated conversations to affirm the nature of their established relationships; in the absence of any such relationship, silence serves

the French as a neutral communication process. This is why in the elevator, in the street, or on the bus, people don't talk to each other readily in France. This is a seemingly inexhaustible source of misunderstanding between the French and U.S. Americans, especially because "these rules are suspended under exceptional circumstances and on vacation (and therefore on the train, on the plane)...U.S. Americans often feel rejected, disapproved of, criticized, or scorned without understanding the reason for this hostility" (Carroll, 1987, p. 30).

The mode of speaking, in short, reflects the overall values and norms of a culture. The cultural modes of speaking in many speech communities reflect the hierarchical social order, family socialization, asymmetrical role positions, and power distance values of the different cultures. Intercultural miscommunication can thus often occur because of the different priorities placed on talk and silence by different groups. Silence can serve various functions, depending on the type of relationship, the interactive situation, and the particular cultural beliefs held. Silence can also serve as a powerful means of sharing or persuasion.

INTERCULTURAL REALITY

CHECK: DO-ABLES

In this chapter, we've explored the diverse features, rules, and functions of language across cultures. We have identified four distinctive language features (arbitrariness, abstractness, meaning-centeredness, and creativity), discussed the five functions of the relationship between language and culture (cultural worldview, social reality, cognitive shaping, group membership identity, and social change functions), and explained the particular characteristics of low-versus high-context verbal communication patterns. Listed here are some checkpoints for you to communicate flexibly when you are using your native language (e.g., English) when communicating with a nonnative English-speaking audience or individuals with a different communication style. To be flexible verbal communicators, try to practice the following guidelines:

- *Understand languaculture.* Have a basic grasp of the features of the languaculture that you will be encountering. *Languaculture* emphasizes the necessary interdependent tie between language and culture (Agar, 1994). The rule patterns of a particular language, from syntactic rules to semantic rules, reflect a speaker's worldviews, values, and premises.
- *Practice verbal tracking.* Pay close attention to the content meaning of the message. Remember that everyone speaks with an accent. Move beyond the accent and track the intended content meaning of the speaker.
- *Practice verbal patience.* Use verbal empathy and patience for nonnative speakers from a different culture. We can try to slow our pace, choose less complex words, consciously pause, and try to rephrase restatements to convey the same intended content meanings.
- *Pay attention to nonverbal tone of voice.* You can be saying the same words; however, your tone of voice can convey your intercultural patience or impatience, receptivity or skepticism. The tone of voice often expresses relational and identity meaning of your verbal content message.
- *Use multiple modes of presentation.* Use visual restatements, such as pictures, graphs, gestures, or written summaries, to reinforce your points. Likewise, if you sojourn to another country, use similar strategies to cross-check for understanding of the meaning of the message from your target audience.
- *Master the cultural pragmatic rules.* Understand the importance of pragmatic rules—you can be linguistically fluent in another culture but still act unconsciously incompetent!
- *Understand the basic differences of low-context and high-context communication patterns.* Be aware of your own ethnocentric tendency to negatively evaluate the opposing high-context and low-context interaction characteristics.
- *Practice verbal code-switching mindfully.* Both low-context and high-context communicators need to practice the figure-eight dance of switching fluently between low-context style and high-context style

in accordance with situational norms, individual relationship distance, communication intention, and desired outcome.

Intercultural miscommunications often occur because individuals use cultural-laden linguistic habits to communicate and interpret each other's verbal messages. Fortunately, by staying flexible

in our intercultural verbal encoding and decoding process, we may be able to catch our own verbal mistakes or miscomprehensions. To be flexible intercultural communicators, we must understand the combined package of *both* verbal and non-verbal communication styles to promote better intercultural understanding.