

Language & Culture

on trial



Effective and sensitive
intercultural communication

Globish: a portmanteau neologism of the words Global and English. It is a simplified version of the English language that uses only the most common English words and phrases. It is used by non-English-speakers of various native languages.

The word culture, from the Latin colo, -ere, with its root meaning "to cultivate", generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activity significance. Different definitions of "culture" reflect different theoretical bases for understanding, or criteria for evaluating, human activity.

Source: www.wikipedia.org

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Introduction

SALTO stands for Support, Advanced Learning & Training Opportunities for the European Commission Youth programme. The SALTO Cultural Diversity Resource Centre is based in the UK- National Agency, Connect Youth at the British Council, London and provides support, information, and training courses on Cultural Diversity issues relevant to different countries and regions in and around Europe. We also work through the website to provide tools, methods, materials and links.

In cooperation with the British Council, Brussels we ran the 'Effective and Sensitive Intercultural Communication' seminar in September 2006. It was organised in response to the experiences and feedback from a number of participants on previous training courses who although having 'youth work' as their common bond, would often feel disconnected from each other due to communication not being as 'sensitive' or 'effective' as it could be.

Training courses for international youth work are these days mostly conducted in English. whether the participants are 'native' or 'non-native' English speakers, their experiences have shown that difficulties and misunderstandings can arise due to the English spoken by each other. Is it due to the impact of culture on language? Could communication be improved by being more culturally sensitive? Should there be a stronger recognition of 'International' English to connect people in an international context? Or would this take away ones' cultural identity?

A lot of these issues and questions are already being looked at by politicians, linguists and trainers such as research carried out by David Graddol, commissioned by the British Council, to look at the future of English; The 'All Different, All Equal' campaign organised by the Council of Europe; The European Commission's vision of multilingualism in Europe and 2008 being appointed as the year of 'Intercultural Dialogue'.

In order to enable youth workers to share their own feelings on the topic and to link this with current research, theory and practical communication strategies, we decided a seminar would provide the most suitable platform to:

- explore the definition of intercultural dialogue and the necessity of cultural sensitivity and mutual understanding in order to deal with conflict and misunderstandings.
- open new portals of intercultural dialogue through looking at techniques and skills as well as language differences in order to set up successful international youth activities training events.
- think about English as an 'international language' and how to communicate effectively and sensitively in a cross-cultural setting.
- bridge theory with practice in order to produce this booklet containing input from participants.

A high level of interest was shown in the seminar reflected by the number of applicants. This demonstrates the importance and relevance of the seminars' objectives. The trainers devised a stimulating programme which included:

- Intercultural speed-dating,
- Defining 'international English' and 'culture'
- Experiencing a conflict: role play, analysing a conflict and Intercultural conflict management
- Misunderstandings and communication skills
- Transmitting and listening to information: Language in question?
- Transmitting and interpreting information: Culture in question?
- Synthesis and Perspectives in an European Framework and a question and answer session with external guests.

We hope you find this booklet is as stimulating and that it will encourage you to add your thoughts to the topic.

Monomita Nag-Chowdhury
Cultural Diversity Resource Centre
SALTO YOUTH

A word from the co-authors of this booklet

How many of us wish we could sometimes have an easy recipe for dealing with cultural differences, for communicating smoothly and effectively with people from other countries? What skills do we need to work efficiently in another language as a lingua franca, or to decode cryptic messages that these “others” address us with? Is it really necessary or enough to be competent in English and, by the way, what English are we talking about: British English, American English, International English? Is a dictionary of the proper terms or a list of do's and don'ts the only solution; will it be enough to ensure sensitive intercultural communication? Surely not, at least not from our point of view. That's why it is so hard to define concepts like intercultural dialogue and intercultural communication.

Nevertheless, this is a real and topical issue: 2008 will be the European YEAR OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE. The Lisbon strategy of the European Union has identified eight key intercultural competences for life long learning, two of which are intercultural communication and the ability to communicate in a foreign language. It seems that the issue is now also political.

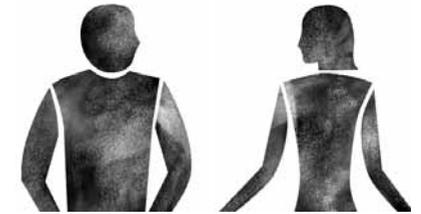
To understand what makes up intercultural communication and in order not to propose a dictionary of terms, which would be like to grasping the intangible, we used our international seminar as a basis to work from. This included calling on the past experience of participants; their knowledge and reflections; the result of their confrontations; and the unexpected impact of the intercultural experience on their group relationship.

Enriched by such material, trying to relate it to existing theoretical models in the intercultural field and in the field of English teaching, we decided to go on trial! Why did we choose the analogy of a trial? – Because the intercultural field is very much about judgements, about norms and perceptions of what is good, what is bad. Stereotypes and prejudices are part of our relationship to others. But this trial will be used only as an analogy. Indeed you will read about a trial, IN WHICH NOBODY IS GUILTY, but a trial where language and culture are the perpetrators. After all, they do influence our relationships, make an impact on our behaviour and create misunderstandings / misconceptions. They are the core of any communication between people from different countries, in a hidden or visible way.

So, our two perpetrators will be two vague concepts that we tried to personify a little bit – we decided to put them on trial.

Mr Globish Language, in reference to the international English spoken by millions of non-native speakers of English.

Ms Intangible Culture, as a large and hard-to-define concept, which is part of our personal and collective identity.



So, let us cross-examine them in order to understand them and their influence better. For that purpose, we decided to put them on trial in five practical cases which have been proposed by the participants in the seminar, out of their real professional experiences. While all attempts have been made to ensure the correctness and suitability of information, the views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of SALTO or the European Commission. These are REAL LIFE WORDS. Like in any trial, each case will reveal some critical issues. Professionals from the field will be asked to comment. Some terms / concepts will be clarified and there will also be some “quick-made” conclusions and quotations, which for some of us might be the most important element to remember out of this story. Finally, there will be some invitations to read more about it.

But at the end, don't expect us to make the verdict, since, as in real life, the only appropriate judge will be you and only you because you are unique! So, use this power wisely and enjoy your reading.

Sylvain Abrial, intercultural trainer, Kaléido'scop
 Louise Chamberlain, freelance TESOL teacher

Case A “An ‘international’ exchange”

Your honour, in the case of “an international exchange”, I will outline the series of events which led my clients to be misled by the infamous “Language and culture” duo.

My clients are an international group, who participated in a multilateral international youth exchange in the city of Newcastle, United Kingdom. The following countries were participating: Bosnia, Bulgaria, Sweden, Turkey and of course United Kingdom.

The group was formed of 6 young people from each visitor country and a larger group from the hosting country (about 15). The team was composed of 6 leaders, aged 18 to 25, just like the youngsters. The theme of the exchange was youth participation, volunteering and culture.

And this is what happened...

