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Mader, Judith; Camerer, Rudi

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International English and the Training of Intercultural Communicative Competence

[”International English” und interkulturelle Kompetenz]

Judith Mader

M.A., Head of Languages Frankfurt School of Finance and Management

Rudi Camerer

PHD, elc – European Language Competence, Frankfurt/Main

Abstract [english]

Training students in the use of appropriate discourse strategies, e.g. in International English, may do more to encourage intercultural understanding than focussing on cognitive and personality-oriented methods prevalent in many intercultural training concepts. The paper is based on curricula and training material developed both for German secondary schools and for chambers of commerce in Germany and Austria.

Keywords: intercultural competence, international English, discourse strategies, politeness conventions, criteria for intercultural competence

Abstract [deutsch]

Interkulturell angemessene Diskursstrategien in der Fremdsprache zu vermitteln, z.B. in "International English", dürfte mehr zur Herausbildung interkultureller Kompetenzen beitragen, als vorwiegend kognitive und persönlichkeitsbezogene Übungsformen, wie sie in zahlreichen interkulturellen Trainingskonzepten zu finden sind. Der Beitrag nimmt Bezug auf Curricula und Trainingsmaterialien, die für Fremdsprachenschüler deutscher Sekundarschulen und für Zertifikatslehrgänge von Industrie- und Handelskammern in Deutschland und Österreich entwickelt wurden.

Stichworte: interkulturelle Kompetenz, Englisch als Lingua Franca, Diskursstrategien, Höflichkeitskonventionen, Kriterien interkultureller Kompetenz

1. Basic Questions Revisited: Culture and Language

There is no doubt that language and culture are inextricably connected (Whorf 1962, Gumperz 1982, Gipper 1987, Geertz 1993, Ochs 2005), but how many intercultural training concepts effectively develop the trainees' intercultural communicative competence? Does knowing about the findings of Hofstede and Trompenaars, being able to define low-context cultures, collectivist societies, or being open-minded, sensitive and able to work under pressure make a person a competent communicator in intercultural encounters? What role does language play in intercultural encounters? Why is language so rarely mentioned by many interculturalists? Looking at these questions from the point of view of relevant criteria, as test experts (which we are) would, we have often been disappointed by the training and testing tools available. It is for this reason that we have chosen a different strategy for developing a training and testing concept for intercultural

competence in English – one now used in some secondary schools in Germany as well as by chambers of commerce in Germany and Austria. This essay outlines our approach and the practical answers we suggest.

2. Language - the Source of All Misunderstanding (A. de Saint-Exupéry)

2.1 A Clash of Cultures – or is it really?

One example for what we suggest was observed in an intercity train in Germany, where a German conductor, wishing to help an Asian passenger with information on where she should change trains was heard to say to her as the train approached the station, "You must get out here!" This turn of phrase combined with a strong German accent clearly confused the passenger. The guard was no doubt proud of his ability to communicate in English and the results gained, when the passenger, albeit rather timidly, left the train as soon as possible. This situation may perhaps not be considered as one of great importance. The passenger got off the train and presumably reached her destination. Communication of a sort was achieved. However mutual understanding between the two protagonists was certainly not achieved as neither realised what had gone wrong in the encounter and each undoubtedly remained with their own stereotypical explanations of the other's behaviour.

Let us examine briefly how this arose and what could have helped both parties to deal more appropriately with the situation. Any dictionary will give *must* as the English translation of the German *müssen*, and although modern language teachers are aware of the limitations of dictionary translation, probably at no stage of his learning of English did the conductor learn that the English use of *must* is not the same as the German *müssen*. Although competent speakers of English would all agree that the appropriate instruction would be something like "I think this is where you have to get off" or "The next station is where you change trains", these are not provided as acceptable equivalents for the entirely appropriate and by no means brusquely German "Sie müssen hier aussteigen" in any standard language courses. If a German conductor were to say "Ich glaube, Sie müssen hier aussteigen", he would expose himself as having only a tentative knowledge of the route, i.e. not knowing his job properly. Had the German conductor been trained to adjust German discourse strategies to an international setting, the near clash with the passenger might have been avoided.

