

Unit 7: Encountering other cultures

Communications professor John Baldwin (2015) cites this story, emailed to him from a student participating in a study abroad experience:

I found your email to be most practical and helpful. I've kept in touch with my family [in the US] and like you said even in short emails I noticed I've become more aware of a sense of frustration with American waste, greed, materialism, consumerism. I can tell especially with my brother and sister I'm going to have a hard time telling them about my experiences and cultural differences that I've been exposed to. In one of the emails I sent to my brother I was telling him how it's amazing to see the value change between the US and Ireland. In his response to this he asked me 'Did you get to see the Superbowl?' I haven't spoken to my family, well at least my brother, after his question.

Encounters with other cultures can be life-changing experiences. They can also lead to frustration, as here, when our friends or family don't understand or are unwilling to accept the changes we have undergone through such contacts, such as acquiring new interests or points of view. Intercultural encounters vary in scope, context, and outcome. We may have contact with a single individual in a brief exchange, or we might live and work in a new culture for an extended period of time. We will be discussing in this unit the range of experiences, as well as potential outcomes, including personal conflicts and culture shock. We will also look at mediated intercultural encounters, through news reports, stories and the Internet.

Personal encounters

We discussed in a previous unit that meeting people we don't know often results in uncertainty and anxiety. That uncertainty is increased when we know little about the other person and have to make assumptions. We may act or speak based on those assumptions. That may prove not to be a problem, particularly if we are open to changing our perceptions, work to accommodate the other person's communication style, and adjust our speech and behavior accordingly. But it's also possible that the encounter leads to miscommunication, bruised feelings, and arguments. Misunderstandings and conflict occur all the time when human beings are involved, even among people we know well or are related to. The opportunity for conflict is all the more plentiful when different languages and cultures are involved.

Conflict can arise over differences of opinion regarding substantive issues such as religion or politics. On the other hand, they may derive from misunderstandings based on verbal or nonverbal communication tied to cultural norms and values. These can be minor – such as not performing a given greeting appropriately – or more serious – such as perceived rudeness based on how a request has been formulated. Missteps in most forms of nonverbal communication can typically be easily remedied (through observation and imitation) and normally do not pose major sources of conflict. Non-natives in most cases will not be expected to be familiar with established rituals. Most Japanese, for example, will not expect Westerners to have mastered the complexities of bowing behavior, which relies on perceptions of power/prestige differentials unlikely for a foreigner to perceive in the same way as native Japanese.

Similarly, non-natives will be forgiven making errors and speaking in areas of grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. Russians will not expect non-natives to have mastered the com-

plex set of inflections that accompany different grammatical cases. Native Chinese will not expect a mastery of tones. Of course, if the errors interfere with intelligibility, there will be problems in communicative effectiveness. There may be, as we have discussed, some prejudice and possible discrimination against those who do not have full command of a language or who speak with a noticeable foreign accent. Conflict is less likely to come from language mechanics and more likely from mistakes in language pragmatics, most frequently in the area of **speech acts**, i.e. using language to perform certain actions or to have them performed by others. Native English speakers, for example, will typically qualify requests by prefacing them with verbs such as "would you" or "could you", as in the following:

"Could I please have another cup of tea?"

"Would you pass the ketchup when you're through with it?"

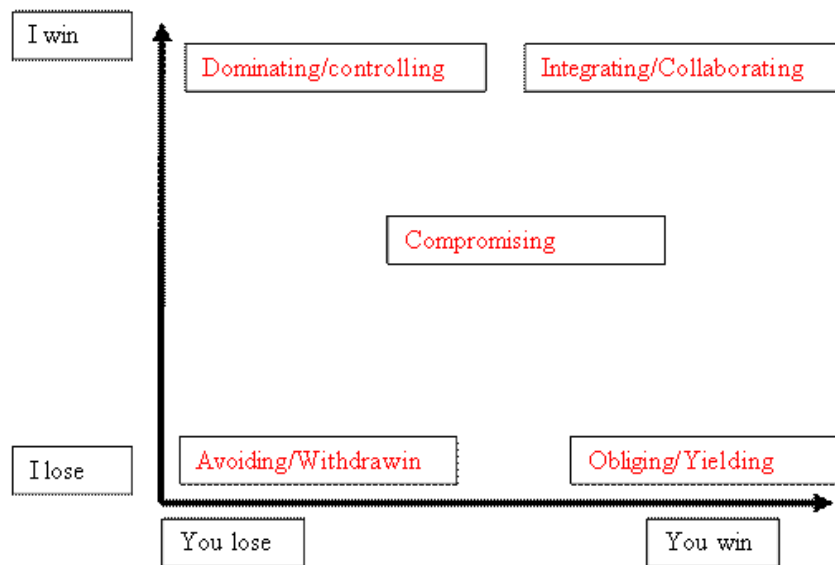
The use of the modal verb "could" or the conditional form "would" are not semantically necessary – they don't add anything to the meaning. They are simply added as part of the standard way polite requests are formulated in English. Asking the same questions more directly, i.e. "Bring me another cup of tea", would be perceived as abrupt and impolite. Yet, in many cultures, requests to strangers might well be formulated in such a direct way. Languages as different from one another as German and Chinese are both more direct in formulating requests. Non-native English speakers might will transfer those formulations from their native language word-for-word into English, leading to a possible perception of rudeness. This is known as **pragmatic transfer**, discussed in unit 4.