When the visitor groups met the ‘British’ host group a few of them were surprised to find that the British group included people originating from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran to name but a few, which raised their awareness that the United Kingdom was made up of British people not only originating from the United Kingdom but also from a number of ethnic groups different in origin but British by nationality. Some of the visiting participants felt that as a result of meeting people, who were in their minds, ‘native’ and ‘non – native’, they needed to review and rearrange the prepared topics such as offering pork brought by the Bulgarian partners for the intercultural dinner.

It's up to you, jury, to decide who has influenced the visitors' preconceptions the most: Ms Intangible Culture or Mr Globish Language? Or maybe my clients were led astray by an intriguing double act!

For the defence of my clients, let us focus on what is crucial in that case:

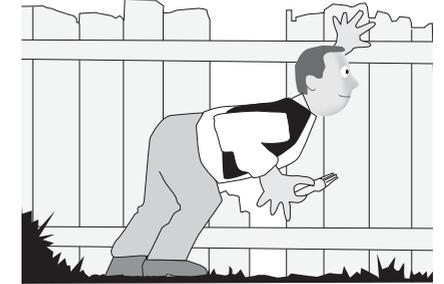
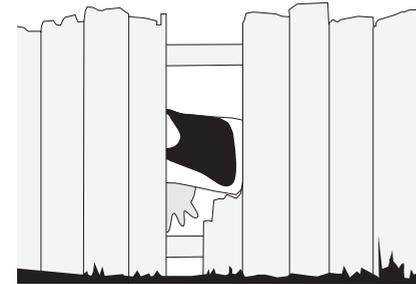


Mr Globish Language, How do we best explain or define people living in different countries? By ‘Nationality’? ‘Ethnicity’? ‘Both’? Are there words which have negative connotations? Is this dependant on where you come from i.e. the use of ‘native’ and ‘non – native’? What's in a word?

Ms Intangible Culture, What is our identity made of? What is culture made of? Who is representative of what? Let's hand over to some professionals...



Do we really see what we believe we see?



The point of view of some professionals in linguistics, intercultural studies and international youth work.

Professional in the field of English language

Our visiting group had preconceived ideas of what being “British” meant which did not correspond with actual reality. Without knowing how the host group defined themselves it is difficult to say where the misconception originated. However, this case is a good illustration of the power of words.

What's in a word? In the United Kingdom terms such as ‘British’ or ‘British Asian’ are often both used to describe a person's nationality and ethnicity.

The word ‘native’ as used to describe language proficiency such as ‘Native English Speaker’ and ‘Non – native English speaker’ are commonly used in the English language field. English spoken as a ‘first language’, ‘second language’ or ‘lingua franca’ are other ways of expressing how the language is being used and can in some cases indirectly indicate the level of proficiency.

However, ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ to describe nationality / ethnicity are seen to have negative connotations even though they might not sound offensive in other countries due to working in a lingua franca. This includes an additional step in interpreting a word: translation. Sometimes in translating, the nuances of connotation can become lost and the word has yet another meaning than was originally intended.

Stages in defining words:

First, there is a dictionary definition. If we take the example of “native” used as an adjective, we find the definition “connected with the place where you have always lived or have lived for a long time” (taken from Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary).

Then, there is connotation, negative or positive . Another definition writes from the same source: native (sometimes offensive) “ connected with the people who originally lived in a country before other people, especially white people, came there” .

Finally there is your own personal association tied to a word based on your experience or knowledge of it. The word evokes an image or sensation that is particular to each individual.

There is nothing in the word ‘British’ or ‘native’ that describes a person's ethnicity and yet some of the visitors had little to no experience of this.

Tips

There are more opportunities for words to be misinterpreted in a lingua franca so:

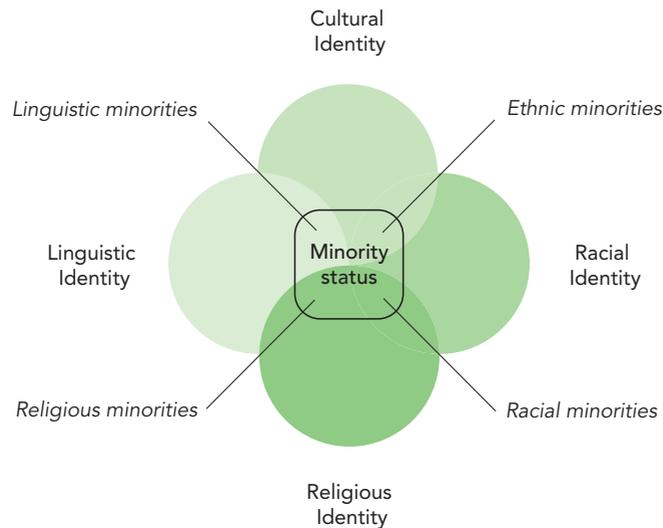
- Take time to negotiate the meaning; this involves questioning the choice of a word that takes you by surprise.
- Be prepared to adjust your interpretation of a word.
- Avoid being over pedantic.
- Watch out for false friends (see glossary).
- Recognise personal associations will differ from yours.

Professional in the field of culture

By talking about ‘nationality’ and ‘ethnicity’, this case tackles the question of identity. Are we talking about national identity or cultural identity? This group of young people in an exchange, were faced with their own preconceptions of another group and probably also with what forms their own identity: Are they at first range a Bulgarian, a Scot, a Swede, or are they first a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew? Are they maybe from Europe, from the Balkans or from the Middle East? Are they male or female? Born in the country they live in or not? During the exchange, they probably played consciously or not with all these different identities. Carmel Camilleri¹ names identity strategies for the way people use their identities for making themselves acceptable and of value to others. E.g. A young person with fewer opportunities, coming from what is seen as a deprived area, will claim proudly that he is a “guy from this particular district of a city (and not a another part) in which there is the best hiphop band of the moment”. Depending who is in front of him, he will show one of the identities he is most proud of, or an identity which differentiates him the most from his interlocutor (who could be someone from the same country or same city).

¹ See part «further readings»

Scheme identity



Source: internet, Conference by Dr Joanna Anneke Rummens, anthropologist and sociologist in university of Toronto. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/french/consultations/race-policy-dialogue-paper-jar.shtml>

The other interesting point in this case is the question of language: would the participants who are British by nationality but not by origin, be more aware of the difficulty of communication that other young people might have in English? As they personally went through an experience of dealing with two different cultures, maybe, they might be able to find other vectors of communication (other languages than English or skills of intercultural communication they acquired) in that context.

And finally, this case refers to the pre-conceptions one might have before meeting people from other countries and the way we expect them to look. Is it easier for our brain to preconceive people from countries to share the same identity and culture (for planning an intercultural dinner for instance!)? It is also interesting to see how participants in the exchange felt embarrassed to serve pork to some of the British host group, without having asked themselves the same question beforehand about participants from the other visiting groups i.e. from Turkey or Bosnia!