2.2 The French are unpunctual

Probably nine out of ten Germans hold this statement beyond reasonable doubt. If asked why they think this, they will present evidence from their personal experience as well as that of friends and colleagues. There are undoubtedly just as many examples of unpunctuality among Germans as among the French, however in Germany this truth is widely accepted. If you consult the German version of *google* for references on "Franzosen" and "unpünktlich", you will be provided with some thirty thousand pages documenting the widely held assumption [10 May 2010]. It may be surprising for many Germans to find that the English *google* lends no support to this stereotypical view but instead suggests some twenty translations of "unpunctual" into French and other languages [10 May 2010]. Some intercultural guidebooks available on the German market back up the view with intercultural theory, explaining the Frenchman's alleged lack of discipline with terminology borrowed from Hofstede and Trompenaars. The French culture type is classified as polychronic or synchronic and the German as monochronic or sequential – something believed to explain the Frenchman's lack of discipline with time, but in fact merely updating long-held prejudices using newfangled terminology (DGFP 2004:49, Wannenwetsch 2009:262). To what extent different culture standards account for the stereotypical perception quoted above can be left open. There are indications, however, that the Germans and the French use different discourse strategies when making private appointments, leaving both sides unaware that they have not agreed on a specific time. The discourse used for making private appointments varies so greatly between the two cultures that attempts to make these arrangements are almost bound to come to grief. Against this background anyone in Germany learning how to make an appointment with a Frenchman using English should be presented with strategies for a different approach. Communication about the arrangements, as well as about how these are made, i.e. meta-language, can be used to deal with the situation and potential misunderstandings defused. In other words, the German should be able to verify mutual agreement in a way that would neither insult nor irritate his French partner.

There are many more cases where intercultural misunderstandings are not caused solely or at all by supposed features of culture types but have as their source a misunderstanding of the other's (national, cultural, personal etc.) identity resulting from the use of conventional discourse style appropriate in the interlocutor's language and too readily transferred to another, in this case English (Gumperz 1998, Young 1982, Jupp et al. 1982, Adler 2003, Handke 2006, Camerer 2007

and 2009). Nonetheless most intercultural programmes available today underestimate the role language plays in intercultural communication. Recent studies of intercultural training concepts in Britain and Germany reveal that the methods most often used by trainers are lectures, discussions, role plays and simulations. The sessions as a whole revolve around cognitive and experiential training, with the practical use of language-bound communication remaining largely disregarded (Ward et al. 2001, Niedermeyer 2001, Bolten 2003, Knoll 2006). Cultural frameworks, on the other hand, among these most of all those provided by Geert Hofstede, are frequently cited and used as theoretical frameworks for understanding cultural differences. It is for this reason that we include the following comments.

3.   Beyond Hofstede: A note on cultural frameworks

Since it was first published in 1980, Hofstede's culture framework has been incorporated into the work of academic researchers and intercultural trainers alike. Today a stunning number of books, essays and training concepts quote Hofstede's findings without acknowledging the fact, it seems, that the world of the 1980s was in many ways a different one (Nakata 2009:4ff.). Without wishing to question the value of Hofstede's research, it is worth pointing out the shortcomings of the methodological basis for this research. The ethnocentric implications of Hofstede's findings have been frequently criticised but little attention has been paid to these criticisms in large parts of the intercultural training sector. The methodological criticism points out that

•   cultures are not limited to values,

•   cultures are not extremely stable,

•   culture may be an effect, not only the cause,

•   geographical boundaries are not optimal for clustering cultures,

•   mean scores and ranking may create a false perception of cultural homogeneity,

•   matched samples are not always helpful for the study of cultural differences,

•   self-response questionnaires do not adequately measure culture (Taras / Steel 2009:40-60, Haas 2009:110ff.).

