



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David



Barriers to Intercultural Communication

Reminder Assignment 1

- Due by Monday 20 November at 10am
- Follow the brief given & answer the question set!
- Explore the cultural factors relevant to the case
- Use relevant theories/models to discuss the case (Hofstede, Hall)
- Chance to review drafts at the end of this class

<https://youtu.be/VMwjscSCcf0>

Resource

- <https://www.commisceo-global.com/>

Business communication between cultures

Universalist approach no longer appropriate

- Diversity needs to be taken into account
- New management skills needed in area of communication
- **Communicating in and between cultures**
 - The different components that affect the process of communication are introduced
 - The forms and the role of communication in business practices are considered

What will you learn?

- What are some barriers or stumbling blocks to effective and appropriate intercultural communication?
 - Anxiety
 - Assuming similarity instead of difference
 - Ethnocentrism
 - Stereotypes, prejudice, racism
- Case Study: How can these barriers to effective communication account for communication between China and the United States?

Intercultural Communication Barriers

Examines the obstacles to the effective flow of information within an organisation.

The breakdown in communication has often to do with:

- Too much or too little information
- Misplaced, inaccurate or incomplete communication
- The context: personal and environmental factors, often complicated by the question of culture
- The question of culture: misunderstandings when the sender and receiver do not share similar meanings for the communicated symbols.

Identifying Intercultural Barriers

- Since it would be an impossible task to learn the norms of all cultures, intercultural communication experts have focused on identifying intercultural barriers to be surpassed
- LaRay Barna (1997) developed a list of six barriers to intercultural communication:
 1. anxiety
 2. assuming similarity instead of difference
 3. ethnocentrism
 4. stereotypes and prejudice
 5. nonverbal misinterpretations
 6. language



Anxiety

- When you are anxious due to not knowing what you are expected to do or to say, it's only natural to focus on that feeling and not be totally present in the communication transaction
- Focusing on that one feeling of anxiety makes you seem awkward and often causes you to make mistakes that would otherwise be avoidable



Intercultural Anxiety



Gudykunst (1983, 1985):

Strangers = people who are members of other groups who act in ways different from one's own culture.

When encountering strangers, you experience **uncertainty** (not knowing how to interpret the person's reactions) and **anxiety** (being afraid of the initial interaction), so you are unsure how to behave and you tend to avoid contact

Sugawara (1993):

- Survey of 168 Japanese and 135 U.S. Americans working in Japanese companies in the United States:
- 30% of the Japanese employees felt the U.S. co-workers were impatient with their accent
- Only 8% of the U.S. employees reported feeling impatience with the Japanese co-workers accent (experiencing anxiety impacted Japanese co-workers' perceptions)

Assuming Similarity Instead of Difference

- When you have no information about a new culture, it might make sense to assume no differences exist, to behave as you would in your home culture; but making that assumption could result in miscommunication
- Boucher (1974) has shown how cultures differ in terms of to whom it is appropriate to display emotions. If you assume that display of emotions is similar to your culture, you might see people of different cultures in certain circumstances as lacking emotion and others in other circumstances as displaying emotions inappropriately

Barriers to Intercultural Communication (1)

- **Non-verbal behaviour** can play a crucial role in interaction
- All cultures use forms of body language to communicate, but the meaning of these forms is subject to different interpretations according to the cultural background of the interpreter.

<https://youtu.be/eoW53zvWBqw>

Barriers to intercultural communication (2)

- Non-verbal signals used in a certain context may not only differ but also influence other consequent non-verbal signals.
- Question of the intention: did the sender (if from another culture) intentionally choose to transmit a non-verbal message with an exact purpose or was he pretending to do so?
- When responding to the signal, the receiver may need to re-adjust his communicative goal, vary the non-verbal messages so that the desired goal is eventually reached.

Barriers to intercultural communication (3)

- Those communicating across cultures must therefore be careful not to assume that certain gestures they perceive do not have the same meaning as in their own culture.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haohj1sVnyk&feature=share&list=RDkn3NwMtAEHs&index=7>

Barriers to intercultural communication (4)

