



# Culture, Communication and Intercultural Communication

## Chapter 1

To communicate with peoples from English cultures, you first have to know their languages. In order to make it clear, try to read the following story and then you should know what plays the most important role in intercultural communication:

A few days ago, the Japanese Prime Minister Mori was given some Basic English conversation training before he visited Washington and met President Barack Obama.

The instructor told Mori, “When you shake hands with President Obama, please say ‘how are you’. Then Mr. Obama should say, ‘I am fine, and you?’ Now, you should say ‘me too’. Afterwards we, translators, will do the work for you.”

It looks quite simple, but the truth is...

When Mori met Obama, he mistakenly said “Who are you?” (Instead of saying, “How are you?”)

Mr. Obama was a bit shocked but still managed to react with humor:

“Well, I’m Michelle’s husband, ha-ha...”

Then Mori replied “me too, ha-ha...”

Then there was a long silence in the meeting room.

The story may be fabricated but it reveals that though differences in cultures reflect themselves in a variety of ways, it is the language through which to communicate that plays the most important role. Communicating with a person from a different culture first requires the communicator to be able to speak the language of the different culture. Unable to use the language, any strategy is useless.

Communication across English cultures first requires the communicator to have been qualified in the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. So you first have to check whether you are qualified.

When you find you are qualified in the four basic skills, you have to know the English culture to make your communication proper, which is equally important, because English and Chinese are two different cultures in which people behave quite differently. For example, the following situations are quite common in everyday life in which we Chinese make quick and proper responses in Chinese. However, what do you think are the proper ways to respond in English culture?



When meeting someone you know;  
When picking up someone at the airport;  
When inviting some friends to dinner;  
While eating;  
When seeing a visitor out;  
When giving gifts to friends and receiving gifts from friends;  
When meeting an old lady or man;  
When receiving compliments...

Is it so easy as just to put what we say in Chinese into English? No, it's not word-for-word translation. It's culture switching!

The problem is: How can cultures be switched? Are they equal to one another?

When meeting someone you know Chinese response is usually “吃了没?” If we say “Have you had meal?” to an English person, he would probably think that you are inviting him to dinner, he may feel very happy! If we say “Where are you going?” to a foreigner, he may respond, “It's none of your business!”

When picking up someone at the airport, we Chinese often say: 欢迎欢迎，一路辛苦了！ In English, “Did you have a long flight?” would be much better and more polite than “Welcome, welcome! You must be tired all the way!”, which would make English people puzzled at what you are saying.

When inviting some friends to dinner, we Chinese often say: “今天的菜不好，请多多包涵。” (The dishes are not good, please forgive me.) It is a Chinese way of being modest. What he really means is that all the dishes here are really wonderful! What he really expects is compliment from the guests! But the English would not understand it at all! Now that it is not good, why should you present the dishes before us? The English would say to their guests: “Enjoy yourself” when eating and “Hope you've enjoyed yourself” after eating.

While eating, we Chinese often say to the guests: “慢慢吃，你慢吃。” (Eat slowly). This would be very puzzling to the foreigners: Am I eating very violently? Am I eating too quickly or too much? Of course, he would feel uncomfortable.

When seeing a visitor out, the Chinese would say: “你请慢走!” (Walk slowly). This is a very polite saying in Chinese, but it's also confusing to the foreigners: Why? Why can't I walk fast? Does it matter whether I walk fast or slowly? Are you worrying that I may fall over? English just say “Bye!” or “See you next time!”

When giving gifts to friends, we Chinese often say: “区区薄礼，不成敬意!” (This is my humble gift for you). But the English would say “This is a special gift for you, hope you will like it.” And he really means it.

While receiving gifts, the Chinese would say: “唉呀，你不要这样客气，这真让你破费了！” And then put the gift aside till the sender leaves. We never open the gift before the guest because if you open it, it seems you are really expecting your guest bring some gift to you. That you leave it aside thoughtlessly means you value your guest. You focus on your guest, not their gift. The English would open the wrapper immediately he receives the gift and say: “Thank you very much. I really appreciate it. This is what I expect”.

When meeting an old lady or man, sometimes we want to show our concern, we would say: “您年纪这么大，身体还是这么健康啊。” (You are so old, but still look so healthy). At this, English people may think “Why, are you saying that I should die?” A polite response is: “You look great and energetic.”

When receiving compliments, Chinese people often say: “哪里，哪里，你过奖了，我做的一点都不好！” (No, no, I didn’t do it well! Not beautiful!) Foreigners would think you lack confidence, or you are just pretending, which they don’t like and can’t understand. So, please respond simply: “Thank you” or “It’s very kind of you to say so.”

People have to behave differently in different cultures. Behaviors that violate the different norms in different cultures are ridiculous. In a certain extent, your culture is your norm to behave. Then what is culture? How culture influences language? What’s the relationship between culture and language?

## 1.1 About culture

### 1.1.1 Definition

Culture can be defined as “a learned pattern of behaviors, and is a way in which a person lives his life”, but it seems too brief to tell you anything. Then if it’s defined as “a learned behaviour which is socially transmitted, such as customs, beliefs, morals, technologies, and art”, it seems only practices and beliefs which are contained in adaptive culture are included. What about artefacts or more specific, material culture? Because culture includes everything, there are too many different ways to define it, such as “Culture may be defined as what a society does and thinks” and “Culture refers to the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes.” It’s said that there have been at least over 150 definitions of culture, but none of them seems to be able to tell us everything about culture.

In fact, Culture involves at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. Thus, mental processes, beliefs, knowledge, and values are parts of culture. Some anthropologists would define culture entirely as mental rules guiding behavior, although often wide divergence exists between the acknowledged rules for correct behavior and what people actually do. Consequently, some researchers pay most attention to human behavior and



its material products. Culture also has several properties: it is shared, learned, symbolic, transmitted cross-generationally, adaptive, and integrated.

The shared aspect of culture means that it is a social phenomenon; idiosyncratic behavior is not cultural. Culture is learned, not biologically inherited, and involves arbitrarily assigned, symbolic meanings. For example, Americans are not born knowing that the color white means purity, and indeed this is not a universal cultural symbol. The human ability to assign arbitrary meaning to any object, behavior or condition makes people enormously creative and readily distinguishes culture from animal behavior. People can teach animals to respond to cultural symbols, but animals do not create their own symbols. Furthermore, animals have the capability of limited tool manufacture and use, but human tool use is extensive enough to rank as qualitatively different and human tools often carry heavy symbolic meanings. The symbolic element of human language, especially speech, is again a vast qualitative expansion over animal communication systems. Speech is infinitely more productive and allows people to communicate about things that are remote in time and space.