In addition to the above, genuinely language-focussed criticism is largely of a) equivalents for terms in different languages, b) questions arising from a difference in degree, e.g. for politeness, c) culture-bound responses and the differences

existing in these and d) factors of social desirability (Behrens 2007, Haas 2007). These general questions have often led to concrete criticism of the judgements which have arisen from Hofstede's findings. Let's take for example his findings for uncertainty avoidance in France as compared to Germany and the UK (Hofstede 2005:168f.):
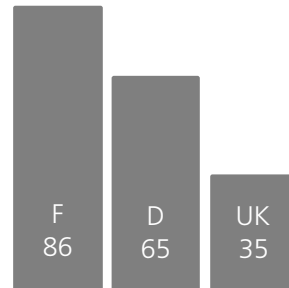
Exh. 1: Uncertainty Avoidance Index according to Hofstede (2005:168f.)

These figures meet with scepticism not only among French experts (Pateau 1999:41ff.) but also in Germany (Jahn 2006:10ff.) as they clearly challenge generally held (stereotypical?) views both in Germany and France.

Not much doubt has arisen about the figures for the United Kingdom. It may be interesting to note, however, that Britain is the country with the highest number of insurance policies in all of Europe, nearly twice as high as in Germany, and significantly higher than in France (Eurostat 2008). Hofstede, it is true, distinguishes somewhat unconvincingly between *uncertainty avoidance* and *risk avoidance,* but nevertheless it would be interesting to know how his findings relate to this piece of evidence. Hofstede's findings, as initial explorations into how features of a culture can be defined and explained, are undoubtedly useful. But their widespread acceptance as well as their practical application in training concepts for intercultural communication is definitely questionable (e.g. Gibson 2000, DGFP 2004). We fear that propagation of many of the widely received findings may have a misleading effect on the general understanding of cultural differences as well as on the contents and methods used in intercultural training programmes. Our hypothesis is that the naïve transfer of culture type features to a culture or country, or even to individuals and their behaviour, leads to a widespread disregard of communicative behaviour and to the deployment of discourse conventions which are not always appropriate. Our aim is to identify genuine language-based intercultural misunderstandings and methods for resolving these. The findings have led us to reconsider material and methods used in many current training programmes in intercultural competence. We base our suggestions for future developments in this field on relevant definitions of the term *competence* and the meaning of the concept of *intercultural communicative competence*. This

uses the research incorporated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as well as that of Gumperz, Byram, Beneke, Müller-Jacquier and others. These have led to the development of criteria for the definition, training and ultimately testing of intercultural communicative competence and its consequences for curriculum design.

4. Intercultural Communicative Competence

The examination of discourse features may well provide useful information for intercultural understanding, as it is language which ultimately makes up interaction, and it is almost always a person's use of language which defines our perception of their intercultural competence. Interestingly language is almost entirely ignored in the many definitions of intercultural competence which are used to provide the basis for training curricula and tests, the results of which can have far-reaching effects on individuals' careers. Competence can be usefully defined as

"…more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating." (OECD 2003:4)

The critical elements are a) the role of context and b) the role of performance. Competences are played out in the social and physical environment – and thus the proof of competence lies in its active performance. To put it quite simply: when we speak of intercultural competence we mean intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural communicative competence is not the same as language competence to be sure, yet it is difficult to imagine intercultural competence without considering language. We suggest it is the intercultural use of language we should be looking at, which includes learning how to find out about other ways of thinking and communicating, how to become more open to them and to develop our personalities to function in a culturally appropriate way in contexts other than our own. And, at the same time, do business successfully by building rapport, thus allowing a positive relationship to develop. For this reason politeness is the core competence in intercultural communication – politeness not in the sense of following rules of etiquette (although this too can be important), but as a way of building rapport. Politeness conventions however may vary considerably, for what may be sufficiently polite or acceptable in one culture may be impolite and completely inacceptable in another (Hickey / Stewart 2005). So what makes a person a

competent communicator in intercultural encounters is principally a combination of three things:

a) some basic knowledge of culture standards (which does not necessarily imply the reading of theoretical books),

b) willingness to accept otherness - as far as possible,

c) but most of all the ability to communicate effectively, using (whichever) language intelligently and adequately, in order to encourage a positive relationship to develop.