Some tips from/to youth leaders to avoid misunderstandings:

- Collect detailed information before, about the group composition and their health, dietary and special needs.
- Encourage participants to communicate with each other as much as possible beforehand.
- Select leaders in the group with experience in managing intercultural conflicts.
- Propose to participants to research the culture of the hosting country they will visit.
- Pay attention to the way one transmits complaints to each other.
- Try to adapt to each other.
- In the spirit of an international exchange, participants should feel confident about presenting their culture and be interested in each other's!

As a conclusion

We probably cannot avoid such surprises but at least help the young people in understanding what they are going through. The question is: isn't it worth allowing a "cultural conflict" to occur sometimes? At least it would be an open conflict, which can be a good opportunity to confront our pre-conceptions and to discuss them.

Intercultural competence acquired in this story:

tolerance of ambiguity = The ability to accept that sometimes you won't understand everything that happened and the way you can cope with "blurry" situations, which are "abnormal" to you.

Quotations, glossary, further readings,...

Glossary

false friend: a word in a foreign language that looks similar to a word in your language, but has a different meaning

Intangible (Culture): lacking substance or reality; incapable of being touched or seen.

Globish: global English also known as international English or, English as a lingua franca – taken from www.wordreference.com

Quotations

"No-one is the same as the other. Everyone is unique."

– Participant in the seminar

"If you were a colour, what would you be? Red. It means energy? Passion? Lucky? Blood? Violence? Communism? "

– Participants in the seminar

"we have different perceptions of the meaning of the words –

Sometimes cannot translate directly, need to question what exactly they mean"

"Ask doubly so that people understand or take other messages (from gestures, the face) to find meaning"

-Participants in the seminar

"My identity is what prevents me from being identical with anyone else"

– Amin Malouf

Further readings

Camilleri, C., Kastarsztein, J., Lipansky, E.M., Malewska-Peyre, H., Taboada-Leonetti, I. & Vasquez, A. (1990). *Stratégies identitaires (Identity strategies)* Paris, PUF.

Amin Malouf – *In the name of identity – (Les identités meurtrières)*, Penguin Books, reprint (March 2003)

What do you think? Write your notes here...

Case B “The Hungarian girl in the Finnish silence”

Your honour, in the case of “the Hungarian girl in the Finnish silence”, I will outline the series of events which led my client to be misled by the infamous “Language and culture” duo.

My clients are a Hungarian girl, who was doing European Voluntary Service in Finland and, the Finnish people she had to deal with.

And this is what she experienced...

In Finland, it is normal that friends have fun together but also enjoy silence together. According to Finnish people, it is not important to talk all the time among friends. They can also be together without saying anything. In the young Hungarian volunteer's culture, if there is silence in the company of a friend, it might be because there is a huge problem that nobody wants to talk about. That's why the first time she experienced the “Finnish silence”, she felt guilty. She thought she had said something wrong. When she asked her Finnish friends what the problem was, they didn't understand her question. “A problem? There is no problem!”, they replied. Then she had to explain her feelings about the “Finnish silence”. After this discussion, her friends tried not to be silent and she accepted the fact that in the company of Finns, it's possible that nobody wants to talk for a while but just enjoy the silence!



It's up to you, jury, to decide who had a stronger influence on my clients: Ms Intangible Culture or Mr Globish Language. Or maybe my clients were clients were led astray by an intriguing double act!

For the defence of my clients, let us focus on what is crucial in that case:

Mr Globish Language, is language only verbal?
Which language convention should we adopt to
in an international context?



Ms Intangible Culture, what are the competences
you need for understanding the misunderstandings?
How much communication do you need for understanding
each other?

The point of view of some professionals in linguistics, intercultural studies and international youth work

Professional in the field of English language

It appears that our Hungarian friend and her Finnish hosts dealt with the situation well and hardly need my intervention in this case. Both sides discovered how language conventions vary from one language to another and found a compromise that suited them both. Language conventions can be divided in to:

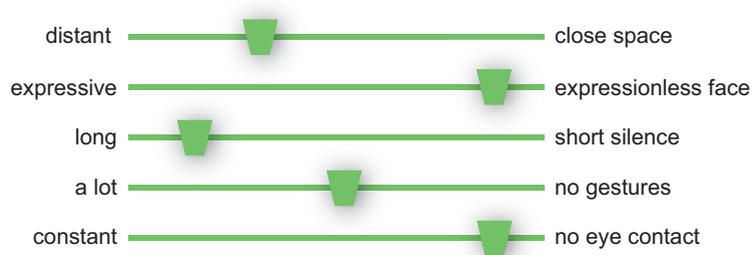
- **Body Language (non-verbal communication)**
almost half of what we communicate is done through gestures and facial expressions without uttering a word
- **Conversational conventions**
These are the rules and structures that have to do with how conversation is organised, and what prevents it from breaking down into a chaos of interruptions and simultaneous talk or complete silence. What happens, however, when a lingua franca is used? Which conventions apply?

Often it is enough just to be aware of the differences so as not to offend or be offended. Think about your own language conventions to compare with another.

How do you:

- open a conversation? Do you use small talk? – “At last some sunshine!”
- take turns in talking? There are some subtle rules and signals to determine who talks when and for how long which include non-verbal signs too.
- interrupt? How much interruption is tolerated? – “Sorry to interrupt, but...”
- show you are listening? – “Mmmmm really?”
- change the topic? – “Oh by the way...”, “Yes, well, anyway...”
- accept or refuse? Does no really mean no? – “I couldn’t possibly”
- close a conversation? abruptly or do you wind down gently? – “Well anyway, I don’t want to keep you from your work.”
- speak? Loudly or softly? With a flat intonation or a varied one?

One way of thinking about these different elements is imagining they are on a sound track equaliser. What impact does moving the bar to the left or the right give? Here is an example of a non-verbal equaliser



The non-verbal equaliser set in this position would give the impression to a British person that the interlocutor was disinterested or bored.

Tips

- Watch out for gestures! They are not international.
- If your interlocutor backs off, you are standing too close!
- Learn some conversational expressions in the lingua franca
- Tune in to the differences – they are interesting.

The point of view of some experts in linguistics, intercultural studies and international youth work

Professional in the field of culture

Living in another country and approaching another culture, especially for a long period, has an impact on our personal behaviour and reveals our cultural behaviour. In the case of this Hungarian volunteer in Finland, like in other cases of people prepared and motivated to go abroad for a long time, there is probably enough awareness raising concerning the cultural differences. This awareness allowed the young girl to make friends but also to communicate as much as possible. Her “hidden agenda” was probably to “explain herself” to others and to understand them at the same time, in order to avoid any misunderstandings. It is thus important not to forget in which cultural context of communication you are.