The cross-generational aspect of culture is indicated by the fact that individuals are born into and are shaped by a preexisting culture that continues to exist after they die. The influence that specific individuals might have over culture would itself be largely determined by culture. Thus, in a sense, culture exists as a different order of phenomena that can best be explained in terms of itself.

Some researchers believe that such an extreme interpretation of culture is a dehumanizing denial of “free will”, the human ability to create and change culture. They would argue that culture is merely an abstraction, not a real entity. This is a serious issue because treating culture as an abstraction may lead one to deny the basic human rights of small-scale societies and ethnic minorities to maintain their cultural heritage in the face of threats from dominant societies.

Anyway, culture, known as the symbol of civilization, witnesses the endless revolution of human society.

### **1.1.2 Culture and language**

Language is a part of culture and a part of human behavior. It is often held that the function of language is to express thought and to communicate information. Language also fulfills many other tasks such as greeting people, conducting religious service, etc. It is obvious that language plays a paramount role in developing, elaborating and transmitting culture and language, enabling us to store meanings and experience to facilitate communication.

The connection between culture and language has been noted as far back as the classical period and probably long before. The fact that different groups speak different, unintelligible languages is often considered more tangible evidence for cultural differences than other less obvious cultural traits. The shared language of a community is the most essential carrier of their common culture. It's unimaginable to study the culture of a foreign people without also becoming acquainted with

their language. The fact that the intellectual culture of a people was largely constructed, shared and maintained through the use of language meant that understanding the language of a cultural group was the key to understanding its culture.

Language use is a way of establishing and displaying group identity. Humans use language as a way of signaling identity with one cultural group and difference from others. A community's ways of speaking or signing are a part of the community's culture, just as other shared practices are. Even among speakers of one language several different ways of using the language exist, and each is used to signal affiliation with particular subgroups within a larger culture. In linguistics such different ways of using the same language are called "varieties". For example, the English language is spoken differently in the USA, the UK and Australia, and even within English-speaking countries there are hundreds of dialects of English that each signals a belonging to a particular region or subculture. For example, in the UK the cockney dialect signals its speakers' belonging to the group of lower class workers of east London.

Each culture has its own peculiarities and throws special influence on the language system. For example, referring to the same common domestic animal, English chooses the word "dog", while Chinese has its own character "狗"; Chinese has the phrase "走狗" while English has the expression "running dog", but the meanings attributed to the two expressions are completely different according to Chinese culture and Western culture respectively. To Westerners, "running dog" has a positive meaning since the word "dog", in most cases, is associated with an image of an animal pet or the favorite friend. But in Chinese "走狗" refers to a lackey, an obsequious person. Since Chinese associates derogatory meaning to the character "狗" depending on the cultural difference.

Briefly, language is a key component of culture. It is the primary medium for transmitting much of culture. Without language, culture would not be possible. Children learning their native language are learning their own culture; learning a second language also involves learning a second culture to varying degrees. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture. It reflects culture. Cultural differences are the most serious areas causing misunderstanding, unpleasantness and even conflict in cross-cultural communication.

### **1.1.3 Dominant culture**

The dominant culture in a society refers to the established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs. These traits are often the norm for the society as a whole. The dominant culture is usually but not always in the majority and achieves its dominance by controlling social institutions such as communication, educational institutions, artistic expression, law, political process, and business.

The concept is generally used in academic discourse in fields such as sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. In a multicultural society, various cultures are celebrated and respected equally.



Dominant culture can be promoted with deliberation and by the suppression of other cultures or subcultures. Take U.S. for an example, in the past, terms as umbrella culture, mainstream culture, U.S. Americans, European Americans have been used. We prefer the dominant culture because it clearly indicates that the group we are talking about is the one in power.

This is the group that usually has the greatest amount of control over how the culture carries out its business. This group possesses the power that allows it to speak for the entire culture while setting the tone and agenda that others will usually follow. The power is not necessarily found in numbers, but in control.

#### **1.1.4 Subculture**

In sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, a subculture is a group of people within a culture that differentiates themselves from the larger culture to which they belong. The term subculture has become deprecated among some researchers, who prefer the term co-culture, in order to avoid the connotations of inferiority associated with the “sub-” prefix. While exact definitions vary, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term as “a cultural group within a larger culture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture.”

Subcultures can exist at all levels of organizations, highlighting the fact that there are multiple cultures or value combinations usually evident in any one organization that can complement but also compete with the overall organisational culture. In some instances, subcultures have been legislated against, and their activities regulated or curtailed. British youths in the post-war era were labeled as troublemakers by members of the dominant culture. Chinese youth tattooing is rejected by the mainstream society.

It may be difficult to identify certain subcultures because their style (particularly clothing and music) may be adopted by mass culture for commercial purposes. Businesses often seek to capitalize on the subversive allure of subcultures in search of Cool, which remains valuable in the selling of any product. This process of cultural appropriation may often result in the death or evolution of the subculture, as its members adopt new styles that appear alien to mainstream society.

Music-based subcultures are particularly vulnerable to this process, and so what may be considered a subculture at one stage in its history, such as jazz, goth, punk, hip hop and rave cultures, may represent mainstream taste within a short period of time. Some subcultures reject or modify the importance of style, stressing membership through the adoption of an ideology which may be much more resistant to commercial exploitation. The punk subculture’s distinctive (and initially shocking) style of clothing was adopted by mass-market fashion companies once the subculture became a media interest.

#### **1.1.5 Culture stereotypes**

Every culture and people have existing ideas about other cultures and people. These ideas about

an entire group, culture or nationality are called stereotypes. So if you believe all Americans are fat, that is a stereotype you believe about Americans.

As the definition suggests, stereotypes do not develop suddenly but are formed over a period of time. They are made up of bits and pieces of information that we store and use to make sense of what goes on around us. They are connected with social customs and rules. As we grow up, we absorb the statements of differences among cultures from our parents, teachers and friends, which become our own stereotypes. The mass medium, such as TV, magazines, newspaper, books and Internet, also plays an important role in spreading and consolidating the stereotype. For example, by reading *Travels of Marco Polo*, westerners got the idea that China is extremely prosperous that gold can be seen everywhere in 13th century. Once established, stereotypes become relatively steady.

The stereotypes are relatively steady, which can be right for a long time. Nevertheless, the established stereotypes which were true might also change little by little with time goes by. For example, the stereotype that Chinese people tend to refuse praise from other people in order to show their humility was true in the past thousands of years. However, being influenced by the western culture, the situation has changed a bit now. It is common to see Chinese people say “thank you” when you compliment them.