To quote a definition: "Intercultural Competence means possessing the necessary attitudes and reflective and behavioural skills and using these to behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations." (Deardorff 2006:5, translation by the authors). Using reflective and behavioural skills to behave effectively and appropriately undoubtedly relies on the use of language. Therefore, when discussing intercultural communication today, *International English* can hardly be avoided.

5. International English and Intercultural Communication

The significance of language today can no longer be determined by the number of its native speakers. What decides on the role a language plays in the world is the number of people who use the language as a first or a second language. This is nowhere more so than with English, and if this determiner of significance is accepted, then English is definitely world language number one and it can be assumed with little doubt that the language of the Anglo-Saxons, and most probably the varieties spoken by the British and US Americans, will maintain their strategically important position (Graddol 2006). It is therefore an Anglo-American variety, sometimes referred to as Mid-Atlantic, which we have taken as the initial language variety for developing intercultural competence in English.

There is widespread agreement among experts that the number of intercultural encounters in which English is not the native language of any of the interlocutors is greater than those in which native speakers take part. This range of varieties, defying attempts of standardisation and referred to here as *International English*, is the rule rather than the exception (Meierkord 1996, Crystal 1997, Beneke 2000, Seidlhofer 2001, Seidlhofer 2003a and 2003b, Graddol 2006, Wolf & Polzenhagen 2006, Jenkins, J. 2007, Prodromou 2008, Mauranen / Ranta 2009, Sharifian 2009). Interlocutors involved in international encounters may be successful in establishing a temporary *Community of Practice,* as Seidlhofer and others have called it. Of particular note, however, is the fact that it is probably a language with no cultural roots which is being

used by all or some of the interlocutors. This assumption, however true it may be, has led many mistakenly to assume that communication in English will always be successful, as long as both parties speak it "well". This is by no means the case. The hidden cultural codes, while not in the language itself, exist nonetheless and are transferred from the native language of the interlocutors to English (see our example with the train conductor). It may be the very use of English, with the assumption that the same language is being spoken by all, which leads to misunderstandings, through its concealment of discourse differences by the blanket use of a language which is the native language of no-one. A standard variety of English, understood by all its users, probably exists only in 5 areas: aerospace industries, international transport, hotels, conferences and academic discourse (Thomas 1991, Verduijn 2004) and even in these, as we all know, misunderstandings are prevalent. Outside these fields, mutually incomprehensible and hidden culturally based communicative patterns form the background to the communication – lurking under the surface to emerge unexpectedly and destroy any hope of mutual understanding in a real sense.

Which leads us to the question, often asked "Which English are we to teach?" (Gnutzmann / Intemann 2005, Graddol 2006). Substantial agreement exists that a focus on British or American English is not enough. Our concept for training intercultural communication in English takes into account the role of English as a *lingua franca* and includes in its curriculum and test the skill of using English in a wide range of intercultural communicative situations.

On the one hand this means that British or American peculiarities of lexis, pronunciation, idioms etc. are taken into account only in so far as they support successful intercultural communication, i.e. considering the extremes of British and American English and finding a middle corridor of (hopefully) universally acceptable discourse features. This includes firstly identifying those features of English often taught which are acceptable neither in British nor American nor in many other varieties of English. To give one example: "no" is a translation of the German "nein" and vice versa but how far can they be used in the same way? It is only culturally aware and sensitive German speakers of English who avoid the use of "no" when speaking English, although they may use "nein" often when speaking their own language. Many less proficient or less aware speakers of English cause offence by saying "No!" when they should be saying "Really? I thought… (the opposite)". Misunderstandings arising from the misuse of apparent equivalents may cause more problems than has so far been assumed. It is therefore not enough to speak