Confusion or conflict can arrive in some cases from differences in tone or intonation.

Donal Carbaugh (2005) gives an example, based on work done by John Gumperz:

As East Asian workers in a cafeteria in London served English customers, they would ask the customers if they wanted "gravy" [sauce], but asked with falling rather than rising intonation. While this falling contour of sound signaled a question in Hindi, to English ears it sounded like a command. The servers thus were heard by British listeners to be rude and inappropriately bossy, when the server was simply trying to ask, albeit in a Hindi way, a question. In situations like these, one's habitual conversational practices can cue unwitting misunderstandings, yet those cues are typically beyond the scope of one's reflection. As a result, miscommunication is created, but in a way that is largely invisible to participants. Once known to them, communication can take a different form. (pp. 22-23)

This source of conflict, a misperception of another person's actions or intent, here attributing rudeness to a difference in communication style, is one of the more common occurrences in both everyday interactions and in cross-cultural encounters. How such conflicts are resolved varies in line with the context and individuals concerned. Communication scholars have identified patterns in this area, which are often labeled **conflict resolution styles**. These represent processes and outcomes based on the interests of the parties involved. These are often presented in the form of a grid, as in the following (Baldwin, 2015).



If I am intent on reaching my own goals in an encounter, I use what's called a **dominating** or **controlling** style. This is most often associated with cultures labeled individualistic, as it involves one individual's will winning over another's. On the other hand, if I am content to allow others to get their way, I use an **obliging** or **yielding** style. This is often associated with cultures deemed collectivistic, as it favors harmony over outcome. Stella Ting-Toomey (2015) has been a leading scholar in this area, with explorations of how to predict a given conflict resolution style based on national cultures. But she cautions, as do others, how dependent individual behavior is on the specific context and on the willingness and ability of the parties to be flexible and compromising. Flexibility and openness might lead to the adoption of an **integrating** or **collaborating** approach, seeking to find a solution that satisfies both parties. A **compromising** approach provides a negotiated outcome which necessitates each party giving up something in order to reach a solution that provides partial gains on each side. **Avoidance** or **withdrawal** may be appropriate if no resolution is likely, or there is not enough time or information to resolve the conflict.

The concept of face

Ting-Toomey has been in the forefront in the development of a theory often applied to intercultural conflict, called **face negotiation theory** (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). This theory tries to explain conflict using the concept of **face**, often defined as a person's self-image or the amount of respect or accommodation a person expects to receive during interactions with others. Ting-Toomey actually differentiates among three different concepts of face:

Self-face: The concern for one's image, the extent to which we feel valued and respected.

Other-face: Our concern for the other's self-image, the extent to which we are concerned with the other's feelings

Mutual-face: Concern for both parties' face and for a positive relationship developing out of the interaction

According to face negotiation theory, people in all cultures share the need to maintain and nego-

tiate face. Some cultures – and individuals – tend to be more concerned with self-face, often associated with individualism. Conflict resolution in this case may become confrontational, leading potentially to a loss of face for the other party. Collectivists – cultures or individuals – tend to be more concerned with other-face and may use strategies such as avoidance, the use of intermediaries, or withdrawal. They may also engage in mutual **facework** (actions to uphold face) such as negotiating, following up in a private conversation, or apologizing.

Face concerns can appear in all kinds of interactions, but mostly come to the fore doing conflicts of one kind or another. Ting-Toomey predicts that certain cultures will have a preference for a given conflict style based on face concerns. Individualistic cultures or individuals will prefer a direct way of addressing conflicts, according to the chart presented earlier, a dominating style or, optimally, a collaborating approach. The latter, however, requires that one address a conflict directly, something which particular cultures or people may prefer not to do. Collectivistic cultures or individuals may prefer an indirect approach, using subtle or unspoken means to deal with conflict (avoiding, withdrawing, compromising), so as not to challenge the face of the other.