If the stereotypes are in coincidence with the truth, the benefits are apparent. They can be the first step toward learning more about another people or culture. However, like many things, cultural stereotypes have two sides: the negative effects outweigh the positive ones. Often stereotypes are problematic because they are oversimplified and exaggerated, basing on half-truth or distortions about a group of people. Many people have preconceived ideas and stereotypes about other cultures. Most of these stereotypes are probably erroneous, and built walls between cultures. The possible example may be the stereotypes of Canadians who are thought peaceful, because Canada doesn't usually fight in many wars. Snow is also stereotype because Canada is covered in snow and is cold. Canada's winters are very cold and snowy so it has given tourists who come in winter the idea that they are always covered in snow. Americans are probably the most stereotyped of all the peoples in the world simply because they do the most advertising of themselves so people tend to think they know them well. They are gun loving. Americans do seem to love their gun violence and it is a big part of their movies and TV shows, and it does seem to happen in the streets there a lot more than other developed countries. But it does not absolutely represent American culture. Another example about Americans is “fat”. America is the fattest country in the world with 63% of the adults in the country either overweight or obese. The American lifestyle is to blame for this as the food most people eat is in high calorie and far too little exercise is done by most people. This is not to say that living in the USA will make you fat, there are still over 100 million people in the USA who are healthy, but if you are lazy and like high fat foods, the USA will make you feel at home. Equality and Freedom is another



stereotype that has its roots in the USA's past but has been having issues lately. Yes, Americans are equal under law but in some areas of the USA there are very big problems with racism still. As well their treatment of homosexuals is falling behind the rest of the Western countries. Due to the royal family and the formal English culture, everyone knows the English are gentlemen. In England's past the royalty and upper class were expected to behave as gentlemen towards others. This doesn't mean that everyone is a gentleman but it does create a very strong gentleman culture which to some extent still exists today. Everyone knows that London is always either foggy or raining. This is another stereotype that is based on truth, but it doesn't rain all the time of course, but England does get a lot more rain than most countries tend to. But this is pretty obvious as England is surrounded on all sides by water so it would make sense that it would rain there a lot. Chinese have a reputation for being great at certain subjects, such as Math, while not doing so well in others, like art or English. This is partly true, because Chinese mostly do do better at Math. Many say Chinese are not very creative. In fact when you say so, you forget about the four great inventions of ancient China, papermaking, printing, the compass and gunpowder and most importantly, the contemporary Nobel Prize winner for literature, Mo Yan. Another stereotype about Chinese is: Never fight with a Chinese person because they probably know kung fu. It's not surprising people think all the Chinese can do kung fu. Sadly, this is not really the case and more than all Westerners can box, Kung Fu requires years of practice to become good at and few people have that much time to invest it. China is more known for being a strongly Atheist country, and this is one stereotype that is partly true. Though most Chinese do seem to have no religion, many of the old claim to be Buddhist, others have converted to Christianity and many are Muslim.

Though culture stereotypes are never comprehensive and sometimes misleading, they can help people know part of the culture. What we have to bear in mind is never believe one-side story but probe into the culture if we want to make a wise judgement of a certain culture. A successful intercultural communicator always has a good knowledge of the general features of other cultures.

### **1.1.6 Culture shock**

Culture shock might be called an uncomfortableness of people who have been suddenly transplanted to a completely new cultural environment. Like most ailments, it has its own symptoms and cure.

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Those signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situation of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to make purchases, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not. These cues, which may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms, are acquired by all of us in the course of growing

up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we do not carry on the level of conscious awareness.

Now when an individual enters a strange culture, all or most of these familiar cues are removed. He or she is like a fish out of water. No matter how broad-minded or full of goodwill you may be, a series of props have been knocked from under you, followed by a feeling of frustration and anxiety. People react to the frustration in much the same way. They reject the environment which causes the discomfort. “The ways of the host country are bad because they make us feel bad.” When foreigners in a strange land get together to grouse about the host country and its people, you can be sure they are suffering from culture shock.

Another phase of culture shock is regression. The home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance. All the difficulties and problems are forgotten and only the good things back home are remembered. It usually takes a trip home to bring one back to reality.

### **1.1.7 Acculturation**

When cultures combine, the intermingling of cultures is known as acculturation.

As a result of acculturation, either or both cultural groups may be changed somewhat, but essentially the two cultures remain distinct. Traditionally, it was thought that one must lose certain cultural characteristics in order to gain others. However, contemporary thinking takes a more multidimensional approach, saying that individuals have the capacity to maintain their culture of origin while adopting characteristics from other cultures.

In general, the majority culture dominates, but it is also common for the dominant culture to adopt practices from the minority culture. This can be seen in the popularity of foods from different countries. For example, there is probably not a city in the world that does not have a Chinese restaurant, and coffee, originally a South American drink, is now drunk almost globally. On the other hand, we see an example of how dominant societies influence and change other cultures in the adoption of western business attire as standard business dress and English as the lingua franca in many countries around the world.

When a person goes to live in a different dominant culture, one of the four processes usually takes place: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization.

Integration is where individuals from the minority culture maintain their own culture whilst participating in the dominant culture. Both cultures are seen by the individual as valuable and worth maintaining. This is considered by cultural theorists to be the least stressful level of acculturation.

When the minority culture is absorbed into the majority culture, assimilation occurs. This may lead to the loss of many of the characteristics which make the newcomers different. Often immigrants are socially pressured to adapt and the steps they take to integrate into the new environment, by



learning the language, making new friends, finding a job or going to school, are not balanced by the new culture's acceptance of the newcomers' specific habits and ways of living, thinking and talking that are different and unique to their culture of origin. This is recognized as a more stressful process of acculturation than integration.

Separation is a situation where individuals from the minority culture maintain their own culture and avoid interaction with other cultures. An example of this would be a religious group such as the Amish in the United States, who avoid contact with the surrounding dominant society in an attempt to maintain their traditional values and way of living.

Marginalization takes place when contact with both one's own and other cultures is avoided. The individual is neither interested in maintaining his or her own cultural identity nor in developing relationships with others in the dominant culture. This situation often occurs under forced cultural loss or as a result of discrimination.

People living and interacting in different cultures undergo varying degrees of each process at different points in time. Individuals within cultures vary considerably from each other so it is important not to stereotype, that is, to take an example of one individual and use that to pass judgments on a society as a whole.

Acculturation is not accomplished in a few days or even a few weeks. It is an on-going process demanded by one situation and then another. Usually a person will encounter four stages of periods of adjustment continuously as he or she moves from one situation to another.

#### The honeymoon stage

The honeymoon stage is characterized by exhilaration, anticipation, and excitement. Taking international students for example, often recently arrived international students are fascinated with everything new. Most of them are embarking on a "dream come true," for example, an education at a U.S. university.

