



# Session

## COMMUNICATING WITH AND ACROSS DIFFERENT CULTURES

At the end of this session, international students will:

- Recognise some of their own and others' cultural assumptions, particularly with respect to the concept of 'politeness'
- Identify cultural interpretations of different symbols
- Develop their confidence and classroom communication strategies

### How and when to use this material

This session is intended to be run before the semester begins and will probably be delivered by learning support lecturers in a pre-semester course, rather than by media/communication lecturers within a masters unit. It builds on the first session, **Setting the scene**, and is designed to further explore cultural difference and interculturality as a way of helping students relate to their new learning and living context. Input and activities in this session are also designed to build students' confidence in working together and using English in a more spontaneous way. This session should be followed with the next pre-semester session on **Learning in a different cultural context**.

In preparation, lecturers may find it useful to read the associated Briefing Note on **Understanding the concept of face and how this impacts the interactions of Chinese students within the Australian university context**.

Note that the exercises draw on the chapter Kachru, Y. and Smith, L. 2008. *Cultures, Contexts and World Englishes*. New York: Routledge, 41-58.

### Note to lecturer

Chinese students, particularly those from mainland China, may have been taught about the concept of 'culture' quite differently from the way culture is explored and expressed in contemporary western societies. In Chinese there is no word for 'interculturality'. 'Culture' in language learning tends to be viewed as 'source culture', 'target culture' and 'international culture' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Even information associated with cross-cultural understandings may be interpreted more as facts (history and geography) and products (literary works or works of art) rather than as beliefs and behaviours. The idea that culture is embedded in language and that language is an expression of culture, is not commonly explored in educational contexts. This separation of language and culture can make transition for Chinese students even more challenging.

Cortazzi, M, & Jin, L. (1999). Cultural Mirrors: Materials and Methods in the EFL Classroom, in E. Hinkel (ed.) *Culture in Second Language Teaching*, 196-219. Cambridge University Press.

### Lecturer input

#### Review and introduction

- Recall some of the issues about differences in Australian culture that emerged from **April's Journey** in Session 1.
- Revisit the clip <http://tls.vu.edu.au/alrc/studentresources.cfm> and note April's shock when a student asked a question of the lecturer. Identify the concept of 'politeness'.

#### Student activity 1: Politeness

- Ask students to write down an explanation for April's shock (a sentence or two only).
- Students to compare explanations by pairing up (e.g. seek out someone with a different coloured shirt).

- Lecturer should write on the whiteboard several explanations that he/she has noticed from overhearing student discussions while walking around the room.
- Ask students to vote on an explanation that they think is the most appropriate and follow this with a discussion. (Note: voting assists students to take a stance which is an important postgraduate skill.)
- Ask if students can identify any other differences between Australia and China in terms of how politeness is understood and enacted. Cluster these on a whiteboard. (See **Handout 1: Parameters of Politeness**, the attached extract of the chapter by Kachru and Smith, 2008, p.53 for ideas.)
- Show **Slides: Politeness and Cultural Difference** which illustrate the following:

*Invitation requesting guest to bring a plate*

Note: This would be unheard of in China as it would imply that the host did not have the capacity to provide for guests.

*Essay marked in red pen*

Note: The use of red pen implies anger or can even imply the desire to terminate a relationship.

*Tea set*

Note: the pouring of tea is integral within relationships. It is used as a sign of respect, i.e. younger family members pouring for their elders. It is also used to offer an apology or express regret.

*Gift wrapped in black paper with white ribbon*

Note: the colours of black and white are associated with death.

*Business card being presented with two hands and facing recipient*

Note: to not present a card in this way would be considered to be impolite. Also, it is important to take time to examine the card and never shove it straight into a pocket.

*Someone expressing anger in public*

Note: this is not acceptable in China.

*White lanterns as decoration*

Note: white lanterns are not used for decorative purposes because of the association of the colour white with death. On the other hand, the colour red symbolises good fortune and joy so many lanterns are coloured red.