E.T and M.R Hall² identified, among others, two behavioural components of culture referring to situations of communication: “High and low contexts of communication” describes the information that surrounds an event. If you are in a culture of high context of communication, it is not necessary to transmit a lot of verbal information, because the communication is already present in the relation between people communicating. In a low context of communication, there might be a stronger need for exchanging information because in the relationship, there is less global communication. The Hungarian girl might have felt this need of communicating a lot, not only because in Hungary, silence is seen as a moment of hidden problems, but also because the context was of low communication, in which she could barely send and receive necessary information. While, maybe in these moments, her Finnish friends didn’t communicate in a verbal way because they simply had enough information just by keeping silent and being in each other’s company.

² See part «further readings»

The second component identified by the Halls, which might be of value to understand this case is the "slow and fast messages", referring to the speed a message can be decoded and acted on. To become friends, to get easily familiar with people is a typical example of "fast messages". Showing familiarity in communication with someone (even a friend) is personal but also cultural behaviour. The concept and level of familiarity of the Hungarian girl was maybe not the same as the one of her Finnish friends or at least it wasn't expressed in the same way, which might have created from one side or another some misunderstandings. In that case, moments of silence might be considered as moments of reflection and maturation for some or moments of trouble and destabilization for others!

Some tips from/to youth leaders to avoid misunderstandings:

- The volunteer should have conversations with people living in the country of their future European Voluntary Service project beforehand.
- The hosting organisation should ask foreigners living in the country to give their opinion about the culture and country, in order to see better how you may prepare the volunteer for the EVS. (Use the mirror effect!)
- Enjoy the interculturalism!
- First think, then talk!
- Give and catch messages! (all of them, even "silent ones" !)
- Be aware that we all are individuals.
- Be aware that you might be seen as the representative of your culture. (And you are!)

As a conclusion

Isn't our personal and cultural behaviour also influenced by the interactions we have with others? Would the Hungarian girl have behaved similarly in a mono-cultural context? Would she have reacted this way if it had happened in her own culture? By noticing cultural differences, does this make you more sensitive to behaviour that you wouldn't notice in your own culture and therefore affect how you behave and feel?

Intercultural competence acquired in this story: trust in a non-familiar environment

Quotations, glossary, further readings,...

Quotations

"Cultural doesn't equal personal" – Participant in the seminar-participant in the seminar.

"Learning language is life-long learning experience. Raising awareness to certain aspects can help " – Participant in the seminar.

"In human intercourse the tragedy begins, not when there is a misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood." – Henry David Thoreau.

Further reading

- Hall, Edward T. and Hall, Mildred Reed (1990), Understanding cultural differences: keys to success in West Germany, France, and the United States. Yarmouth, Maine – Intercultural Press, Hewstone, Miles and Brown, Rupert (1986). A summary version of the behavioural culture components can be found in T-Kit "Intercultural Learning", www.training-youth.net

What do you think? Write your notes here...

Case C "Friends or colleagues in the Romanian Hotel?"

Your honour, in the case of "Friends or colleagues in the Romanian Hotel?", I will outline the series of events which led my clients to be misled by the infamous "Language and culture" duo.

My clients are all participants in a trilateral project between Slovenia, Italy and Romania, which took place in Romania.



And this is what they went through...

They noticed that in implementing a big project between Ljubljana, Rome and Bucharest, a lot of cultural differences were recognised in their working styles and approaches. For the communication, because they spoke different languages, they chose English.

One of the biggest problems they faced was time. They had a huge debate in creating their common time schedule and respecting deadlines.

Another issue was the Romanian group who insisted on having the smartest hotel as possible, as a venue for this exchange, whereas, the Slovenian group wanted to focus on the quality of the programme's contents.

Yet another problem was the lack of balance in age and gender.

Finally, how the actors of the project interacted with each other, posed difficulties.

For some of them, being colleagues and friends were two different things.

For others, being colleagues meant the possibility of being friends as well.

It's up to you, jury, to decide who had a stronger influence on my clients: Ms Intangible Culture or Mr Globish Language? Or maybe my clients were led astray by an intriguing double act!

For the defence of my clients, let us focus on what is crucial in that case:

Mr Globish Language, what level of formality in English should be adopted in an international context?



Ms Intangible Culture, what do we want to show from our culture? How do we interact with others? What does it mean to have a common working style?

Let's hand over to some professionals...

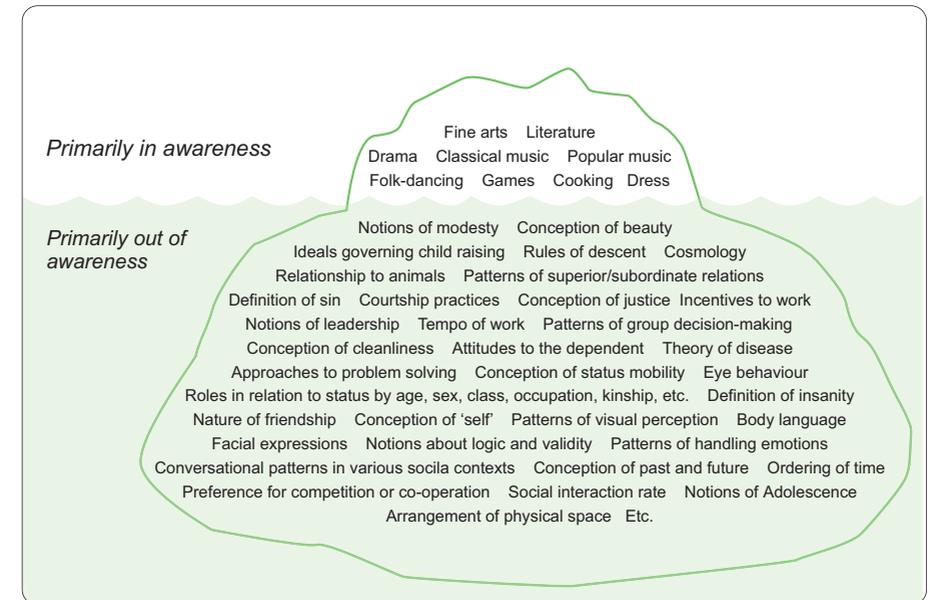
The point of view of some professionals in linguistics, intercultural studies and international youth work

Professional in the field of culture

It has been said that you are aware of your culture only in the confrontation with others. This is named "ethnorelativism"³. And once you have started to compare your culture to others, you consciously or unconsciously show the best of it. Furthermore, if you have a little bit of cultural awareness, you would probably like to confront other people's stereotypes and prejudices with your own culture and show them your reality. But what do you wish to show from your culture, what do you think people "need" to see from it? In this case, some people think that accommodating the participants in a high quality hotel might show the best side of their country and impress them. That's one point of view. The important factor in this case is not about sleeping in a high class hotel or in a campsite, it's about accepting the image that others have of our own culture. This image can be stereotyped or prejudiced but for sure it is also founded on, or can be reinforced by, the visible elements of your culture that you show to the others. (can also be found in T-Kit "Intercultural Learning" p.21)

³ Refers to the work of M.J Bennett

The famous metaphor of the iceberg of culture helps us to understand the visible and invisible elements of the culture in this case. The visible part here is the standard of accommodation that this group wanted for its guests. The invisible part can be a need for recognition expressed through a certain idea of standards of living. The disagreement occurred in the lower part of the iceberg. While the conception of decency was the most important. Rules of descent were the most important in that context for one group, what was ruling the others was the process of group decision-making at that particular moment. It also seems that the perception of time was quite an important and blocking issue, difficult to resolve. Here again, the confrontation and disagreements took place in the less visible part of the culture.



