Intercultural Resource Pack
Intercultural communication resources for language teachers

Derek Utley
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York Associates would also like to thank James R. Chamberlain, Director of the Language Centre of the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences, Germany. Jim possesses the special talent of being able to convert his extensive knowledge of this subject into stimulating training tools that engage the widest possible range of user. We are very grateful to him for the Introduction to Intercultural Studies; for providing the Recommended reading list; for the Further reading references which appear in each set of Teacher's notes; and for the Background briefings.

*Steve Flinders, York Associates*
www.york-associates.co.uk

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About this pack

Why intercultural?
Intercultural communication has been a vital issue since the world began. Intercultural competence can end disputes, save lives, radically transform the existence of millions of people; it can lubricate the wheels of industry and business; it can help teams win, whether they be sports teams or teams of international aid workers.
No wonder, then, that as the globalisation (see activities 1.6 and 1.7) of business and leisure propels international contact forward at a dizzy rate, 'international communication' is a phrase heard more and more often in the worlds of business, education and training. Understanding and optimising it is as vital to survival as it is fashionable. The terms ‘intercultural’, ‘cross-cultural’ and ‘multicultural’ are referred to in the Introduction to Intercultural Studies (page 7).
The purpose of these materials
The Intercultural Resource Pack gathers together the best of current thinking and practice, and forms a set of materials which are easily accessible to and usable by teachers, trainers and others responsible for personnel development. They can be used as seminar and discussion material, and to support presentations on intercultural communication.
Contents
The pack consists of:
• an Introduction by James R. Chamberlain, of the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences near Bonn, Germany, who has integrated intercultural communication work into an innovative programme for his German students in higher education
• a set of photocopiable activities consisting of discussion topics, exercises and explanations
• teacher's notes for each activity including, where appropriate, possible outcomes
• recommendations for further reading for those who wish to study the subject more deeply.
Format of the materials
The spiral-bound format allows photocopying of the activities for use as handouts or transparencies. The activities are divided into sections and consist of information, opinions and short texts presented in such a way as to invite discussion and group activity. They are designed to be modular: any activity can be used independently of the others.
How to use this pack
1 The materials follow no specific school of thought. Instead, they embrace and introduce a number of current approaches and theories on intercultural communication, and make them available for teachers and students to use as desired.
2 The learning style adopted is experiential, based on the principle that people in a training or educational setting learn better by carrying out activities than by being passive. Within this loose framework, teachers are encouraged to use the materials in the way best suited to their style and their students' styles.
3 Many of the activities are provocative; none is meant to be outrageous. Certain views and opinions are presented which are certainly held by some percentage of the population, but will not necessarily be held by a majority of any group of participants.
4 Most of the activities will be best done as follows: a short explanation, division into pairs or groups for discussion, then feedback and discussion in the main group.
5 The main role of the teacher is to present the activities, and then to mediate and channel the mental and nervous energy they will almost certainly generate. The questions posed are not trick questions, nor will they have one 'correct' answer. The possible outcomes in the Teacher's notes will give some guidance where necessary. It may sometimes be useful to stimulate further discussion through questioning and redefining certain ideas. The Teacher's notes give some suggestions.
Basic assumptions about cultural development
A distinction is made between two different kinds of intercultural development:
• intercultural awareness or sensitisation – being aware of the existence of a number of different cultures and types of culture, and of their importance in all forms of human interaction, in private and working life; and
• cultural briefing – acquiring information about how particular cultures operate and manifest themselves.
The assumption is also made that intercultural competence consists of two main elements:
• cultural knowledge – understanding cultural differences, both factual and affective; and
• cultural skills – the ability to act and react in a variety of cultures, and to put this interaction to good effect. These skills include attitudes of openness and tolerance, and the ability to cope with ambiguity.
Further development
Teachers are encouraged to add to these materials from their own experience; to include items and observations from students; and to develop networking with other teachers in order to benefit from their varied experience.
A cultural anecdote

Twenty years ago I moved from a small town in the American Midwest to Stuttgart, Germany. I clearly remember my first day in the city: it was a sunny spring day and I was full of the promise and excitement of new adventure. As I strolled down the main shopping street, passers-by would catch my eye, and of course I greeted them with a hearty ‘Guten Tag’! Not to do so would have been rude. In fact, where I come from, making eye contact with other people obliges one to acknowledge their status as a fellow human being with a hi, a hello, or a nod and a smile. But the Stuttgarters didn’t return my greeting. Most of them ignored me; some gave me what seemed to be bemused, perhaps condescending smiles; and a few stopped in their tracks, looked at me and scratched their heads as if to say, ‘Do I know that guy?’ I soon learned that German city dwellers don’t usually greet strangers on the street, although they’ll look you up and down and straight in the eye. And yet, after twenty years in this country, I still have to repress the urge to say hello when I make eye contact with someone on the street, and deep down I’m a little disappointed that they don’t want to greet me. I try not to hold it against them.