clearly and correctly in English (grammatical mistakes will be forgiven in most cases) and our knowledge of English will not help us much if our perceptions of the words we use differ because of our own or another language. A list of critical language functions for intercultural situations will probably include the following: first encounters (including body contact), small talk, instructions, dissenting, criticising, complaining, finding agreement, convincing, extending / accepting / refusing invitations, as well as others. All the above will involve questions of social relations, hierarchy, appropriate register, politeness conventions, non-verbal communication etc. When dealing with language it is a matter of being on the ball constantly, as the answers will change as language and the use of it changes. How English develops as a *lingua franca* will to a great extent be dependent on the first languages of the speakers using it. It is unlikely that we will all use the language codes which the British or Americans use, but which language codes will we use? The answer will be found in the identification of language codes in our own languages as well as those in the languages of our interlocutors. Speakers of other languages whose only common language is English will have to be trained to interpret these. The most pragmatic answer is to provide learners with the means for the use of a "middle corridor" of polite discourse strategies in English, avoiding both (extravagantly) indirect conventions typical for some Anglo-Saxon milieus and (overly) direct discourse to be found in other cultures, among them Germany, Holland, Poland, Spain etc.

On the other hand, it is probably the skill of meta-communication which plays the most important role, perhaps particularly because this has so far largely been ignored in language training. Meta-communication holds the key to the success or otherwise of a great variety of communicative situations in which English as a *lingua franca* is used. Meta-language may be difficult or impossible to employ when communicating with members of some so-called high-context cultures, but in most intercultural encounters meta-communicative skills will play an essential role (Byram 1997, Beneke 1998 and 2000, Mülller-Jacquier 1999 and 2000).

6. Criteria for Intercultural Communicative Competence

A person with limited linguistic competence may be an excellent communicator in intercultural encounters, and the opposite may be true as well. So what exactly makes a person an interculturally competent communicator? The answer is a combination of knowledge, awareness and willingness as well as ability, expressed in performance. Drawing on relevant

descriptors incorporated in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 2001) as well as on some highly influential contributions to the academic debate (Byram 1997, Beneke 1998 and 2000, Müller-Jacquier 1991, 1999 and 2000, Council of Europe 2001, Lázár 2003, Eismann 2007) we take intercultural communicative competence to be made up of the following eight factors, the existence of which can only be revealed through performance:

1. *Knowledge* about the processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, i.e. country specifics.

2. *Knowledge* of the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origin, i.e. intercultural theory.

3. *Ability* to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality (including the ability to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment).

4. *Ability* to engage with politeness conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction.

5. *Ability* to use salient conventions of *oral* communication and to identify register shifts.

6. *Ability* to use salient conventions of *written* communication and to identify register shifts.

7. *Ability* to elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events, i.e. meta-communication.

8. *Ability* to mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena.

There can be no doubt that the successful employment of all these skills involves the use of language. Although knowledge and awareness play an important part, it is finally performance which counts towards the success of intercultural encounters.

7. From Theory to Practice: A Curriculum for Training Intercultural Competence in English

What are the consequences for curriculum design, training and assessment? Some elements can certainly be found in conventional language courses and in intercultural training courses of the type described above. The identification of the relevant skills and their combination to produce communicative competence for intercultural encounters was only the first step towards the development of a curriculum, a training course and ultimately a test of intercultural competence in

English developed for chambers of commerce in Germany and Austria. The concept consists of the following six modules for which illustrations are given as examples.

7.1 Intercultural Theory

This does not involve lectures on the subject or extensive reading, but draws on the learners' personal experience with, for example, the different levels of culture, proxemics or turn-taking and familiarises learners with the basic assumptions and different approaches while training the use of polite discourse. This module is not cognitive in essence but, like all the others, provides an introduction to and training in communicative competencies, choosing cultural differences as their main subject.

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THE CULTURE ICEBERG
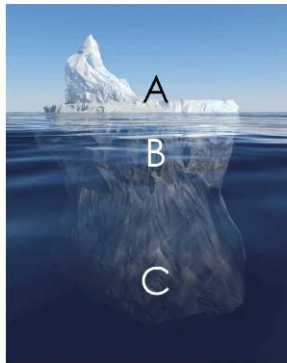
What do you think is the most interesting thing about an iceberg?