Source: P.14 AFS Orientation handbook Vol. 4, New York: AFS Intercultural programs Inc, 1984

Some tips from/to youth leaders to avoid misunderstandings:

- Be prepared and organised Arrange things in advance (common language, time etc.)
- Take time to be colleagues first to learn the way of working together.
- Be aware of stereotypes.
- Be aware that you might be seen as the representative of your culture.
- Co-operate.

As a conclusion

The challenge is to build a collective and intercultural working identity, trying to integrate all personal and cultural differences, all different working styles and all pre-conceptions. If the team of leaders is able to reach that point, they will be able to communicate to their young people in a new collective and co-operative way.

Intercultural competence acquired in this story: management of complexity

Professional in the field of English language

There are two factors here that play a part in choosing a level of formality. The individual's culture and that of the organisation. When working within an international context there is often a mixture of characteristics, some coming from «headquarters» and some from the local culture. It is this hazy area which makes defining the right level of formality difficult. In this case there were different expectations from the participants which resulted in a sense of unease.

Formal language

is about showing respect to the person you are addressing depending on their office and status. A person's office is his or her job, and positions held e.g. chairperson, director. Status refers to the social standing or position in the social hierarchy and is determined by factors like age, education, family background, office and wealth. The more carefully you attend to your speech production, the more formal it becomes, which is appropriate in formal contexts. The choice of language helps to put a comfortable distance between the speakers.

Informal language

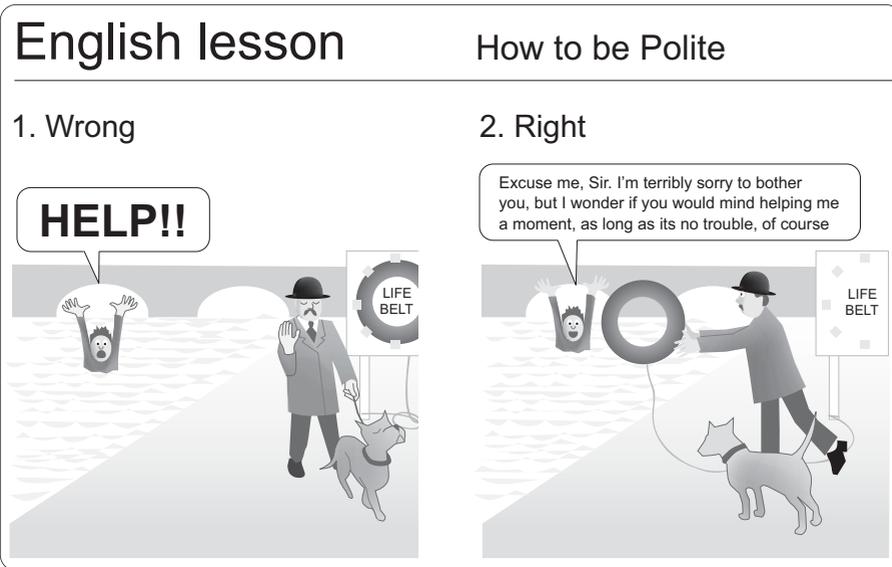
is about speaking more naturally and casually, which is appropriate when the social setting is informal and the speakers are of more or less equal status.

Too formal and you might sound pompous and ridiculous and elicit remarks like «He treated me like a VIP. What a laugh!» Too informal and you might offend or shock and elicit remarks like «I never would have thought she was a minister» Finding the right place on the formal-informal continuum in an international context requires cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Tips:

- Play safe and avoid either extremes of the continuum.
- Mirror, as far as you feel comfortable, the other person.
- Time will tell if your working relationship grows in to a friendship.

It is important to note that the degree of politeness does not depend entirely on the degree of formality (informal speech, for example, is not necessarily impolite). "Can you open the window, please?" is polite but not as formal as, "Would you mind opening the window, please?" Instead, politeness refers to the extent people want to make the other person feel comfortable, either because, for example they respect the person and his privacy, or because they would like something from him/her.



Quotations, glossary, further readings,...

Glossary

- **Stereotype:** Generalizations about people that are based on limited, sometimes inaccurate, information (from such sources as television, cartoons or comic books, minimal contact with one or more members of the group, second-hand information) – English Online Teaching Forum.
- **Prejudice:** An adverse judgment or opinion formed beforehand or without knowledge or examination of the facts – Free dictionary by Farlex.
- **False friend in French:** Prejudice (FR) = injury, damage (it is also interesting to think about the meaning given to words!)

Quotations

"My experience with CEOs or politicians, there is not always a difference between the words, but more the way you express it. Intonation is important." – Participant in the seminar.

"Multicultural environment is a chance, use it!" – Participant in the seminar.

"Appropriacy – what is suitable to the situation, you will choose the language to match it, so you don't distance people." – Participant in the seminar.

"Need good balance between formal and informal stuff. It's important to know both, if you just meet people from intercultural environments, then when you meet people from more serious society you are not prepared. It's good to be able to manage that." – Participants in the seminar.

"If I reduce the high polite way to a training course for youth workers, they would think I was a certain kind of person, arrogant – it's not a common language. We have to find the common language which is not rude, but not too polite." – Participant in the seminar.

"Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from their neck saying, 'Make me feel important.' Never forget this message when working with people." – Mary Kay.

"The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible." – Oscar Wilde.

Further reading

- Cultures and organisations: Software of the Mind by Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede, 2004: an in-depth account of the effect of culture on corporation.
- Milton J. Bennett 'Towards ethnorelativism: a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity' in Education for the intercultural experience, Yarmouth: Intercultural Press, Paige, R. Michael (ed) (1993) – Can also be found in T-Kit Intercultural Learning p.31.
- (3) footnote by Milton J Bennet.

What do you think? Write your notes here...

Case D "Forest Havoc"

Your honour, in the case of "Forest Havoc", I will outline the series of events which led my clients to be misled by the infamous "Language and culture" duo.

This case which I present you raises a number of issues. The setting is a multilateral youth exchange, in a forest in Slovakia, between 5 countries: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Malta and Austria. It brought together 45 young people aged between 14 and 23 years old, one youth leader per country, over a period of 10 days.

Already by the second morning Language and Culture were leading my clients astray:

The Maltese and Austrians were feeling hungry because they did not like the Slovakian cuisine.

Maltese did not agree on the timetable for eating, resting and going to bed. There was under-age drinking going on at mealtimes.

The Maltese group did not mix with the others largely due to the fact that their leader forbid them to visit the rooms of other participants, especially women's.

Most of them had difficulties communicating in English and needed to call on translators.