*Mobile phone*

Note: In China it is acceptable to answer phones in meetings.

- Students in pairs should choose a photograph (i.e. one item between two) and demonstrate in mime or explanation how that photo shows respect or the opposite (impoliteness). This task may need to be demonstrated first to build student confidence.

## Student activity 2: More on politeness: different parameters

### Note to lecturer

The following two exercises draw on the chapter by Kachru and Smith (2008).

- Print out onto separate A-4 sheets/cards, each of the 12 'parameters' from the attached **Handout 2: 12 Parameters of Politeness**.
- Also print out pp. 42-3 only from the full article by Kachru and Smith (2008), **Handout 1: Parameters of Politeness**.

Do not give these out yet.

### Lecturer input

- Introduce the question: *In what ways is communication in society 'mediated'?*
- Place the question at the top of the ideas that have already been written up.
- Define 'mediated' as this is a key concept.
- Conduct a general discussion on *Gaze, gesture and body posture* drawing on ideas from the chapter by Kachru and Smith, p. 53 (Note: Students won't yet have read this chapter.)
- Introduce Kachru and Smith's Parameters of Politeness (see full article for full description, **Handout 1: Parameters of Politeness**).

- Read aloud to the class the 'Politeness Formulae' section **only** from pages 42-43 from Kachru and Smith (2008), **Handout 1: Parameters of Politeness**.
- Divide the class into groups (3-4) and hand out only page 43. Ask students to read **only** the paragraph on *Face*. They may have to read this several times until they have become so familiar with it that they can report back to class.

- Add their ideas (plus any from your own reading of the **Briefing Note: Understanding the concept of face**) to sticky notes and place on whiteboard under the heading *In what ways is communication in society 'mediated'?*
- Draw attention to anything from Kachru and Smith that may have already come up in previous discussion and is already on sticky notes.

### **Student activity 3: More on politeness: different parameters**

- Divide up class into five (small groups or pairs) and give out the **Handout 2: 12 parameters of politeness** which will help students to identify the remaining parameters.
- Designate each group to one (or two) of the remaining of Kachru and Smith's Parameters of Politeness: *Values, Face, Status, Rank, Role, Power, Age, Sex, Social Distance, Intimacy, Kinship, and Group Membership*. (Note that Kinship and Age can be joined together if numbers aren't enough, as can Group Membership and Social Distance).
- Get them to become acquainted with the parameter they have (they can ask the lecturer for assistance).
- Depending on their level of English, ask students to communicate their idea/parameter by 'explaining' or 'teaching' the rest of the class. Some may prefer to act this out.
- More advanced students may wish to draw on online resources such as YouTube or use PowerPoint.

#### **Note to lecturer**

This is a Jig-saw activity. It can be a useful strategy for when they have group assignments, where different groups have different information which together make up the whole. 'Teaching' someone else is one of the highest forms of assisting recall and hence comprehension - much higher than straight reading or listening to something.

- Revisit the question: *In what ways is communication in society 'mediated'?* Using sticky notes, get them to add more ideas from what they have learned and place onto the whiteboard. See if any ideas can be clustered around the same idea, perhaps even as examples from their own culture. (Note: if this session is being followed immediately by the next session, then save the whiteboard with its notes for the following activities.)

#### **Student activity 4: Personal glossary**

- Students to add 'mediate' to their personal glossary.
- Other new / key vocabulary phrases also to be added.
- Entries to be shared with the person sitting next to them.

#### **Note to lecturer**

The creation and ongoing development of a personal glossary enables students to build a working vocabulary - with definitions - for important, unfamiliar or frequently encountered concepts, idioms and metaphors that will be useful during their study of media and communication.



Australian Government



Office for  
Learning & Teaching

## Produced for the project 'Collaborating for Success: Enhancing the Transition of Chinese students into Australian postgraduate education'

Additional materials and resources are available from  
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

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*Support for the production of this publication has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.*



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