For most people, it is that the largest part of the iceberg is invisible, i.e. that most of the iceberg is under the surface. What you can see is a very small and unimportant part of the whole. The part that really matters cannot immediately be recognised, but it is this enormous hidden part which makes all the difference – as the Captain of the Titanic found out to his cost.

The deeper you go in the water, the more essential — and potentially dangerous — the iceberg becomes.

1. **How can culture be compared to an iceberg?**
2. **What do you think are the most important elements of a culture** (your own or another)**?**
3. **Where would you place the following aspects of culture on the iceberg — A, B or C?**

EDUCATION		HUMOUR	
TABLE MANNERS		ORGANISATION OF COMPANIES	
DEMOCRACY		PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP	
DIRECTNESS OF SPEECH IN BUSINESS		PHYSICAL GESTURES	
ARCHITECTURE		AUTHORITY & RESPECT	
EMOTION SHOWN IN PUBLIC		ATTITUDE TO TIME / PUNCTUALITY	
FAMILY LIFE		SOCIAL LIFE: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE	
ROLES OF MALES AND FEMALES		TREATMENT OF OUTSIDERS/FOREIGNERS	
GREETINGS		VALUES AND BELIEFS	
RELIGION		NATIONAL ANTHEM	

4. Take notes.
5. Discuss your notes with your partner.

You may find these phrases useful:

EXPRESSING AN OPINION:
- I feel …
- I think …
- I believe …

DISAGREEING:
- I see your point, but …
- Maybe you're right, but …

REPAIRING / COMPENSATING:
- What I'm trying to say is …
- How do you say … ?

AGREEING:
- You are absolutely right.
- I absolutely agree.
- That's correct.

SUGGESTING SOMETHING:
- Perhaps we should also consider …

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Exh. 2:   Sample worksheet section 1: The Culture Iceberg

7.2 My Own Cultural Programming

This builds on the above module and focuses on the trainees' own assumptions and presumptions. Different concepts of time and punctuality or attitudes to hierarchy and discipline may serve as examples. Philosophical questions are not the focus but rather adequate ways of communicating about these assumptions using politeness conventions acceptable in most intercultural contexts.

THE ART OF BEING GERMAN

Germans have utmost respect for appointments, for prearranged engagements, for deadlines; delays, postponements and unplanned hitches are anathema, throw them off balance and can ruin their days. Punctuality is so close to godliness that in the old days, it wasn't enough to be simply on time, you had to arrive five minute early. Well, this may no longer hold true in general, but pre-punctuality (for want of a better word) is quite often observed by shops and supermarkets, where the personnel start cleaning up and emptying cash registers well before official closing time—and shut their doors pre-punctually in the faces of last-minute customers. So do bureaucrats working in offices. … The German airline carrier, Lufthansa, recently admitted its punctuality record was unacceptable. In reality, the airline was towards the top of the world rankings in terms of punctuality, but this still wasn't good enough. As a contrast: I have it from several employees of the Pakistani national airline, PIA, that any arrival or departure within 24 hours of the scheduled time is considered punctual.

Susan Stern, These Strange German Ways (Hg. Atlantik-Brücke e.V. 2000), p. 27f.

hitch — Störung
to be anathema — ein Gräuel sein
Godliness — Gottesfurcht

Read the text and discuss the questions with your partner.

a. What does Susan Stern say about Germans' attitude to time and punctuality?
b. Do you agree?
c. What do you think about the examples she gives?

Use the expressions below.

Expressing an opinion	I feel .. / I think … / I believe …
Agreeing	You are absolutely right. I absolutely agree. That's correct.
Disagreeing, expressing a different opinion	I see your point, but … Sorry, I'm not sure I agree with you. Maybe you're right, but … Could it also be that … ?
Balancing reasons, hesitating	Perhaps we should also consider …
Agreeing	Do we (all) agree that … ? So we (all) agree that …

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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH 29

Exh. 3: Sample worksheet section 2: The art of being German

7.3   Country Specifics

As intercultural competence cannot be trained for all cultures and contexts and a specific context needs to be defined for each trainee involved, this module focuses on a country or countries of the trainees' choice. The identification of important features of the chosen country, e.g. with reference to factual information, cultural characteristics or rules of polite behaviour, culminates in the trainee giving a presentation on the country concerned.