It's up to you, jury, to decide who had a stronger influence on my clients: Ms Intangible Culture or Mr Globish Language? Or maybe my clients were led astray by an intriguing double act!

For the defence of my clients, let us focus on what is crucial in that case:

Mr Globish Language, what other option is there to using a translator?



Ms Intangible Culture, how much does time perception differ from one culture to another and how much does it affect our interrelationship? What are the different approaches to authority and leadership?



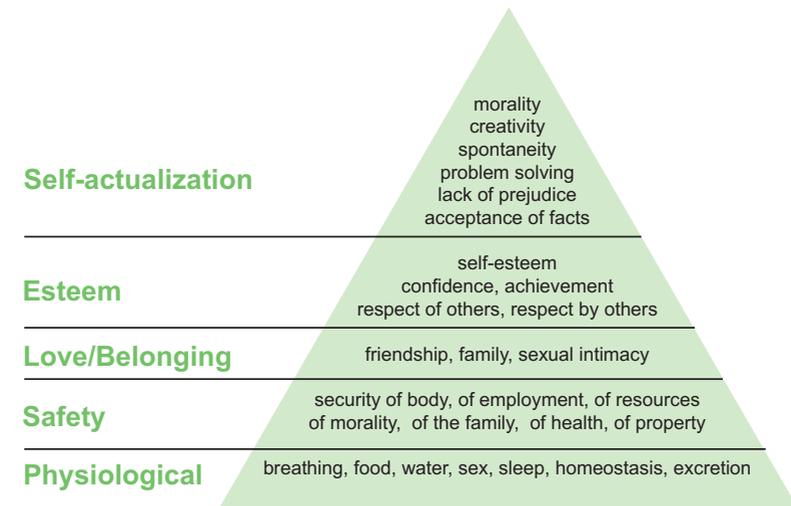
Let's hand over to some professionals...

The point of view of some professionals in linguistics, intercultural studies and international youth work

Professional in the field of culture

Time and rhythm and pace of life are very sensitive issues in intercultural field. That's why, I would focus on that point among the many others raised in this case. Isn't time a universal value? Isn't one minute made of 60 seconds for everybody on the planet? Time is universal, yes! Perception of and relation to time are definitely not! Are the Maltese monochronic (dealing with time in a linear way, one thing after the other) or polychronic (using time as an extendable value, doing different things simultaneously and not necessarily sticking to a schedule)? Are Slovaks more past, present or future oriented? These different notions identified by Hall and Hall, in their five behavioural dimensions of culture, and Hofstede, in his "Cultures and organisations: software of the mind," might help us to understand how much an international youth exchange is being affected by the way we relate to time. You might argue on what should be the normal and appropriate timing for a youth exchange. Should we have dinner at 18.00, which sounds quite normal in some cultures? Or should we have it at 21.00, as it is usual in some other cultures? Can you imagine it?! There is a gap of three hours between these two different "usual" timings! And the worst thing is that choosing the "right" timing for a meal will have a direct impact on biological needs as it deals, in this situation, with basic needs (eating, sleeping). In this case, the perception of time is very relative and is a cultural matter but might also become a physiological issue.

Where is the intercultural learning happening if participants are hungry or cannot digest because it is too early to eat ?!



In Maslow's model, we can understand that if you are not able to cover these basic needs, forget about reaching any further personal development. So, here again, watch carefully look out for what might be the effect of time, rhythm and pace of life chosen for the exchange, as these affect the personal needs and development of all involved.

Some tips from/to youth leaders to avoid misunderstandings:

- Explore the cultures before.
- Organise group games focusing on experience, pointing towards a strong activeness and participation.
- Try to communicate the possibility of a conflict as soon as it appears, to avoid problems worsening.
- Try to improve Focus on communication strategies – misunderstandings often have their source in communication problems.
- Pay attention to the terminology that is used and to details.
- Speak out if you think something is going wrong.

As a conclusion

This case tackles many issues, but is actually raising one very important question: what is cultural and what is personal? For sure there is something cultural in time perception but physiological needs of young people are something very personal. Trying to integrate them is an intercultural challenge, because it means dealing with individual development in a collective environment. Communication in that context will be both an intercultural and interpersonal one.

Intercultural competence acquired in this story: knowledge of oneself in relation to others

Professional in the field of English language

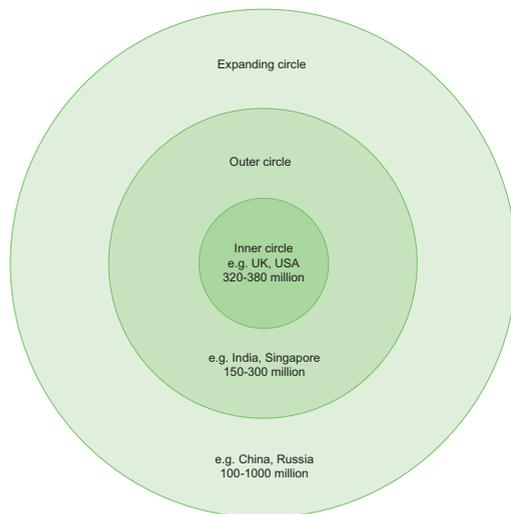
Firstly I would ask whether the lingua franca chosen for this situation was the right one or not. How did the organisers decide on English? Had other languages been considered such as, German, Spanish or French?

Certainly there is a large, growing number of people using English as another language (see diagram)

Braj B. Kachru (1985). The inner circle: English is a non-native second language, but still counts as an official language of administration or education. Finally, the dynamic expansion of English is present in the expanding circle. In many countries English is recognised as an important lingua franca and usually learnt as a foreign language. For countries of this category English does not have a history of colonisation, nor is it given an official status.

Source: <http://www.ewhistling-pub.meotod.de/> Lecture 7

In this case there do not appear to be any native speakers present, so this already redefines the type of English being used. Often referred to as "International English", the ownership of the language is in the hands of non-native speakers and



differs from the typical models taught at school such as British or American English. Grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are adjusted, simplified or ignored to reflect the non-native users' own understanding of the language where their first language plays a big influence. See evidence 3 on page ?? for a list of International English terms commonly recognised in the youth field page.

Whatever lingua franca is chosen, there is always the problem of how to overcome the disparity in levels, between competent and less competent speakers? One solution is to use other participants as translators. This is, however, a voluntary, non-professional role which all parties need to agree to. It would be unfair to place too much responsibility on the translator's powers of interpreting and translating while they are acting as a participant.

Another solution is to grade the level of the language to the less competent speakers rather than to the more fluent ones. Here are some points to consider:

Tips

- use simple language to avoid ambiguity.

Think carefully before using idiomatic expressions, *see evidence 4 on page 45. Phrasal verbs (verb with preposition) often have a more easily understood, single-verb equivalent e.g. look into = investigate. Keep sentences short.

- negotiate understanding.

