

Unit 11

Cross-Cultural Differences

I. Pre-Reading

1. Is it easy to get along with people from different cultures?
2. Do you like being with people from different cultures, or does this make you feel uncomfortable? Why?

A British perspective

Encountering people from another culture can be difficult at the very least. From the beginning, people may send the wrong signal. Or they may ignore signals from another person who is trying to develop the relationship.

Different cultures place varying amounts of emphasis on the importance of relationship building. For example, business in Turkey is not possible until there is a relationship of mutual trust. Even with people at work, it is necessary for people to spend a lot of time in “small talk,” usually over a glass of tea, before they do any job. Haste equals rudeness.

In many European countries, too—like the UK, France, or Spain—people find it easier to build up a working relationship in social settings. It is at restaurants or cafés, and not at the office, where people form lasting working relationships.

Talk and silence may also vary in some cultures. I once made a presentation in Bangkok to local staff. I was sure it was going to be a success, but for some reason it was not. The staff stared at me blankly and smiled. My presentation began to fall apart. Nobody asked any questions. I had expected my presentation to start a lively discussion; instead there was an uncomfortable silence.

After getting to know Thai ways better, I realized that the staff thought I was talking too much. In my own culture, we express meaning mainly through words. We speak a great deal to express what we feel and think, and silence makes us

uncomfortable. In some other cultures, people understand a lot of what is happening from the context, and sometimes feel too many words are unnecessary. People communicate in an unspoken way.

Even within Northern Europe cross-culture differences can cause misunderstandings. Certainly, English and German cultures share similar values; however, Germans tend to get down to business more quickly. Typical British comments of our neighbors include such descriptions as “overbearing” and “rude.” In fact, this is just because one culture starts discussions and makes decisions more quickly.

People from different parts of the world have different values, and sometimes these values clash head-on. Nevertheless, if we can understand and appreciate these differences, a multicultural environment can be a wonderful learning opportunity.

II. Working with the Vocabulary

A. Focus on the Reading

Choose the best word for each sentence.

appreciate encounter express mainly
mutual values nevertheless

1. _____ people from another culture can be difficult at the very least.
2. Business in Turkey is not possible until there is a relationship of _____ trust.
3. People from different parts of the world have different _____, and sometimes these values clash head-on. _____, if we can understand and _____ these differences, a multicultural environment can be a wonderful learning opportunity
4. We speak a great deal to _____ what we feel and think.
5. In my own culture, we express meaning _____ through words.

B. Focus on New Contexts

Here is more practice with the new context. Choose the best word for each sentence.

appreciate encounter express mainly
mutual values nevertheless

1. Since Wimon graduated in March, she has _____ working as a travel clerk at Cookson's World Travel.
2. Everyday of our lives, we _____ several people coming from all parts of the world.
3. Tom and Linda can work together for their _____ benefit and progress.
4. These birds live _____ on nectar.
5. My students may find it easier to _____ themselves after class than in class.
6. The countries of South Asia also share many common _____.

III. Understanding the Reading

A. Comprehension Questions

Check (✓) the business customs you think are generally true.

- _____ 1. In business, a relationship of mutual trust is important.
- _____ 2. "Small talk," or social conversation, is important at work.
- _____ 3. Haste, or doing something in a hurry, is considered rude.
- _____ 4. People build up working relationship in social settings.
- _____ 5. People speak a great deal to express what they feel and think.
- _____ 6. Working people usually get down to business quickly.

B. Answer the questions.

1. In what ways is your culture similar to and different from the cultures of the countries mentioned in the reading?

2. What values are important in your country? Do you think other cultures share the same values?

3. Do you think it is important for people to understand how cultures around the world are different? Why or why not?
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C. Understanding the author's purpose

Who do you think the article was written for? Check (✓) the correct answer.

- _____ 1. people who want to learn about British culture
_____ 2. people who travel to different countries of their jobs
_____ 3. college students who are taking a foreign language course

IV. Word Study

A. Word Meaning

Find the words or phrases in **bold** type in the reading. Underline the meaning of each word or phrase provided.

1. When you **encounter** someone, you **meet them for the first time / know them for a long time.**
2. When you **send the wrong signal**, you **help people understand what you mean / do something that confuses people.**
3. When things **vary**, they are **the same / different.**
4. When you **stare at people blankly**, you **look at them as if you don't see them / look at them with understanding.**
5. When people are **overbearing**, they **ask you for help /tell you what to do.**
6. When ideas **clash head-on**, they are **completely different / exactly the same.**
7. When you **appreciate** something, you **talk about it / feel it is important.**

B. Prefixes

Add the prefixes **un-** or **in-** to change the meaning of the word below.

- | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. ___able | 5. ___complete | 9. ___expensive | 13. ___known |
| 2. ___acceptable | 6. ___convenient | 10. ___formal | 14. ___aware |
| 3. ___correct | 7. ___necessary | 11. ___friendly | 15. ___spoken |
| 4. ___comfortable | 8. ___successful | 12. ___important | 16. ___credible |

C. Practice using the word in the new context.

Read the story. Then complete the sentences with words from **B** above.

I wanted to get to know my new neighbors because I didn't want them to think I was unfriendly. They were from another country that I thought I knew well. In the end, however, my knowledge of their culture was_____. First of all, I remembered reading somewhere that people give welcome gifts, so I bought my neighbors something nice but _____. This was a big mistake. I was _____ that it is _____ for strangers to buy welcome gifts. Only family members give them, and these gifts always cost a lot of money. Then I invited the neighbors to my home for coffee in the afternoon. This was _____ for them, since the whole family usually are together at this time. When I invited them to sit in my kitchen, I could see that they were _____; but I didn't know why. I later learned that in their culture it is too _____ to have guests sit in the kitchen. They always sit in the living room. Finally, since they didn't speak my language, and I didn't speak theirs, we were _____to communicate.