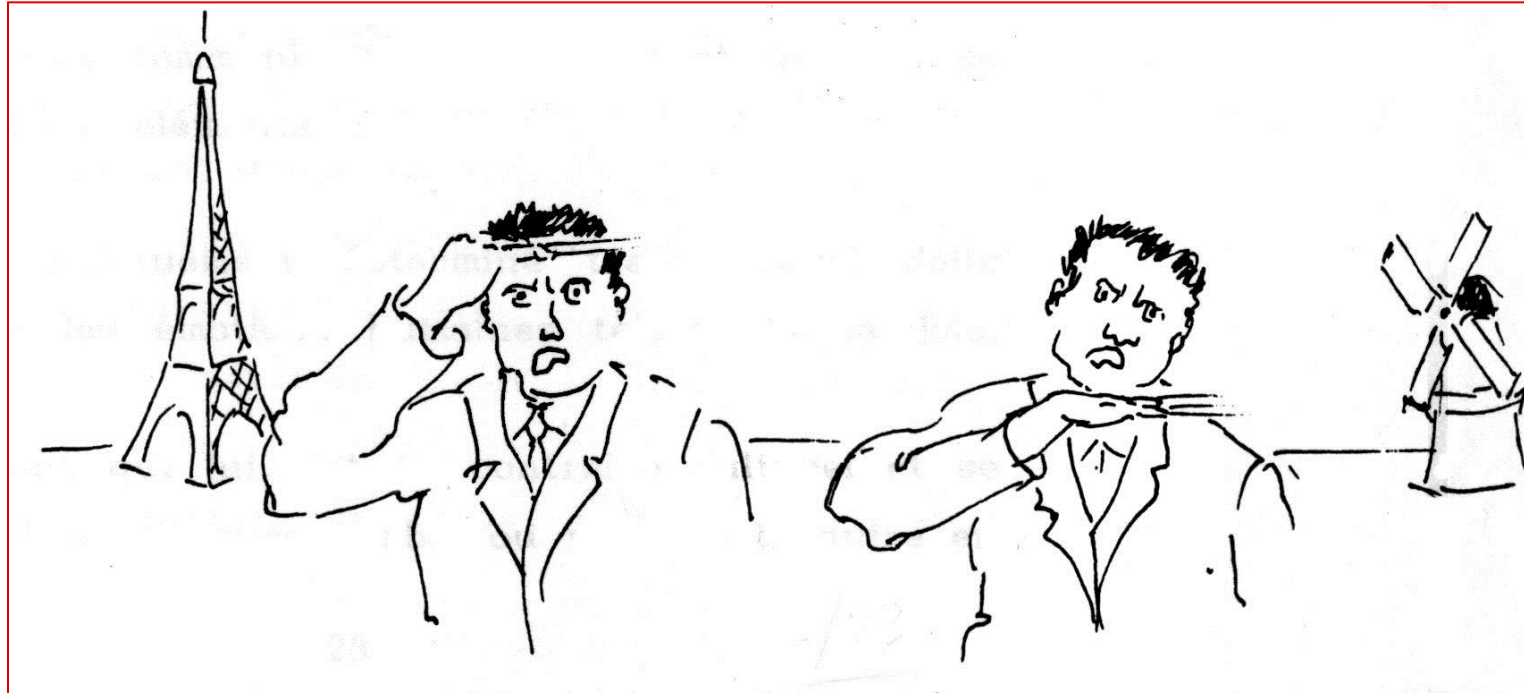


Figure 14.1 'I've had enough'

Non-verbal communication barriers

- **Use of body language**

For example:

- use of arms by the Dutch, compared to
- use of the whole upper part of the body by the French
- the Dutch may perceive French as very emotional and excited since the Dutch only use gestures made by the French when they feel deeply emotional.

Non-verbal communication barriers

- **Silence**

- In western cultures, silence marks pauses in a discourse.
- In oriental cultures, silences are an integral part of communication. Silences can indicate:
 - Respect, of agreement or disagreement
 - Modesty (avoid improper use of words).

Non-verbal communication barriers

- The way feelings are expressed can vary so much between cultures and the result can be negative feelings towards another.
- The creation of such prejudices is not the differences in themselves but the way in which the differences are interpreted.

Assumptions and culture (1)

Assumptions may have:

- 1) a **cognitive dimension**, related to presumptions as to **how people think that things work**;
- 2) an **affective dimension**, related to the **presumed likings of people**; and
- 3) a **directive dimension** related to the **presumed choices of people**.

Assumptions and culture (2)

Assumptions can be **time-related**:

- Is time a scarce good (economy of time)?
- Are tasks performed simultaneously or one after the other (monochronic versus polychronic)?
- Is life seen as a continuity or as cyclic episodes?
- Is the orientation in time towards the past, the present or the future?

Assumptions and culture (3)

Assumptions can be **space-related** relating to territories: orientation may be:

- 'in-group': the group space includes families, nations and cultures;
- 'out-group': based on the assumption that there is a unity of mankind beyond the borders of in-group spaces;
- in-group orientation does not completely exclude out-group orientation (e.g. in Nordic European cultures).

Assumptions and culture (4)

Assumptions can be **identity-related**: related to identity of self and others.