Both the person transmitting the message and the person receiving it need to check understanding. This involves:

asking for confirmation e.g.
Do you follow me?

confirming e.g.
Yes I see what you're saying

asking for clarification e.g.
What did you mean by?

clarifying and rephrasing e.g.
What I meant was...

- allow for more time.

This also applies to the time needed to 'tune in' to someone's accent.

- be patient.

Quotations, glossary, further readings,...

Quotations

"Behaviour may vary according to your level of English, your language competences, how skillful are you. If your level is good, you feel confident, you can be spontaneous, freely express yourself. Otherwise, more calculated, process each word, more reserved." – Participant in the seminar

"I try to understand people with my feelings or my heart, and help them if I can. It takes time to understand. When I understand I can help them too. Usually I speak to people born in India, I have lots of experience with that particular accent." – Participant in the seminar

"In ex-socialist countries, serious inferiority complex. If someone speaks very good English, I think that is cool, be impressed. Well prepared youth worker, when met a native speaker, wasn't brave enough to talk, I felt small and can't speak, hide away, not equal person. My experience still nowadays, same feeling continues, if the English is perfect I would feel alienated." – Participant in the seminar –

"Time is on my side, yes it is." – Mick Jagger

"The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is." – C.S Lewis

"Times don't change. Men do" – Sam Levenson

Further reading

- English as a Global Language by David Crystal: a lively and factual account of the rise of English as a global language. Crystal explores the whys and wherefores of the history, current status and future of English as the international language of communication.
- English Next by David Graddol: this book explores some very recent trends in the use of English worldwide and its changing relationships with other languages.
- Motivation and Personality by Maslow, A. (1970) New York: Harper and Row.

What do you think? Write your notes here...

CASE E “Romanian spirit threatened”

Your honour, in the case of “Romanian spirit threatened”, I will outline the series of events which led my clients, all the young participants, to be misled by the infamous “Language and Culture” duo.

Imagine if you will, an international summer university and festival in Hungary with 300 young people over a period of 10 days. Many activities were organised, one of which was the production of a newspaper, open to all participants and published every other day.

As one of the cultural activities, there was also an international evening where all the young people from participating nations presented their culture, food and drinks etc.

The day after the international evening the festival newspaper carried an article with the headline “We Don’t Like The Romanian Spirit”. This offended the Romanians who thought the remark was aimed at their temperament or attitude. In fact it was meant as a joke about Romanian palinka/vodka!



It's up to you, jury, to decide who had a stronger influence on my clients: Ms Intangible Culture or Mr Globish Language. Or maybe my clients were led astray by an intriguing double act!

For the defence of my clients, let us focus on what is crucial in that case:

Mr Globish Language, how clever and witty can we be in a language which is not our own?



Ms Intangible Culture, how much of the information is being filtered by culture?

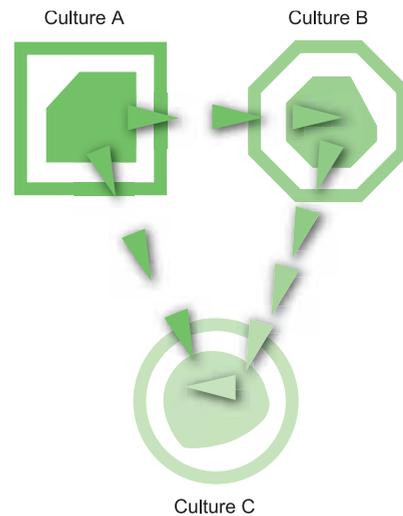
Let's hand over to some professionals...

The point of view of some professionals in linguistics, intercultural studies and international youth work

Professional in the field of culture

Communication is everywhere. We are communicating permanently. Communication is made of rational and emotional elements. But, communication is not only about a person A sending a message to a person B, who receives it. The process of communication is much more complex than that: a message sent by someone (orally or in a written way) goes through a chaotic journey before it reaches its final destination. Indeed, the message is being filtered and distorted by different elements: emotions, body language (when a spoken message), surroundings, ... Culture is one of these filters. And guess what? Those filters are not only the ones of the sender of the message but also the ones of the receiver, which makes the communication really complicated! In “approaching intercultural communication”, Porter and Samovar attested that “when a message leaves the culture in which it was encoded, it contains the meaning intended by the encoder(...) When a message reaches the culture where it is to be decoded, it undergoes a transformation in which the influence of the decoding culture becomes a part of the meaning of the message.”

In this case, by writing “we don't like the Romanian spirit”, the young participants meant something and this sentence was the result of their thinking. The message, then, started its journey till it was received by some other people, including some Romanians. And it is clear that it was not understood and interpreted the way it had been meant. The message content carried a clear reference to a culture and expressed a clear judgement. It had all the components for being misunderstood and culturally filtered. This case also refers again to the cultural dimension identified by Hall and Hall: fast or slow message (cf. case A), as it has been chosen here to communicate through a newspaper and this kind of communication is not approached the same way according to different cultures.



By Porter and Samovar (1997)

Some tips from/to youth leaders to avoid misunderstandings:

- **Solution:** “You are my friend.”
- Try to bring the problem from a cultural to a personal level, because it is much easier to solve it on a lower this level. It was one journalist who made a mistake and not the opinion of a whole culture.
- Personal and cultural background.
- Be aware of your culture and the one of the others. You might collect some information before interacting with somebody from another culture.
- Keep it simple and communicate as much as possible.
- Ask for explanations, make sure the others understand you and be open minded to accept different point of views.

As a conclusion:

The most important point is not what I say but what the others understand!

Intercultural competence acquired in this story: active listening and empathy

Professional in the field of English language

First you need to ask yourself, is this headline “We Don't Like The Romanian Spirit”, funny or offensive? What was the author trying to say or do by writing such a provocative statement? Perhaps:

he / she didn't know what he was writing

He / She can't claim the word play was made unconsciously because writing, as opposed to speaking, allows the author to select, check and edit his words carefully. The advantages in writing are helpful when using a lingua franca, to ensure there is no ambiguity or misunderstanding. The disadvantage is that the writer cannot interact with the reader. Once the words have gone out their message remains the same with no opportunity of rephrasing them. The reader is left with unanswered questions. One exception, however, is the use of e-mail where there is often an exchange of messages and the language has more of a spoken style.

or

he was only trying to be funny

If we take the argument that he was trying to be witty then the author has a different definition of humour from his Romanian readers.

What is funny?

A survey was carried out on the internet at laughlab.co.uk to find the funniest joke in the world. The results showed that the style of humour differed from nation to nation. Some preferred the use of wordplays, others, surrealism or others, jokes with a sense of superiority. Some countries enjoyed jokes that involved making light of topics that often make us feel anxious, such as death, illness and marriage.

This suggests that different parts of the world have fundamentally different senses of humour. The more we understand about how people's culture and background affect their sense of humour, the more we will be able to communicate effectively.