DOS AND DON'TS

What you should know when going to the USA

		TRUE	FALSE
First encounters	1. Americans like a firm handshake and firm eye-contact.		
	2. You should always give your full name and say where you come from, what you do and how much you like America.		
Meals	3. During meals Americans keep their left hand in their lap.		
	4. It is seen as a wonderful compliment to finish the meal leaving your plate almost clean.		
Dress-Code	5. Americans often dress informally. You can wear jeans in practically all companies.		
	6. What we Germans call a "Smoking" is called a "tuxedo" in America.		
Invitations	7. "Come and see us any time" is not really meant as an invitation in most cases.		
	8. It is normal to come about half an hour after the time of invitation.		
	9. Americans expect a thank-you mail or telephone call from you the next day.		

Exh. 4:   Sample worksheet section 3: Dos and don'ts USA

7.4   Communicative Competencies

As the expression of politeness and strategies of building rapport vary from culture to culture, this module is closely linked to Modules 1 to 3 and depends not only on knowledge of cultural differences in general (Module 1), awareness of cultural assumptions and presumptions (Module 2), but also on the particular culture involved (Module 3). The focus again is on language and the appropriate use of it in a variety of intercultural encounters, particularly those which could become critical for one or more of those involved.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

What would you do or say in the following situations?
Discuss your answers with your partner.
Work out the exact words you would say and write them down.

Photo: www.aboutpixel.de dommy

1. You arrive at a company for a meeting. At the reception you are told that the meeting started half an hour ago. What do you do and say when you go into the meeting room?

2. A colleague returns to work after a long illness. What do you do and say when you see him for the first time?

3. Someone rings your company and asks to speak to your boss. You do not know where he is at the moment. What do you say?

4. You do not have a car at the moment and want to ask a colleague if she can give you a lift. What do you say?

5. You hear that a colleague's mother has died after a long illness. What do you say to the colleague when you see her?

6. You are offered a cup of coffee but do not want one. What do you say?

7. You want to ask something about a piece of equipment but are not sure of the right expression to use for the part you are interested in. What do you say?

8. You have spent an evening at a colleague's house, but now you have to leave. What do you do and say?

9. Someone says something negative about your country. What do you say?

10. You are asked how you like the US. What do you say?

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Exh. 5:   Sample worksheet section 4: Dealing with difficult situations

7.5 Metacommunication

This involves identifying the situation and moving from the level of direct discourse to the negotiation of the communication itself. Examples of this are establishing the use of forms of address, clarifying the terms to be used and discussing basic cultural standards (e.g. concepts of time and punctuality), to name but a few. The use of appropriate language in these situations has, to our knowledge, so far been neither a part of language training nor of most intercultural training.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

1.

Things that seem perfectly normal in some cultures are not at all normal in others. It's a good idea to establish common ground before problems arise.
Here are some ways of doing this. When could you use them?

A. Should I come a bit before 10 if the meeting starts at 10?

B. No, we don't usually start exactly at 10 here. Everyone will probably be here at about a quarter past.

A. I've been invited for coffee. What time should I go?

B. Coffee here usually means morning coffee so at about 10 I would think.

A. Ring me any time in the afternoon. I'll be in my office.

B. Ok, I'll call you at 2 o'clock.

2.

Now read the following situations and discuss them with your partner. Decide what you should do and say. You want to be polite.

- In Copenhagen you are invited to dinner at the home of a Danish colleague. You don't know exactly when he wants you to come.

- You are on a business trip in London and have an important meeting at 10 o'clock. The traffic is heavy and you realise you will be about 15 minutes late.