- What is seen to be the ideal conduct in certain social contexts:
 - Main socio-demographic categories (age, sex, social class)
 - Particular roles in society (such as the perfect politician, or successful businessman).

Perceptions and stereotypes (1)

WHO IS SAYING WHAT ABOUT WHOM?	
WHO/ABOUT WHOM?	WHAT?
Germans	<i>They're pretentious</i>
British	<i>They're arrogant</i>
Americans	<i>They're chauvinist</i>
Spaniards	<i>They're hypocritical</i>
Dutch	<i>They've got no sense of humour</i>
French	<i>They're individualistic</i>

Table 14.1 Who is saying what about whom?

Source: Based on Gruère and Morel (1991)

Perceptions and stereotypes (2)

- Every culture sees its own system of values in a positive light
- If confronted with negative stereotypes of themselves by other nationalities:
 - will not recognise themselves
 - will react strongly since they feel under attack
 - defend their own personal identity
 - see their national identity more in terms of 'them' than 'us'.

<http://youtu.be/xYJXNkMKgX8>

Activity : Define these terms

Stereotypes, Prejudice, Racism

- **Stereotype:** the broader term; negative or positive judgments made about individuals based on any observable or believed group membership
- **Prejudice:** the irrational suspicion or hatred of a particular group, race, religion, or sexual orientation
- **Racism:** prejudice with the exercise of power on or over the group through historical or institutional structures

Stereotyping and Profiling

- **Stereotyping:** judgments based on group membership.
 - Psychologists have explained stereotyping as mistakes our brains make in the perception of other people similar to mistakes our brains make in the perception of visual illusions; what we see, the most readily available image, is what we expect to see
- Example:
 - if we expect that heads of corporations are tall, slender, White males, we don't see people with disabilities, women, and people of colour in that group

- **Profiling** refers to a law enforcement practice of scrutinising certain individuals based on characteristics thought to indicate a likelihood of criminal behaviour.
- Example:
 - Conducting traffic stops based on the vehicle occupant's perceived race, ethnicity, gender, or economic status



Negative Effects on Communication

Stereotypes are harmful as they impede communication in at least four ways:

- They cause us to assume that a widely held belief is true when it may not be
- Continued use of the stereotype reinforces the belief
- Stereotypes also impede communication when they cause us to assume that a widely held belief is true of any one individual
- The stereotype can become a “self-fulfilling prophecy” for the person stereotyped

Identity and communication

National identity characterises a nationality: sets the limits of an intercultural exchange.

- Perception of the other always is based on one's own culture > **ethnocentrism**
- Ethnocentrism is inherent to any membership of a socio-cultural, ethnic or national group
 - It is the intrinsic mechanism separating 'mine' from 'yours'
 - Our perceptions are made through a barrier which is unconsciously made up of our own values
- Ethnocentrism is responsible for prejudices and stereotypes.

Ethnocentrism

- **Ethnocentrism:** negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one's own culture; believing in the superiority of one's own culture
- **Cultural nearsightedness:** less extreme form of ethnocentrism; taking one's own culture for granted and neglecting other cultures
- **Cultural relativism:** in contrast to ethnocentrism; the view that an individual's beliefs and behaviors should be understood only in terms of that person's own culture

Extreme Ethnocentrism

- Leads to a rejection of the richness and knowledge of other cultures
- Impedes communication and blocks the exchange of ideas and skills among peoples
- It excludes other points of view, so an ethnocentric orientation is restrictive and limiting



Stereotype building

- Starting-point for building a cultural stereotype is the norms and values of the culture concerned.
- A stereotype consists of images created in our minds with regard to a group or groups of people.
- These images are over-generalizations made from selective (self-) perceptions and information corresponding with our beliefs.
- A stereotype confirms our prejudices rather than reflecting accurate observations of reality.
- The development of prejudices is supported or provoked by our cultural environment.

How to deal with stereotypes? (1)

- Suppress them, fight them or ignore them?
- Better not to fight against them since they are the first stage in the process, whereby the existence of another culture is acknowledged.
- Stereotypes are necessary for establishing one's own cultural identity. If a cultural group cannot compare itself to other groups, then it cannot become aware of what it is.

How to deal with stereotypes? (2)

- If people could place another culture in its own context and avoid judging it according to their own 'system', stereotypes would eventually disappear.
- Note the dynamic nature of interaction:
 - characteristics of speakers PLUS
 - structure of the situation and the context, as well as time and space
- The variable nature of the interaction makes every communicative situation unique and therefore unpredictable.

Activity: Gypsies/Romanies/Roma

- What do you know about them?
- What are your cultural stereotypes and preconceptions about them?
- How does society tend to perceive them? Why?

