

SOME INTERACTIVE METHODS OF TEACHING CROSS-
CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AT THE FOREIGN
LANGUAGE LESSON

"Culture [is] the total communication framework: words, actions, postures, gestures, tones of voice, facial expressions, the [handling] of time, space, and materials, and the way he [she] works, plays, makes love and defends himself [herself]. All these things and more are complete communication systems with meanings that can be read correctly only if one is familiar with the behavior in its historical, social and cultural context. " (Edward T. Hall)

Cross-cultural communication is a multifaceted, psychological and physical process between individuals of different cultures. The study of intercultural communication can help us step back from our habitual ways of viewing the world and open our eyes to the influences that have contrasted our ways of thinking.

Several centuries ago the world seemed small, and most people only communicated with others much like themselves. Nowadays due to rapid growth of advanced technologies and cultural, diplomatic, commercial, economic relations and ties we are united into one global community and cannot avoid the study of other cultures for we do enjoy the sheer joy of communication. On the other hand we want to overcome the stereotyped assumptions (xenophobia, culture shock and the like) that we have about other nations. To this end it is of vital importance to try our utmost to investigate the mystery of the so-called cross-cultural communication. The latter is especially important for a student studying a foreign language as it is not a secret that studying a particular language does not mean only learning the language codes of the native speakers, but also the vast background information about the language in question, from its geography and history to culture, cultural values and heritage. It should be borne in mind that the culture forms the mentality and the language use of any nation, above all a language is a culture. To this end we would like to dwell on some theoretical foundations of cross-cultural differences envisaged in a table below and practical activity assigned for homework or self control for a student opting for any language should be aware of the cultural peculiarities of the country

whose language he/she is studying. Furthermore, he/she should be able to oppose and contrast the basic cultural differences arising (sometimes hampering – “culture shock”) the process of acquiring the language.

Thus the following procedures/activities are suggested for the above mentioned goals:

- 1) The instructor invites the students to write down their direct associations connected with the notions “culture” and “cross-(inter-) cultural communication.”
- 2) After this procedure it is advisable that the learners be encouraged to compare and contrast their written thoughts with their fellow students. While doing so they (learners) fill their notes with the new and additional ideas obtained from the other learners in class.
- 3) The next activity that follows assumes distribution of handouts containing basic theoretical information given in the table below:

FINDING OUT CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

CONCEPT	CULTURE I	CULTURE II
1. Achievement	• Emphasis is on competition and success	• Cooperation and group spirit is encouraged
	• Manual labor is respected	• Manual work – not respected
	• Individual accomplishments are predominant	• Accomplishments are not individual
2. Age	• Youth is valued	• Age means wisdom
	• Old people are considered problematic	• Old people are more respected
3. Family	• Small / nuclear	• Extended / joint
	• Contractual partnership	• Partnership is arranged by the family
	• Not child centered	• Kinship – important, child centered, dominated by elders
4. Gender / Role	• Relative equality	• Men are more independent
		• Women have more responsibilities

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men – pampered, women - discriminated
5. Individuality ↔ Group Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual makes his own life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humility, anonymity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-reliance is important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deference to group elders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual identity is strong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group identity and group norms are more important
6. Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal formed Key to school mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal education for few to enhance family image
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflective, analytical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher authoritarian
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher authority / facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less reflective
7. Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality mode of interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continual shift from low to high status
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Casual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hierarchy decides
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct eye contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eye contact is avoided
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assertive / aggressive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less assertive
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loud voice is acceptable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loud voice = anger
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly verbal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less verbal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehemently expressing one's opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hurting feelings of others is not desirable
8. Social Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face to face interaction (confrontation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus → help from intermediary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal / structural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many contacts, physical closeness, less structural
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social obligation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social obligation is large
9. Private / Professional Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strictly separated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overlap with each other
10. Behavior in Public Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Line up and wait for one's turn to come 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jump the queue
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First come, first serve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No permission is required
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orderliness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disorderliness

11. Work and Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strictly separated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-separated
12. Saying-Promising-Doing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saying and promising lead to action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saying, promising forgetting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeating the promise with no action
13. Time Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time is governed by clock / calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time is constantly flowing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punctuality is crucial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punctuality is not important
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed is valued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One goes slowly without any fixed schedule
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past oriented
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time is mostly valued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wasting everyone's time is normal
14. Who controls life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free will 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free will → fate
15. Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materialism ↔ Religious Belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious Belief ↔ Materialism
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquiring things – symbol of success and power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive accumulation is not desirable
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One always looks at someone who has more. Aspire to get more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One always looks at someone who has less

After having examined thoroughly this chart the learners are invited to mark those concepts and stated facts which they have missed. Alongside this activity the learners should be encouraged to select those points which need to be expanded and which require additional knowledge/information.