Students in this stage are delightful to work with and to work for, but they frequently nod or smile to indicate understanding when in fact they have not understood. When their misunderstandings mount up, they are likely to experience the second stage of cultural adjustment.

#### The hostility stage

The hostility stage is characterized by frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, and sometimes depression. Following the initial anticipation is confusion and frustration and the weariness of speaking and listening to the different language everyday. It can be very upsetting that although they have studied the language, at times they feel like they don't understand anybody, or worse still, others don't seem to understand them.

Sleep patterns may be disrupted. They may suffer from indigestion and may be unable to eat. International students probably react in one of two ways to their frustrations. One way is to reject

the new environment which seems the source of intense personal discomfort. Internally the student may think, “If I feel this bad, it’s because of them.” The students blame the external environment for their pain. The other common reaction is for the students to internalize their pain and sit mute and inattentive in the classroom. (They might be thinking, “If I feel bad, it’s because something is wrong with me.”) Whether the student withdraws or displays hostility, his or her pain shows in fits of anger over seemingly minor frustrations, displays of excessive fear and mistrust of the host country, frequent absenteeism, lack of interest, lack of concentration, lack of motivation, and at worst, complete withdrawal. Academic problems will be magnified during this stage.

This is a painful, difficult stage, but it does not last. As each situation is “figured out,” there is a sense of relief and accomplishment which leads students to the third stage.

#### The acceptance stage

The humor stage follows when people begin to feel comfortable and relaxed in the new environment. They begin to smile or even laugh at minor mistakes and misunderstandings which previously would have caused major headaches during the hostility stage. They feel more able to get needed information.

This more relaxed state is accomplished by making some friends, finding recreational outlets, understanding one’s studies, passing some tests, or finishing a research paper. They are relieved once some progress has been made in managing the complexity of, say, the U.S. university where organization of time, professors’ expectations, subject content, language, and rules of behavior are all different.

#### The home stage

The home stage occurs when they not only retains allegiance to his or her home culture, but also “feels at home” and functions quite well in the new culture. They have successfully adjusted to the norms and standards of the culture and should be commended for the ability to live successfully in both cultures.

More and more Chinese apply to study in English countries. How do these students deal with cultural differences? What impressions do they make on people in English cultures? What advice should they take before leaving their own culture? It’s of great importance for Chinese who are studying or will be studying in English countries to take culture into consideration.

Firstly, there’s vast difference in Chinese and English education styles. In China, kids memorize. There is no discussion. There is virtually no debating or presenting in the average Chinese classrooms which often consists of 50 students or more. Teachers don’t focus on creative learning. It must be very difficult for Chinese students trying to acclimate to American classroom life. So Chinese students studying in English countries are accused of “killing class discussions”, “lack of curiosity” and “learning only for grades”. Rebukes like “They don’t come here to learn”, “They just come here



for the grades”, “You never see any of them at any school function, unless it can help them with a grade” are American students’ impression on Chinese studying there.

Secondly, most students do not learn English well, though English learning is a nationwide campaign in China. The youths who can afford to study abroad are mostly from rich families. They are not as diligent as the average students and they are even worse in English. Once in an English classroom, they have to give presentations as they are assigned to, but their English peers say “I cannot even stand having to listen to them give presentations. Their English is terrible.” And they are also accused of “never interacting with anyone who is not from China”. They are even accused of “never taking a try” though their English is so terrible. It’s obvious that Chinese students stick together to refuse the English language environment which they travel so far away at great cost to be in! It is so different from college students in China who are desperate to make friends from English-speaking cultures so they can improve their language skills. Maybe the reason is like this: They fail to meet their IELTS grade over to UK, for example, in the summer, months before term starts. They then have a crash course in English language training to pass the tests. This is a great money spinner, but it isolates all the Chinese (the majority on the crash course) before most students arrive for term. The crash course is entirely exam focused, and they have no opportunity to speak to natives. When term starts, they already have solid relationships built among their fellow Chinese.

Thirdly, the problem of “face-value” and “sincerity”. Going to study in developed countries is considered an honor in China which is equally expected with honorable return years later. The fact is they are in a tight corner there. They then have to try every means to “pass” examinations which includes “cheating in exams” just as they are condemned of “They cheat all the time”, “It is pretty unbelievable how often I have seen them cheating”. Though cheating is also condemned and prohibited in China, it often happens and if not caught, no one will take it seriously.

There’s no disgraceful thing than cheating, because it proves you are dishonest which tells the quality of a person. Nothing equals losing face than cheating.

## 1.2 Communication

Communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behavior. It is the meaningful exchange of information between two or more living creatures. Pragmatics defines communication as any sign-mediated interaction that follows combinatorial, context-specific, and content-coherent rules. Communication is an inherently social interaction, and communicative competence is the ability to engage in intersubjective interactions.

One definition of communication is “any act by which one person gives to or receives from

another person's information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or non-linguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes."

### **1.2.1 Levels of communication**

Human communication occurs on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and public levels. Intrapersonal communication is communicating with oneself. It encompasses such activities as thought processing, personal decision making, listening, and determining self-concept. Interpersonal communication refers to communication that takes place between two or more persons who establish a communicative relationship. Forms of interpersonal communication include face-to-face or mediated conversations, interviews, and small-group discussions. Public communication is characterized by a speaker's sending a message to an audience. It may be direct, such as a face-to-face message delivered by a speaker to an audience, or indirect, such as a message relayed over radio or television.

### **1.2.2 The elements of communication**

There are many different models of the interpersonal communication process, but a simplified view of the communication process is just "A sender transmits a message through a medium. A receiver decodes a message", in which key elements include:

The sender or communicator, also known as the source, is the person who initiates the communication process;

The receiver or interpreter. In a dyadic or two-person communication situation, the receiver is the other person involved. In a public speaking or public communication situation, the audience is made up of receivers. The numbers can vary from a few to a few hundred. The speaker may use only his/her voice or may need a public address system. In mass communication, there could be literally hundreds, millions, or even billions of receivers;

The message, the verbal or nonverbal content that must be encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver;

The channel, the medium by which the message is delivered and received. In dyadic communication or public speaking, the channel, or a means of sending or receiving information, is both verbal communication (the spoken word) and nonverbal communication (gestures and one's appearance).