In addition to the content of the joke there are also the questions of: Who is the audience and how well do you know it? The less you know the audience, the bigger the risk you are taking. Is it the right time / place to use humour? Humour is vital to communication but used at the wrong time or in the wrong place it can backfire with serious consequences.

Quotations, glossary, further readings,...

Glossary

- Witty (adj.) able to say or write clever, amusing things
- Empathy = the ability to take oneself out of oneself and put oneself into another person's world.

Quotations

"When you're speaking another language you are wearing a disguise because you don't feel the depth of the words, you can use swear words but it doesn't mean the same for you. What is the weight of the words in a foreign language? It doesn't have a contact with your emotions." – Participant in the seminar-

"I feel when I don't have enough money I must control myself, calculate very well how much. My behaviour is not so spontaneous. I can speak and enjoy words in my own language. Here it is not easy in English. Happy to have chance to understand you, I make great efforts to understand, must concentrate, tired. I feel I am more serious in English, usually I make jokes in my language." – Participant in the seminar-

"One man's joke is another man's insult " – anon.

Further reading

www.laughlab.co.uk for funniest joke in the world

- Porter, Richard E & Samovar, Larry A. (1988). " Approaching Intercultural Communication". In Porter, Richard E. & Samovar, Larry A, eds.

Our final plea about Ms Intangible Culture and Ms Globish Language

Yes, Ms Culture is intangible, yes communication is both interpersonal and intercultural and yes English is one way, among others, to communicate. But, as we are in a court, trying to identify who to hold responsible place the guilt on between Globish Language and Intangible Culture, we just want to mention to you the 7 laws of intercultural communication⁴, which every intercultural citizen should try to follow:

Law no.1: Our cultural filter is being shaped through our socializing process (education, experience).

Law no.2: The cultural filter cannot be taken away (it is kept inside of you).

Law no.3: Fortunately, the cultural filter is flexible and adaptable.

Law no.4: The sense of transmitted message is only known by the sender.

Law no.5: The sent message is being encoded (shaped) according to cultural pre-suppositions and perceptions of the sender.

Law no.6: The received message is being decoded (rebuilt and interpreted) on the basis of cultural pre-suppositions and perceptions of the receiver.

Law no.7: Normally, the received message is not the same as the sent message.

So, dear jury, what ever your final judgement may be, consider all you have read and remember this:

Think 'complex' for communicating 'simple' !

What do you think? Write your notes here...

Evidence 1

Test your knowledge of false friends in other languages by completing the blank column

language	no.	word	translation	False friend	Definition in English
French	1	actuellement		actually	as a matter of fact
	2	agenda		agenda	points to cover in a meeting
	3	assister		assist	help
	4	éventuellement		eventually	finally
Spanish	5	carpeta		carpet	Floor covering
	6	raro		rare	not common
	7	embarazada		embarrassed	shy, awkward, ashamed
	8	bizarro		bizarre	strange
Italian	9	parente		parent	Mother/father
	10	morbido		morbid	gruesome
	11	palazzo		palace	royal residence
	12	triviale		trivial	of little importance
German	13	Box		box	container to put things in
	14	dezent		decent	honest and fair
	15	Gift		gift	present
	16	winken		wink	close one eye

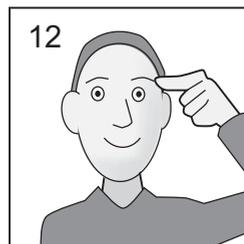
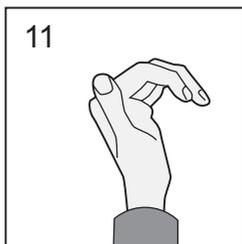
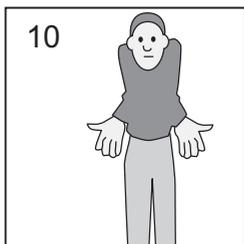
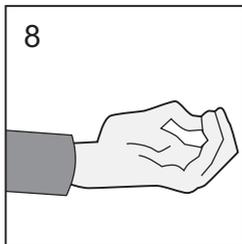
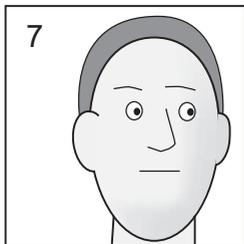
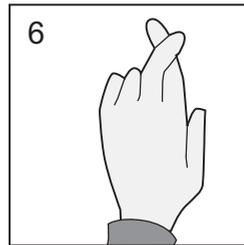
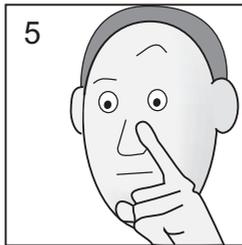
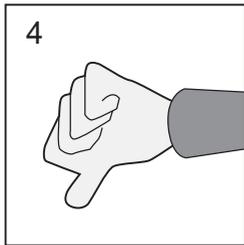
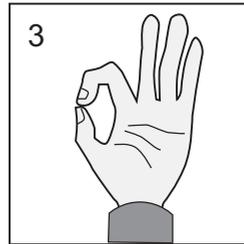
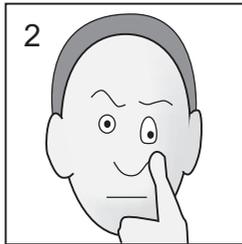
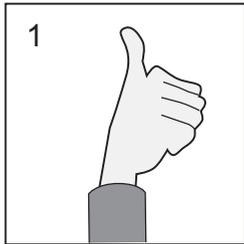
Answers 1.at the moment 2.diary 3.attend 4.possibly 5.file/briefcase 6.strange 7.pregnant 8.brave 9.relative 10.soft 11.building 12.vulgar 13.speaker(audio equipment) 14.discreet 15.poison 16.wave

More to add? Add your comments at: www.salto-youth.net/globish

Evidence 2

Can you agree with another reader on what these gestures mean? Is there such a thing as an international gesture?

Answer: As of yet I have not found a gesture which is recognised internationally. Please tell us at SALTO if you know of one.



Evidence 3

This glossary was compiled during the seminar and would be interesting to develop over time. Email us if you have come across any others?
diversity@salto-youth.net

International English	British English
magic stick Memory stick beamer scotch red line to not feel well with something webography eraser to inventorise to missionarise your approach a transversal/horizontal priority or idea Go to the bathroominventorise multipliers rubber boots Coffee break	wand USB key, flash drive videoprojector sellotape A session flow (for a course), a logic not happy / comfortable with sthg list of websites rubber to make a list To act like a missionary A priority, an idea that you can be common to different fields or different people Pop to the loo Multipliers, people trained and informed and able to pass on what they learned to others. Wellington boots Tea break

Evidence 4

A. Complete the sentences below with one of these colours: blue, green, black red, white.

1. She can't write any more cheques or her account will be in the
2. She told alie to avoid hurting his feelings.
3. The invitation arrived out of the
4. Where did you get thateye ? Have you been fighting again ?
5. He waswith envy when they bought a new car.

Case studies and experience
taken from European youth
leaders on the topic of
intercultural communication:
Its up to you to judge!