After this stage the learners are suggested the following sample texts, which are represented in a parallel manner. They can either listen to or just have the texts at their disposal to read them.

11 November, 2005

Dear Nancy,

I had already read about 20 books on India and spoken to at least 10 people who had already been there. But since I am here this country and its people have been surprising and shocking me in many things.

When I landed at the airport I was surprised to see ten people waiting to receive me. Someone collected my baggage, another one insisted on carrying my briefcase and someone led me to the car, opened the door and wanted me to feel comfortable. I didn't understand why ten people were wasting their time and energy like that. I could have taken a taxi and gone to the hotel. They also put a big garland on my neck. Since no one told me when I should remove it, I could remove it only after I reached the hotel. It was a real pain in the neck.

At the hotel when I said "I will be ready in 30 minutes!" after all I wanted to get on to the business talks, they all insisted that I should simply relax on the first day. I felt quite annoyed because I didn't want to waste my time, but they had already planned things for me.

I was suggested that I should go on sight-seeing. One person was deputed to accompany me wherever I went. I went to Golconda in the morning. I was quite amused to see that the tourist guide there knew less than what I had read in the books about this historical place. In the afternoon I managed to get rid of my "shadow" and went all alone to Charminar and bought some pearls. Later on I came to know from my Indian hosts that I had paid too much for the taxi as well as the pearls. Everyone seems to think that all Europeans are very rich and

August 15, 2005

Dear Anamika,

You know I always thought that life in the USA is not going to be problematic because I can speak English. But you had cautioned me that there may be cross-cultural communication problems. You were right. I am already having some problems. Things are indeed different here.

This past weekend I went to stay with a nice American family that invited me. They asked me to come at 6 pm for dinner. I had some work to finish, so I left the office only at 7 pm.

Then I couldn't find the house and wanted to call them but couldn't because the visiting card my host had given me did not have his telephone on it. So I rang up my friend Suresh who is a friend of this family and he gave me their number. But when I called them I got only an answering machine saying they weren't available and that I should leave a message.

At 9 pm I got there finally. I felt very embarrassed when they told me that they had waited for and had finished dinner. I couldn't believe that they would eat so early. I was also told that they got my message on the phone. I was surprised to hear that they put the answering machine on when they don't want to receive any calls, even if they are at home.

They were all actually sitting in the kitchen and they invited me in too. I was amazed that they let me in the kitchen, for we don't let anyone outside the family in our kitchen at home! When they asked me about my dinner I pretended that I had already eaten. I found it quite funny that they didn't ask me a second time. I had to remain hungry!

therefore can pay fancy prices for everything. The trouble I had with beggars is something about which I would rather not talk.

In the evening I was informed that I shall be attending a wedding in the family of one of the Deputy Managers of the company. I could not understand why they invited me to the marriage; they did not even know me. It was a lavish marriage and there were hundreds of people. Why are they spending so much money for nothing? They could have deposited this money in the name of the young couple; they could have used it for setting up their home. When I asked someone about this he smiled at me and said: "They have already a home, they will be living with the parents of the boy and the girl will have to adjust."

Next morning the company car was supposed to pick me up at 10.00 a.m. But I had to wait and wait. At last someone came at 11.00 and said something about a traffic jam. Whenever I had to travel in a car I thought I am going to die. No one follows here any traffic rules, even the traffic police don't seem to be bothered about it. But surprisingly there seem to be fewer accidents than those on our roads.

When I reached the company I was received in a similar way like at the airport. These people are very hospitable, but don't know how to effectively manage their time. We had some discussions and then I visited the factory. There was some problem with one of the machines. The engineer-in charge could have set it right. It was a minor thing. But he called the assistant engineer. That man called the junior engineer, he

Before we all went to bed they told me to take anything out of the fridge to drink during the night. Well I wasn't thirsty, but later in the night I was so hungry that I finished off a cake in the fridge. Later on I came to know that actually they were saving it for the next day's dinner.

Next day morning when I got up I wanted to take a bath as we do at home. But somehow I don't like bathtubs. Who wants to sit in the dirty water like buffaloes in India standing neck deep in a pond? So I decided to use the shower. I India our bathrooms are wet, but here they have carpeting on the floor! Since I didn't know how to use the shower I asked their seventeen year old son to come with me to the bathroom. He turned purple-red, saying that I should shower myself. Well I ended up with water all over the floor and the wife rushing in because water was running out into the hall. They should have told me about tucking in the shower curtain!

Since I had nothing to do I decided to look around the house. Since they had let me in the kitchen I thought that Americans are very informal and I can walk anywhere. The lady of the house was really offended when I looked into her bedroom. I could not understand why. I found it also funny that they came and asked me if they could go into the room they had given me to get something – it was after all their own house.