The context, the setting and situation in which communication takes place. Most obviously there is the physical context, whether we are talking to someone in our living room or on the terraces at a football match. But then there is the social context, which is to do with the occasion involved and the



people in it. This might be a group of friends in a club or a family meal or a group of mourners at a funeral. And then there is the cultural context, which refers to an even broader set of circumstances and beliefs, which still may affect how we talk. For example, it would matter if the funeral was in a Hindu or an Anglican context. It is particularly important to see that the media are part of the cultural context in which we operate. How we talk, what we talk about, what music we listen to, has a lot to do with the influence of the cultural context of the media;

Noise, anything that interferes with the accurate expression or reception of a message. Noise can be physical or psychological, it can disrupt the communication process at any point, and it can be associated with any element in the system;

Feedback, a response from the receiver indicating whether a message has been received in its intended form. Feedback is the final link in the chain of the communication process. After receiving a message, the receiver responds in some way and signals that response to the sender. The signal may take the form of a spoken comment, a long sigh, a written message, a smile or some other action. Even a lack of response, is in a sense, a form of response. Without feedback, the sender cannot confirm that the receiver has interpreted the message correctly. Feedback is a key component in the communication process because it allows the sender to evaluate the effectiveness of the message and take corrective action to clarify a misunderstood message.

Because communication is interaction, participants take turns “sending” and “receiving”. This turn-taking is even true for mass-mediated communication, for instance, the process whereby an entertainment program is created, programmed, and aired for an audience’s enjoyment. If the audience watches and enjoys the program, it is likely to continue to be aired. If the audience is not amused, the program is canceled.

Interaction means that both parties, persons or entities, can affect the other. In this way, both parties are senders and receivers. They are also co-persuaders in that they may take turns trying to affect one another by sharing symbols.

An interesting manifestation of the attention paid to the receiver in the study of the communication process is the concept of “co-orientation”, which has become popular in the United States recently. The idea behind this concept is that two persons can have similar perceptions and interpretations of the same object, and the greater the similarity (co-orientation), the more efficient will be the flow of communication between the persons. Conversely, an intense flow of communication may increase co-orientation.

Effective communication takes place when a sender’s message is fully understood by the receiver.

### 1.3 Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication in its most basic form refers to an academic field of study and research. It seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures behave, communicate and perceive the world around them.

The definition of intercultural communication must also include strands of the field that contribute to it such as anthropology, cultural studies, psychology and communication.

There are many researchers and academics of note within the intercultural field, which naturally all have different definitions of “intercultural communication”. For example Karlfried Knapp defines it as “the interpersonal interaction between members of different groups, which differ from each other in respect of the knowledge shared by their members and in respect of their linguistic forms of symbolic behavior”.

In this sense it seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. As a separate notion, it studies situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Aside from language, intercultural communication focuses on social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people.

Intercultural communication as a phenomenon takes place everywhere. When you talk with a British guest, you are having intercultural communication with him. When you correspond with an American through e-mail, you are engaged in intercultural communication. When you watch a French film, or read a French novel, you are engaged in intercultural communication. Although you don't see the person, the French person is actually talking to you through the book or the novel. So you are having the intercultural communication with him or her.

The interaction between peoples from different cultures gets well only when it takes different cultural norms and rules into considerations: the way we are expected to greet others, the way we are expected to dress, the way we are expected to eat, and the way we are expected to answer questions. For example, if you greet an American by asking him or her “Where are you going?” or “Have you eaten yet?” the American might feel very uncomfortable because asking these questions could be interpreted as an invasion of privacy. But in the Chinese culture, these are appropriate greetings which do not invade the other person's privacy.

Now intercultural communication is a daily occurrence, i.e., it takes place every day. In today's world, intercultural communication has become increasingly important, because it is so easy for people of different cultural backgrounds to come together and communicate.

Firstly, mobile means of transport offers convenience. Now jet planes fly everywhere. It used to take months to travel from Shanghai to Los Angeles, but now it takes only 12 hours. It is now much



easier for people to move from one country to another. People of different countries and races get together much oftener than before. Secondly, people get in touch with each other in various ways, including the internet, the telephone, the satellite, etc. So sophisticated communication systems have also helped to increase intercultural communication. Thirdly, there is globalization of world economy. This means multi-national companies now operate in many countries in the world. They employ people of different ethnic groups and of different countries. Actually, some multi-national companies make a point of employing people of different countries. They don't use people from just one country. Because their company is the multi-national company and they want to use people from different countries. And finally there is mass migration. Millions of people now move across national borders every year.

So the importance of intercultural communication now is being recognized by an increasing number of people.

## 1.4 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation". Maslow subsequently extended the idea to include his observations of humans' innate curiosity.

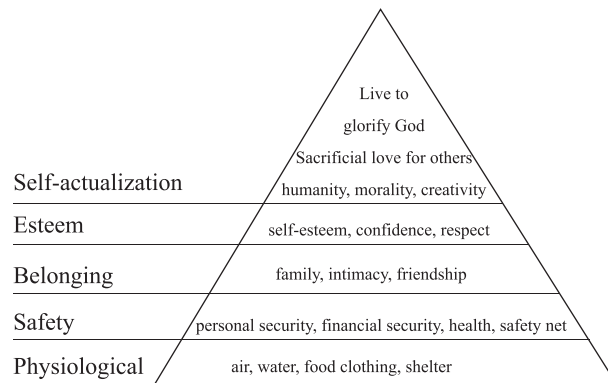
Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often portrayed in the shape of a pyramid with the largest, most fundamental levels of needs at the bottom and the need for self-actualization at the top. The most fundamental and basic four layers of the pyramid contain what Maslow called "deficiency needs": esteem, friendship and love, security, and physical needs. If these "deficiency needs" are not met, with the exception of the most fundamental (physiological) need, there may not be a physical indication, but the individual will feel anxious and tense. Maslow's theory suggests that the most basic level of needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire (or focus motivation upon) the secondary or higher level needs.

The human mind and brain are complex and have parallel processes running at the same time, thus many different motivations from various levels of Maslow's hierarchy can occur at the same time. Maslow spoke clearly about these levels and their satisfaction in terms such as "relative," "general," and "primarily." Instead of stating that the individual focuses on a certain need at any given time, Maslow stated that a certain need "dominates" the human organism. Thus Maslow acknowledged the likelihood that the different levels of motivation could occur at any time in the human mind, but he focused on identifying the basic types of motivation and the order in which they should be met.

### 1.4.1 The basic human needs

Physiological needs

Physiological needs are the physical requirements for human survival. If these requirements are not met, the human body cannot function properly, and will ultimately fail. Physiological needs are thought to be the most important, so they should be met first. Air, water, and food are metabolic requirements for survival in all animals, including humans. Clothing and shelter provide necessary protection from the elements.