- After a long day with a business partner in Tokyo, he invites you to a Karaoke night. You don't want to stay up too late because you have a lot of work to do tomorrow.
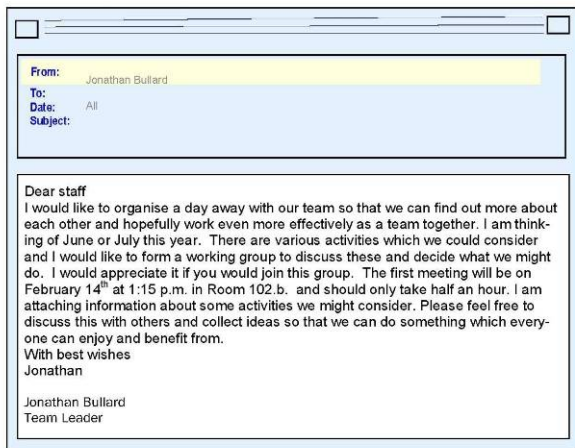

ICE
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Exh. 6:   Sample worksheet section 5: Finding common ground

7.6   Critical Incidents

Working with critical incidents is a standard part of most intercultural training concepts. Our approach is distinguished by the focus on the use of language in the critical incidents provided. It is not enough, we feel, to identify the critical incident and to suggest possible reasons for its occurrence, it is also necessary to be able to deal with it using language with the aim of (re)stabilising the relationship and furthering its success.

_____

A TEAM-BUILDING DAY

You have just started working as part of an international team in Norway. The members of your team come from different countries in Europe and other parts of the world. Your boss, the team leader, Jonathan Bullard, is British and has lived and worked in many different countries. Not long after you start working in the team, you get the following email:

From:	Jonathan Bullard
To:	
Date:	All
Subject:	

Dear staff
I would like to organise a day away with our team so that we can find out more about each other and hopefully work even more effectively as a team together. I am thinking of June or July this year. There are various activities which we could consider and I would like to form a working group to discuss these and decide what we might do. I would appreciate it if you would join this group. The first meeting will be on February 14th at 1:15 p.m. in Room 102.b. and should only take half an hour. I am attaching information about some activities we might consider. Please feel free to discuss this with others and collect ideas so that we can do something which everyone can enjoy and benefit from.
With best wishes
Jonathan

Jonathan Bullard
Team Leader

Read the information Jonathan has attached:

Health and Fitness	Adventure Days	Wine and Dine at a Murder Mystery Evening (in English)
Let your teams relax and tank up energy for the next project!	Departments and teams can work together better after exciting experiences they have shared. Book our centre for your team (only one group is here at a time) and experience the thrills and fun of any or all of the following:	Experience Agatha Christie as a detective on the trail of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple and enjoy a three-course meal at the same time.
We cater for corporate clients and offer a range of activities to make your work go better:	• Abseiling • Tug-of-war • Bungee jumping • Paintballing • Ten-pin bowling • and much more	Solve a murder in teams and compete against other teams from other companies.
Sauna, swimming, gym (with instructors if required), yoga, and much more!		Great for team-building.
Lunch and drinks (only healthy food and non-alcoholic drinks) included in price.	Beginners welcome. All activities supervised if necessary and tailored to your needs! Snacks and drinks included.	Fine wines and gourmet food to suit all tastes.

**Decide which of these activities you personally would prefer.
Think of one more idea for a team-building day**

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Exh. 7:   Sample worksheet section 6: A team-building day

8. Conclusion

As can be seen, the entire course focuses on the use of language, i.e. international English, in intercultural contexts and makes use of specific material and methods designed to train this. This implies ignoring many aspects of conventional language courses, designing new elements and identifying and focussing on elements which have often taken a back seat up to now both in conventional language courses and in intercultural training programmes. Emphasising practical communication and the role of polite discourse and combining these with awareness-raising exercises with respect to culture-bound conventions and country-specific rules lie at the heart of it. The training concept described has not only been developed in theory but the material has also been used successfully in a considerable number of courses.

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