We had a nice lunch. But guess who did all the clean-up after lunch? The husband! Even though they have a daughter who could have helped, she stayed in her room with her friends while her father did the kitchen all alone. The wife told me

entrusted the task to the foreman, he again told a worker to do it, the worker told an apprentice to solve the problem and he did a good job. I was wondering why they need so many people to attend to one small problem. When I tried to help them I was politely told: "Sir, that is not your job."

I was invited for lunch by one of the senior managers. He took me home. They had a cook and a servant to serve the food. I thought in India they sit on the floor and eat with fingers. But these people had a dining table and used spoons, but no fork or knife. What surprised me was also that the lady of the house gave instructions to the cook and the servant, but did not eat with us. I was told that she will eat later with other lady members of the family. Discrimination of women? Or is there some other reason? I just don't know. I didn't bother to ask and enjoyed my food.

In the evening there was a formal dinner in my honor in the house of the General Manager. It started at 8.00 pm. By that time I was quite hungry since at our place we have our dinner much earlier. Not all the guests were punctual. To start with there were a lot of drinks and some little things to eat. I was not very happy because drinking on an empty stomach is not the right thing to do. People went on drinking and drinking. Food was served actually at 10.00 pm. By that time many men were quite drunk and I was starving. Interestingly most of the men were wearing European dress and the women were in typical Indian dresses. Why this double standard? Women here seem to carry the Indian culture wherever they go and the men only the responsibility to talk and boast

that if she cooks, he cleans up. Sometimes he also cooks. Don't you find it crazy? Do our women in India treat men like this? They do not only cook for us but also serve us the food. When I told them this, they just smiled.

In the afternoon we took their dog for a walk. I was amazed for they seem to give him more attention than to their children. They carried with them the most disgusting thing: a "pooper scooper." They followed after the dog and picked up his shit in the thing! The American dogs don't seem to lead a dog's life!

In the night I went down to watch television in the basement. That was very strange because all the lights were off except for the TV screen. So I turned a light on to find a seat and what do I see? Four teenagers – two boys and two girls – sitting very close together on the coach holding hands! Even worse, when I woke up early the next morning and did not know what to do (Americans sleep very late on holidays) I went down to watch television again, and found the teenagers still there, asleep on the coach. I am not sure whether their parents knew about it. We never had such chances in India. I can only envy them!

I must tell you about the kids. They all talk back to their parents and don't do things they are asked. Last night when the father asked the young girl to go to bed she started arguing. She told him that he had in fact promised she could stay up to see a television show and wanted to know why he suddenly had changed his mind. She also said that it wasn't fair to change his mind. The father had to give in. I think children here don't

about it. One big problem was also the way all these people nod their heads, I just could not understand what they were conveying: yes or no! Tomorrow we will continue our business talks. I am quite curious and also a little nervous about how things are going to develop.

One big problem I have is also the noise around me. Indians seem to be very noisy and no one objects to this noise pollution. I do hope I am back home before I exhaust all my tablets which I brought from home so that I don't fall ill. Till then, take care of yourself.....

Your Kevin

have any respect for their parents. Compared to this our father has so much respect for our grandfather that even today he does all that the grandfather wants him to do. After all I also went for America only after our grandfather gave his permission. You know getting his permission was much more difficult than getting the visa from the American consulate!

Well, I could go on and on about my cultural shocks but I have to live with them. I must admit that I admire these people in many ways because their life seems so hard. I thought I had created a lot of problems to them. But amazingly they have invited me to come back next week. I really didn't understand that but they say they want to talk to me about Indian culture and Indian way of life. I don't know what questions they are going to ask. I am feeling quite nervous. Pray for me!

My regards to all the elders and blessings to the younger ones.

Your brother,
Bharathiyudu

After this procedure the learners are invited to select separately from the two letters portions of information which touch upon the basic cultural differences. In this way they form an image of two distinct cultures: in this particular case – a) Indian, b) American, and discuss in class the results.

The next procedure assumes teamwork. The learners are divided into 4 minor groups each representing a separate culture sojourning into another one (it can be acted dramatically as well), say, for instance, group 1 represents an Armenian in India, group 2 – an Armenian in the USA, group 3 – an Indian in Armenia, group 4 – an Armenian in the USA (or in Britain) and so on.

The next step includes a thorough discussion and comparative analysis of each culture based on the knowledge of the learners. These kinds of activities presuppose not only acquiring basic knowledge on cross-cultural communication techniques but also active discussions in class.

Undoubtedly, these activities do not thoroughly disclose the very core of the cross-cultural communication, and actually do not give all the answers to the innumerable questions on the topic. Time and space limitation did not allow us to give due attention to such crucial points in cross-cultural communication studies as: collectivistic versus individualistic cultures, non-verbal communication, mass communication, and the ways of assimilating to another culture, overcoming ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination etc. – factors which educate learners to respect and have mutual understanding towards the representatives of other nations.

Literature

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