It is a long and often arduous journey from the natural state of believing that the way we do things at home is the only right way, to the learned state of accepting foreign ways as neither better nor worse, but just different. And happy the person whose path is made a bit smoother by that judicious bit of knowledge, advice or instruction. For all the importance that intercultural communication in recent years has gained – in politics and diplomacy, in tourism and travel – it is still at its core a basic human need: how to cope with displacement, with being a stranger in a strange land.

Forewarned is forearmed, and those who prepare others for sojourns abroad, or help to ease visitors into their new and unaccustomed surroundings, are providing a truly human service. But trainers need preparation too, and Derek Utley offers here invaluable assistance in the form of photocopiable activities for trainers to construct a program that leads their students through a process of guided discovery, from increased knowledge of other cultures (and hence their own), to heightened sensitivity to other value systems, whether these be in faraway lands or in one’s next-door neighbor. This process in turn fosters openness, tolerance and acceptance, which help us meet the real challenges of intercultural encounters: behavior management, speech accommodation, and role flexibility.

What is culture?

Myriads of definitions of culture abound, from the pragmatic (‘the way we do things around here’) to the academic (‘a shared system of assumptions, values and beliefs of a people which result in characteristic behaviors’). But perhaps the best way to understand culture is by analogy with children learning their first language – instinctively, unconsciously, contingent upon their environment. They also are performing a feat of linguistic genius. Yet this is just one of many skills to be learnt: besides linguistic competence, children are also acquiring communicative competence, i.e. learning to use the appropriate speed and volume of speech, pitch and tone of voice, chuckles, sighs, gasps, etc. to communicate a highly nuanced range of emotions.

Beyond these so-called paralinguistic features, children are also learning extra-linguistic communication: gestures, how and when to make eye contact, how close to stand to different people, when it is their turn to speak, etc. As children continue to grow and to learn, they in time acquire cultural competence: a vast web of interconnected knowledge which includes, among other things, which groups of people should be accorded the most respect, which behaviors are acceptable for men and which for women, which foods are accorded the most respect, which foods one may eat, what is funny and what is not.1 In short, children become fully socialized members of a community, and the constellation of values, norms and behaviors they have learned can be summed up with the word ‘culture’.

Culture and communication

The culture we have acquired – the ways in which we have learned to see and think about the world – will of course influence how we communicate. By growing up in a certain society, we have come to expect certain behaviors (including verbal ones) as normal, others as appropriate only to specific situations, and others as taboo. We could say that our culture has fitted us with a set of filters that influence both our perceptions and our conceptions of the world.

In their book Communicating with Strangers, Gudykunst and Kim outline several notions about communication, including these assumptions:

- Communication is a process involving the encoding and decoding of messages.
- Communication takes place at varying levels of awareness.
- Communicators make predictions about the outcomes of their communication behavior.
- Intention is not a necessary condition for communication.
- Every communication message has a content dimension and a relationship dimension.2
The way we formulate our own ideas, and the way we interpret the utterances of others, are subject to various influences, whether your interlocutor be a human being from an exotic culture or the person most close to you (‘Yes, dear, that’s what I said, but that’s not what I meant!’).

The several layers of influence that surround each human being function as conceptual and perceptual filters, that is, mechanisms that delimit the number of alternatives from which we choose when we encode and decode messages. More specifically, the filters limit the predictions we make about how strangers might respond to our communication behavior. The nature of the predictions we make, in turn, influences the way we choose to encode our messages. Further, the filters delimit what stimuli we pay attention to and how we choose to interpret those stimuli when we decode incoming messages.3

Or put more plainly, our culture endows us with a set of expectations as to how people should act and react when we communicate with them. And these expectations are, at home and among our own, usually met. Once we are placed in an alien or a multicultural environment, however, we may find that our expectations are inaccurate; but this doesn’t stop people from holding on to these expectations all the more tenaciously. This natural reaction is called ethnocentrism, the basic human tendency to believe that the way we learned to do certain things is the (only) right way.

**Intercultural communication training**

‘Culture, a system of beliefs and values shared by a particular group of people,’ writes Craig Storti, is an abstraction which can be appreciated intellectually, but it is behavior, the principal manifestation and most significant consequence of culture, that we actually experience. To put it another way: it is culture as encountered in behavior that we must learn to live with.