**Figure 1 An interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs**

#### Safety needs

With their physical needs relatively satisfied, the individual's safety needs take precedence and dominate behavior. In the absence of physical safety, due to war, natural disaster, family violence, childhood abuse, etc., people may (re-)experience post-traumatic stress disorder or transgenerational trauma. In the absence of economic safety, due to economic crisis and lack of work opportunities, these safety needs manifest themselves in ways such as a preference for job security, grievance procedures for protecting the individual from unilateral authority, savings accounts, insurance policies, reasonable disability accommodations, etc. This level is more likely to be found in children because they generally have a greater need to feel safe.

Safety and Security needs include:

Personal security

Financial security

Health and well-being

Safety net against accidents/illness and their adverse impacts

Love and belonging

After physiological and safety needs are fulfilled, the third level of human needs is interpersonal and involves feelings of belongingness. This need is especially strong in childhood and can override the need for safety as witnessed in children who cling to abusive parents. Deficiencies within this level of Maslow's hierarchy, due to hospitalism, neglect, shunning, ostracism, etc., can impact the individual's ability to form and maintain emotionally significant relationships in general, such as:



### Friendship

### Intimacy

### Family

According to Maslow, humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance among their social groups, regardless if these groups are large or small. For example, some large social groups may include clubs, co-workers, religious groups, professional organizations, sports teams, and gangs. Some examples of small social connections include family members, intimate partners, mentors, colleagues, and confidants. Humans need to love and be loved, both sexually and non-sexually, by others. Many people become susceptible to loneliness, social anxiety, and clinical depression in the absence of this love or belonging element. This need for belonging may overcome the physiological and security needs, depending on the strength of the peer pressure.

### Esteem

All humans have a need to feel respected; this includes the need to have self-esteem and self-respect. Esteem presents the typical human desire to be accepted and valued by others. People often engage in a profession or hobby to gain recognition. These activities give the person a sense of contribution or value. Low self-esteem or an inferiority complex may result from imbalances during this level in the hierarchy. People with low self-esteem often need respect from others; they may feel the need to seek fame or glory. However, fame or glory will not help the person to build their self-esteem until they accept who they are internally. Psychological imbalances such as depression can hinder the person from obtaining a higher level of self-esteem or self-respect. Most people have a need for stable self-respect and self-esteem. Maslow noted two versions of esteem needs: a “lower” version and a “higher” version. The “lower” version of esteem is the need for respect from others. This may include a need for status, recognition, fame, prestige, and attention. The “higher” version manifests itself as the need for self-respect. For example, the person may have a need for strength, competence, mastery, self-confidence, independence, and freedom. This “higher” version takes precedence over the “lower” version because it relies on an inner competence established through experience. Deprivation of these needs may lead to an inferiority complex, weakness, and helplessness.

Maslow states that while he originally thought the needs of humans had strict guidelines, the “hierarchies are interrelated rather than sharply separated”. This means that esteem and the subsequent levels are not strictly separated; instead, the levels are closely related.

### Self-actualization

“What a man can be, he must be.” This quotation forms the basis of the perceived need for self-actualization. This level of need refers to what a person’s full potential is and the realization of that potential. Maslow describes this level as the desire to accomplish everything that one can, to become

the most that one can be. Individuals may perceive or focus on this need very specifically. For example, one individual may have the strong desire to become an ideal parent. In another, the desire may be expressed athletically. For others, it may be expressed in paintings, pictures, or inventions. As previously mentioned, Maslow believed that to understand this level of need, the person must not only achieve the previous needs, but master them.

### **1.4.2 Maslow's theory and culture differences**

Ends in themselves are far more universal than the roads taken to achieve those ends since the roads are determined locally in the specific culture.

Take physiological needs for example, whatever culture you are in, you have to eat to survive and have to clothe to keep warm or behave properly in public, but the ways people eat and clothe are different from culture to culture. Chinese eat using chopsticks, Europeans and Americans using knives and forks, and Thais used to eat using their right hands. Besides, what to eat is also different in different cultures. Some Chinese think fried locusts are delicious, but most westerners never have the thought to try them because eating locusts makes them feel disgusted.

The second level of Maslow's theory, safety needs, is more likely to be found in children because they generally have a greater need to feel safe. Naturally Chinese think the safest people for a child rearing are his or her parents, and that's God's truth, even if they are found abusing their child. The most case is if a child is found seriously physically punished by his/her parent because of his/her poor performance at school, the parent is condemned of his/her cruelty by the public or the police, and then the child is returned to his/her legal guardian, because he/she is the biologically linked to the child, and the only reliable one. But Americans don't think that parents are the only reliable and safe guardians to protect the young children. The unqualified parents who punish children or abuse children are deprived of their custody. So parents are not the natural or born custodian of their children. Because young children have greater need to feel safe, parents are being kept of the suspects under constant surveillance.

Examples are illustrated in the two movies: *I'm Sam* and *Guansha Treatment*:

In the film, *I'm Sam*, Sam Dawson is a mentally challenged single father raising his daughter Lucy. Sam is a sweet, good-natured man who earns a living by sweeping up at a local coffee store. His mental capacity is that of a seven-year-old, and as his daughter turns seven, she begins to intellectually outgrow her father. For the good of the child, Sam is deprived of the custody of the girl.

In the film *Guasha Treatment*, Xu Datong, a Chinese immigrant, has just made great success in the U.S. One day, Datong's only little son Denis has a stomachache. So his grandpa, a typical traditional Chinese, uses guasha to treat the boy's disease, which leaves Denis's back black and blue. And then when Denis is sent to the hospital, the scary bruise is found by others. So the Child Protection Organization accuses Datong of child abuse and Datong is deprived of the custody of the boy.



Though the culture difference is not the theme of the two films but the difference between Chinese attitude of child protection and Americans' is well illustrated. That they don't believe all parents are legal guardians in a child rearing really shocks Chinese.

The other three needs also reveal cultural difference of which the list goes on. As it has stated, the study of cultural differences begins at how people make their needs met. So the needs (Maslow's theory) are universal in all cultures, but the ways to make the needs met are different from culture to culture.

## 1.5 High-context and low-context cultures

### 1.5.1 Definition

The general terms "high context" and "low context" are used to describe broad-brush cultural differences between societies.

High context refers to societies or groups where people have close connections over a long period of time. Many aspects of cultural behavior are not made explicit because most members know what to do and what to think from years of interaction with each other. Your family is probably an example of a high context environment.

Low context refers to societies where people tend to have many connections but of shorter duration or for some specific reason. In these societies, cultural behavior and beliefs may need to be spelled out explicitly so that those coming into the cultural environment know how to behave.

In a high context culture, many things are left unsaid, letting the culture explain. Words and word choice become very important in higher context communication, since a few words can communicate a complex message very effectively to an in-group (but less effectively outside that group), while in a lower context culture, the communicator needs to be much more explicit and the value of a single word is less important.