Case Study: The Roma

- Migrated from India over a millennium ago, first to Persia, then to Europe (13th or 14th century); name “Gypsy” – by medieval Europeans, who thought they came from Egypt
- Led a nomadic life; were often regarded as tramps and accused of thefts; from 17th century: attempts to forcibly assimilate Roma people by requiring permanent settlement, banning Romany language
- Particularly persecuted by Nazi Germany; about 500,000 died in gas chambers and concentration camps
- No nation-state; approximately 10 million in Europe, mainly in the Balkans, and about 2 million elsewhere, mainly in North and South America and North Africa
- The European Union has made better treatment of the Roma a condition for new members



Trump in China

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41912325>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-asia-china-41896439/trump-in-china-chinese-citizens-describe-america-in-one-phrase>

China-U.S. Communication: Anxiety

- **Anxiety:** not knowing what are the expectations in an intercultural encounter
 - Not knowing what you are expected to do means you need more information. How much information about China does the average U.S. citizen know?
-
- **Land:** slightly smaller than the U.S.
 - **Population:** 1.3 billion (4.3 times more people than in the U.S.; 1/5th of the human race; the most populous country)
 - **Ethnicities:** 90% Han; 55 other recognized ethnic groups
 - **Economy:** Second largest economy after U.S.
 - **History:** 4,000 years of civilisation; communist decades
 - **Regional differences:** Hong Kong, Macau, Guangdong



China-U.S. Communication: Assuming Similarity Instead of Difference

- Beginning with Marco Polo's trek in China in the 13th century, there have been two "Chinas" - China as imaged by Westerners and the real China; at times the China as imaged by Westerners has been similar to Western countries rather than the real China

Some present-day differences:

- All broadcast media are owned by, or affiliated with, the Communist Party of China or a government agency
- The Central Propaganda Department lists subjects that are off limits to domestic broadcast media
- The government approves all programming; foreign-made TV programs must be approved prior to broadcast
- The government encourages the Internet for education and business but blocks material deemed subversive and blocks access to various websites and to YouTube, Facebook, Twitter

China-U.S. Communication: Assuming Similarity Instead of Difference

- Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in a major speech in 2010, drew an analogy between the Berlin Wall and restricted access to the Internet
- Chinese reaction to her speech was that the United States uses the Internet as a means to create worldwide hegemony based on Western values. The *People's Daily* newspaper compared Google to the opium traders of the 19th century



China-U.S. Communication: Ethnocentrism

The dispute on human rights between China and the United States:

- The U.S. has attempted repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, to gain censure for Chinese human rights policies from the United Nations Commission on Human Rights
- China views these demands as attacks on its sovereignty; China has also charged that the U.S. human rights record includes huge prison populations, low voter turnout, and a history of slavery

- Rather than viewing this only as a political clash, some would seek explanations based in cultural values.
- China emphasises collective order, whereas Western cultures stress individual liberties
- Chinese leaders place a higher premium on social order and a lesser one on individual expression

China-U.S. Communication: Stereotypes and Prejudice

- China's strong economy, growing military, and expanding role in international affairs threaten some in the United States and other countries
- With fears can come negative stereotypes such as those of China as the world's polluter and as having a significant influence on others' economies

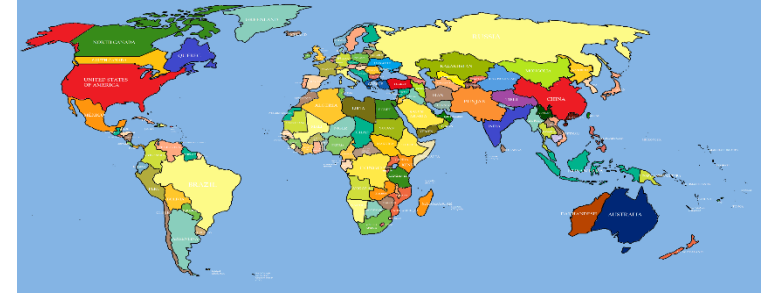


- How would you prepare the hotel staff to deal with the barriers discussed in this chapter?
- How could you help employees deal with their anxiety when interacting with Chinese tourists for the first time? How would you deal with assumptions of similarity? How would you deal with employees' ethnocentrism and stereotypes?
- How would you use Weibo or other social media with Chinese tourists before their trips?

Conclusion

- The cultures of those communicating filter information and interpret it according to their own references.
- Stereotypes form the most important barrier to intercultural communication.

Next Class: Thursday 23/11



NO CLASS ON THURSDAY 16 NOVEMBER –
FINISH YOUR ASSIGNMENT
DUE IN BY 10AM ON MONDAY 20 NOVEMBER

Review of Drafts now / after placement talks on Tuesday afternoon