The adjustments we must make to a new culture are invariably of two kinds: we have to adjust or get used to behavior on the part of the local people which annoys, confuses, or otherwise unsettles us; and we have to adjust our own behavior so that it does not annoy, confuse, or otherwise unsettle the local people. So long as we are put off by or consistently misconstrue the behavior of the locals and so long as we repeatedly provoke or baffle the locals by our own behavior, we can never expect to feel at ease abroad or to be wholly effective in our work.4

**Aims and goals**

The overall aim of the trainer is to raise the trainees’ awareness of their own inherent ethnocentrism, and then offer exercises and experiences to help them leave that ethnocentrism behind.5 Pragmatically, this means teaching people to manage their behavior so that it harmonizes with that of a different culture. But because behavior is the outward manifestation of a system of assumptions, values and beliefs, the trainee will also need to understand this system (appreciate it intellectually) and to feel comfortable living under it (accept it on an emotional, or affective, level).

Intercultural trainers have, therefore, three main goals. These are:

1. cognitive, that is, adding to the learner’s stock of knowledge
2. affective, that is, changing the trainee’s attitude by developing openness, tolerance, acceptance and awareness, and
3. behavioral, in which the trainee learns the ‘dos and don’ts’ of the new environment.6

Trainers also deliver content, the information to be conveyed:

- the ‘what’ of facts and figures, anecdotes and descriptions
- the ‘how’ of appropriate behavior in particular situations, rules of address and conduct, ‘dos and don’ts’, and
- the ‘why’ of cultural phenomena, using knowledge of the particular historical development of the target culture.

Finally, trainers must consider the process by which changes are effected in the trainee. A cognitive approach may be chosen, using such methods as lectures, readings and discussions. A more experiential approach is also possible, in which the trainee’s temperament, emotions and interpersonal skills are brought into play. Examples of methods here include games, role-plays, simulations and ethnographic interviews.

The Intercultural Resource Pack offers trainers a wide range of materials with which to deliver the content of intercultural communication training. The activities help the trainer achieve the cognitive, affective and behavioral goals of training, and they serve as a springboard into the real world of experiential intercultural interaction. Through them the student should begin the enriching process of making the strange seem familiar and the dangerous seem delightful, and should gain that cultural understanding that grants us the sense and sensitivity to be both gracious hosts and gracious guests upon this island Earth.

**Notes**

3 Ibid., p. 31.
Recommended reading


Fantini, Alvino (1997) *New Ways of Teaching Culture*, Alexandria: TESOL.


Some of these phrases may be useful for groups of students when discussing the activities.

**Asking for and giving opinions**
- Do you think that …?
- I think ...
- I feel that … is important.

**Agreeing and disagreeing**
- I agree with you (up to a point).
- I'm afraid I don't agree.
- That may be true, but ...
- Yes, but on the other hand ...

**Making suggestions**
- Should we include this?
- What about including this?
- I think we should include this.
- Would it be a good idea to …?
- Could we also say that ...?
- Maybe it's important to ...
- Don't you think ...

**Checking**
- So you mean that ...?
- Do you mean to say that ...?
- What exactly do you mean by ...
- Was that eight or eighty?

**Summarising**
- To summarise, then ...
- To sum up, then, ...
- Let's just summarise the position.

**Comparatives and superlatives**
- This is more important than ...
- ... is of less value than ...
- ... isn't as useful as ...
- ... is the most important thing.
- These are the least useful.

**Discussing a hypothetical situation**
- I'd want to know ...
- Wouldn't you need to know about ...?
- It would be useful to know if ...
- I think I'd want information about ...
- Would ... be useful?

**Likelihood**
- I'm (absolutely) sure/certain this will increase.
- This is (quite) likely to increase.
- This may/might increase.
- It is (highly/very) unlikely this will increase.
- This (definitely/certainly) won't increase.

**Conditions**
- If we choose this, we will have problems.
- If we included both items, there would be too many.
- If we had known that, we would have acted differently.
- If I were in their position, I would ...

**Obligation**
- We really must do this.
- It's essential we do this.
- It's important we do this.
- We should do the following ...

**Sequencing**
- First we should ..., then we should ..., and finally we should ...

**Explaining**
- This is a good idea because ...
- That's why I said that.

**Coming in**
- Can I come in here?
- Can I just say something?

**Asking and challenging**
- Are we sure this is true?
- Do you (really) think this is important?

**Fillers and refiners**
- Actually, ...
- As a matter of fact, ...
- Basically, ...
Teacher’s notes and activities