A cultural context does not rank as "high" or "low" in an absolute sense because each message can be presented on a continuum from high to low. Likewise, a culture (French Canadian) may be of a higher context than one (English Canadian) but lower context than another (Spanish or French). Likewise, a stereotypical individual from Texas (a higher context culture) may communicate more with a few words or use of a prolonged silence, than a stereotypical New Yorker who is being very explicit, although both being part of a culture which is lower context overall. Typically a high context culture will be relational, collectivist, intuitive, and contemplative. They place a high value on interpersonal relationships and group members are a very close knit community.

### 1.5.2 The stereotypical contexts

While the milieu of individuals in a culture can be diverse, and not all individuals can be

described by strict stereotypes, understanding the broad tendencies of predominant cultures of this world can help us inform and educate ourselves on how to better facilitate communication between individuals of differing cultures. The following spectrum of levels of context in various cultures is universally recognized.

Lower context culture:

Australian  
English Canadian  
English  
Finnish  
German  
Irish  
New Zealand  
Scandinavia  
Switzerland  
United States (excluding the Southern United States)

Higher context culture:

African  
Arab  
Brazilian  
Chinese  
Filipinos  
French Canadian  
French  
Greek  
Hawaiian  
Hungarian  
Indian  
Indonesian  
Italian  
Japanese  
Korean  
Latin Americans  
Persian  
Portuguese  
Russian



Southern United States

Spanish

Thai

Turkish

Vietnamese

Higher context cultures tend to be more common in the Asian cultures than in European cultures, and in countries with low racial diversity. Cultures where the group/community is valued over the individual promote the in-groups and group reliance/support that favor higher context cultures. Coexisting subcultures are also conducive to higher context situations, where the small group relies on their common background to explain the situation, rather than words. A lower context culture tends to explain things further, and it is thought that this may be related to the need to accommodate individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds.

### **1.5.3 Features of contexts**

Higher context cultures tend to correlate with cultures that also have a strong sense of tradition and history, and change little over time. For example, the Native Americans are of a higher context culture with a strong sense of tradition and history. The focus on tradition creates opportunities for higher context messages between individuals of each new generation. This is in contrast to lower context cultures in which the shared experiences upon which communication is built can change drastically from one generation to the next, creating communication gaps between parents and children, as in the United States.

A high-context joke from a high context culture will not translate well to someone of a different culture, even another high context culture. Humor is very contextual, as a joke may not be considered very funny if it seems like it is over-explained using only low-context messages.

A lower context culture demands more independence, and expects many relationships, but fewer intimate ones. A high context individual is more likely to ask questions rather than attempt to work out a solution independently, and the questions are likely to be asked from the same few people. The high context persons may be frustrated by people appearing not to develop a relationship or continue to help them on an ongoing basis. The term “hand-holding” might be used to describe high context individuals in an unintentionally derogatory sense.

Higher context cultures expect small, close-knit groups, and reliance on that group. Groups can actually be relied upon to support each other, and it may be difficult to get support outside of your group. Professional and personal lives often intertwine. A lower context individual may be more likely to try to work things out on their own and feel there is a lack of self-service support or information, rather than ask questions and take time to develop the relationships needed to accomplish the things that need to be done.

### **1.5.4 Entering high and low context situations**

High contexts can be difficult to enter if you are an outsider (because you don't carry the context information internally, and because you can't instantly create close relationships).

Low contexts are relatively easy to enter if you are an outsider (because the environment contains much of the information you need to participate, and because you can form relationships fairly soon, and because the important thing is accomplishing a task rather than feeling your way into a relationship).

Remember that every culture and every situation has its high and low aspects. Often one situation will contain an inner high context core and an outer low context ring for those who are less involved. For instance, a PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) is usually a low context situation: any parent can join, the dates of the meetings, who is president, what will be discussed, etc. are all explicitly available information and it is usually fairly clear how to participate in the meetings. However, if this is a small town, perhaps the people who run the PTA all know each other very well and have many overlapping interests. They may "agree" on what should be discussed or what should happen without ever really talking about it, they have unconscious, unexpressed values that influence their decisions. Other parents from outside may not understand how decisions are actually being made. So the PTA is still low context, but it has a high context subgroup that is in turn part of a high context small town society.

When you enter a high context situation, it doesn't immediately become a low context culture just because you came in the door! It is still a high context culture and you are just ignorant. Also, even low context cultures can be difficult to learn: religious dietary laws, medical training, and written language all take years to understand. The point is that information has been made conscious, systematic, and available to those who have the resources to learn it.

### **1.5.5 Interaction between high and low context cultures**

What will happen when people in high-context culture interact with people from low-context culture? How should one from high-context culture behave in a low-context culture?

In high-context cultures, when faced with troubles, people prefer to ask in-group members for help than the out-group members. In low-context cultures, most of the cases, it depends on what the trouble is. They would ask the person in his field for help regardless of in-group or out-group. So it's more likely that over-seas Chinese may ask another Chinese for help. But an American in China tends to ask his business partner or his colleague for help.

When people from high-context culture interact with people from low-context culture, conflicts can't be avoided sometimes. Such conflicts can be between family members, neighbors or colleagues if they are involved in a mixture of cultures. The following case is about a high and low context culture conflict between family members, a Finnish wife and her Chinese husband:



My husband and I have been long wished to bring his mother to stay with us for a while. Last summer, after we redecorated our house, we invited her over. You can well imagine how happy my husband was! And I was just as happy. I know being filial to parents is a great value Chinese people cherish. As a wife of a Chinese man I try to be as filial as my husband. Two days after my mother-in-law's arrival, I talked to my husband while his mother was sitting in the garden enjoying sunshine.

Litz: Dick, how long is your mom going to stay?

Dick: I don't know. I haven't asked her.

Litz: Why not ask her?

Dick: What do you mean by asking her?

Litz: I mean what I said. Just ask her how long she's going to stay.

My mother-in-law overheard our conversation, and decided to leave for Taiwan the very afternoon. I had never expected that her visit should be short. I tried very hard to persuade her to change her mind, but in vain.

Litz is from Finland whose culture is of low context, while her husband and his family members are of the high context culture.

In high context cultures, many aspects of cultural behavior are not made explicit because most members know what to do and what to think from years of interaction with each other. Many things are left unsaid, letting the culture explain. Words and word choice become very important in high context communication, since a few words can communicate a complex message very effectively to an in-group (but less effectively outside that group). In low context cultures, cultural behavior and beliefs may need to be spelled out explicitly so that the speaker can be correctly understood. The communicator needs to be much more explicit and the value of a single word is less important.

When Litz asks her husband "How long is your mother going to stay?" nothing is left unsaid, she just means so. But to her mother-in-law, the unsaid part of "How long is your mother going to stay?" is "I can't stand your mother living under the same roof with us. Why can't you tell her to leave here as soon as possible?"

The following case is about a secretary who is on pins and needles because she has to try every means to read her boss' mind:

Two classmates, Chen Qi and Dai Yun, from a top Chinese university all took jobs as secretaries after graduation. They both work as bilingual secretaries for a Finnish company in Beijing. Chen Qi is secretary to the Finn general manger, and Dai Yun is secretary to the Chinese local manger, a position only slightly lower than that of the Finn manger.

Five years later they had a reunion and discussed their jobs. Chen Qi is satisfied with her job with the Finnish company but Dai Yun is not. The Finn manager receives orders from the company's home office in Finland, and he gives orders to those below him in China, including his secretary Chen

Qi. He tells her how he wants his time scheduled and she then makes appointments for him according to his instructions. She translates memos and other documents and interprets from Chinese to English. If the manager does not think Chen Qi has done her work well, he tells her right away. He is very demanding, but Chen Qi feels that she knows what her duties are and knows what her manager expects. She is confident that she is doing a good job.

Dai Yun often does not have as much work to do as Chen Qi does, because her boss schedules his own appointments and does a lot of the office paperwork himself. When he is out of town she has time to study for the graduate entrance exam. However, she is not sure whether or not she is doing a good job. Her manager tells her what she is expected to do, but he does this day by day. When people call or come to the office to see her boss, she greets them in English or Chinese as necessary. She receives their memos and other messages as well as their questions and requests and passes them on to her manager. Dai Yun thinks of her job as doing what her manager wants her to do. She pays close attention to his moods and behavior, and sometimes she is able to anticipate what he would like without him telling her.

Chen Qi's boss is from Finland whose culture belongs to a low context while Dai Yun's boss is from China whose culture belongs to a high context.

In the former context culture, nearly everything is expressed in words, as is described "He tells her how he wants his time scheduled and she then makes appointments for him according to his instructions. She translates memos and other documents and interprets from Chinese to English to Chinese. If the manager does not think Chen Qi has done her work well, he tells her right away." Even if the manager is demanding, Chen Qi knows what her manager expects. So she is confident. But in Dai Yun's culture, her boss does not tell her what kind of specific job to do and even he himself does some of Dai Yun's work which makes Dai Yun feel less confident or even her work is unimportant, because in a low context culture you have to sense what is right or wrong instead of being told. Much of the information is left unsaid. She has to pay close attention to her boss' moods and behavior, and sometimes she is able to anticipate what he would like without him telling her. Living in a culture where you have to figure out things instead of being told is tiring, so Dai Yun is less happy.

The following misunderstanding is caused by the interaction between Canadian and Chinese cultures:

Linda Carmichael lives in a Canadian city with her two-year-old adopted Chinese daughter Ming. She is a busy professional woman and a single parent who wants her daughter to speak Chinese and know the culture she was born into. For this reason Linda invites new Chinese immigrants to live in a spare bedroom in her house. She always interviews prospective housemates before they move in. She wants to avoid any misunderstandings by making her expectations clear, and she wants everyone who lives in the house to benefit. Among other things, she wants to see how Ming likes



any new person who might live with them. She expects a new resident in her home to agree to share housework and to speak Chinese to Ming. In exchange Linda agrees to help with English and any other problems the newly arrived immigrant might face in adapting to life in Canada.

Linda liked 32-year-old Jiang Yumei, an engineer from northeast China, immediately when she came for her interview, and so did Ming. Jiang Yumei thought this would be an ideal place to spend the six months she had to wait until her husband and her four-year-old son could join her. They lived with Jiang Yumei's parents, where she and her husband had lived since they married. She readily agreed to everything Linda said during the interview.

After a few weeks Linda noticed that Jiang Yumei seldom did any housework, so Linda had more housework than before Jiang Yumei moved in. Linda helped Jiang Yumei with English and job applications, and practiced job interview with her. At the same time Jiang Yumei did not seem to spend much time with Ming.

Linda gave Jiang Yumei some reminders such as joking about how she hates housework or saying, "Ming, tell me what you did this afternoon." This did not produce any positive result, so Linda decided to discuss the problem directly. One evening at the kitchen table Linda said, "I think we have some crossed lines of communication. Understood that we had a certain agreement between us, but you obviously understood something different. Can we talk about it?" Jiang Yumei was silent and stared at the table. Linda tried again, "I hoped you would spend more time with Ming. You two got along so well at first. She likes you and is disappointed that you don't play with her anymore." Jiang Yumei did not say anything. She did not look at Linda. She got stiffened, her face turned red, and she stared at the floor. Linda tried again, "I'm not angry, just confused. Tell me what you're thinking. I want to understand your point of view."

More silence. Finally Linda could not tolerate Jiang Yumei's silence any longer. She was angry when she said, "You know, in this culture it's very rude to stay silent when someone is trying very hard to resolve a misunderstanding."

The next day Linda went to see her friend Liu Qian, who had lived in Canada for over a year. Liu listened to Linda's story and said, "She's angry!"

This was a surprise to Linda. "What is she angry about? Why won't she talk to me?"

Linda never found out. Jiang Yumei moved out soon after.

Linda who is from a low context culture could not understand why Jiang Yumei who is from a high context culture is angry. Linda expressed all in words so that she thought Jiang Yumei would not misunderstand her. Jiang Yumei misunderstood her just because Linda expressed everything in words. For example, after Jiang Yumei "got stiffened, her face turned red, and she stared at the floor", Linda kept pestering "You know, in this culture it's very rude to stay silent when someone is trying very hard to resolve a misunderstanding"! It is too direct talking to an adult which makes Jiang Yumei lose

face and feel ashamed or insulted by Linda, because in a high context culture, such hurting words are always left unsaid. It's left for you to figure out yourself.

In fact, in high context cultures, when you find the other guilty you stop talking, because what you want to say has been said.

People from one culture stick together, just as Chinese students studying overseas. High and low context culture theory also explains this. In high context culture, one would think the in-group member is right on an intuitive level. In low-context culture, people will judge it with evidence instead of from personal emotions. "In-group" is not the reason for them to be favored. In high-context cultures, people are used to living in a static group that may be made up of their families and friends. The bonds between in-group members are strong, and the frequent contact among in-group members strengthens their friendship, so they are closer than the out-group members. And in the low-context cultures, there is no obvious distinctions between the in-group and out-group because people don't limit themselves in a small circle. They meet varieties of new faces everyday; friends are easy to be and easy to fade away. So the bonds between in-group people are fragile.