Another way to view conflict styles resolution is through the **Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory** developed by Mitchell Hammer (2005). According to the theory behind the inventory, disagreements leading to conflict have two dimensions, an affective (emotional) and a cognitive (intellectual or analytical) side. According to Hammer, parties in a conflict experience a emotional response based on the disagreement, its perceived cause, and the threat they see it as posing. How the two parties interact he sees as dependent on how emotionally expressive they tend to be and how direct their communication styles are. This results in four different styles, **Discussion** (direct communication style while being emotionally reserved), **Engagement** (also direct but expressive emotionally), **Accommodating** (indirect communication style, emotionally relaxed) and **Dynamic** (indirect communication style, while emotionally involved). Hammer developed an instrument that measures these four styles and argues that being able to identify your own style and that of your counterpart can help better manage conflict.

Cross-cultural adaptation

Adjusting one's communication style and interactional behavior to a single individual or a small group from another culture can be stressful, but it pales in comparison to adjustments and difficulties one might encounter in spending an extended period of time living in a different culture. There are a variety of situations which might lead to such experiences. One might be an **immigrant**, moving permanently to another country, or a **refugee**, leaving one's home involuntarily due to adverse or dangerous conditions. **Asylum-seekers** leave their countries due to the threat of political or religious persecution. **Economic refugees** seek better working and living situations for themselves and their families. These situations all differ markedly from that of those who go abroad voluntarily to work or study with the expectation of returning home after a certain period of time. Those who stay for a longer time, such as 1 to 5 years, are often labeled **sojourners**. Sojourners will often associate willingly with compatriots, forming an **expatriate**, or ex-pat, community. Sojourners have a different experience from short-term visitors or **tourists**, the latter generally having a filtered exposure to the other culture, while traveling in national groups largely isolated from native communities.

Because of the short time frame and the lack of in-depth exposure to the new culture, tourists normally have an unproblematic relationship to the culture, often experiencing it in a positive light, if perhaps somewhat exoticized. Those who have the day-to-day experience of living in the culture are likely to have a quite different experience. This might involve learning and using a second language, coping with bureaucracies, finding out how things get done in that culture, making new friends, and a host of other issues and potential difficulties that everyone living in that culture – native or foreigner – experiences. This process of adjustment is often referred to as **acculturation**, the learning and adapting of at least some of the values, norms, and behaviors of the new culture. This may be an easy process, or long and difficult. That depends on many factors, including one's age, educational level, familiarity with the language and culture, reasons for relocating, support structures available (friends, family, coworkers), and the degree of difference between one's home culture and that of the new residence.

The process of acculturation can vary depending on the purpose of the contact, such as colonization, trade, evangelism, or education. It can also depend on the length of time the contact lasts. A scholar who has studied acculturation extensively, John Berry, has identified four principal modes of acculturation (Berry & Sam, 1997). **Assimilation** is the loss of one's original cultural identity by acquiring a new identity in the host culture. The goal is to become indistinguishable from other people in that culture. Adapting to the host culture but maintaining the identity from one's native culture is **integration**. This kind of bicultural identity is likely to provide the most successful and satisfying acculturative experience. In some cases, individuals prefer no close contact with the host culture. In this mode, **separation**, the individual maintains his or her native identity with minimal adaptation to the host culture, although the individual may choose for practical reasons, such as employment, to adopt particular aspects of the host culture (speech, dress). The fourth mode of acculturation is **marginalization**, in which individuals have a weak identification with both host and native cultures. This can lead to alienation and a sense of abandonment. An additional mode of acculturation was identified by Richard Mendoza (1989). He labeled this **cultural transmutation**, in which an individual chooses to identify predominantly with a third cultural group, such as youth culture or gay/lesbian groups.

Culture Shock

Some individuals tend to be more flexible and adaptable than others, able to suppress, at least temporarily, some aspects of their ego, developing a new way of thinking and behaving in accord with the other culture. Others, due to personality, attitude or contextual factors have a more difficult path to satisfactory acculturation. Those who have a difficult time with the adjustment process are said to be experiencing **culture shock**. This could manifest itself in different ways depending on the individual, but the common experience is a sense of disorientation, a feeling of loss of control over one's life, leading to sadness, grief, or anger, and in some cases even to psychosomatic or real disorders. The process of experiencing culture shock and eventually adjusting to the new environment has traditionally been described using the image of a U-curve, which suggests that travelers go through three distinct stages. This starts with a positive experience, at the top of the U, then a period of difficulty, representing the bottom of the U, before an ultimate period of adjustment and return to the top of the U. The initial period is often called the **honeymoon stage**, during which one is excited by the newness of the experience.

The second period, often called the **crisis stage**, is when the newness has worn off and one is confronted by the difficulties of adjusting linguistically, socially, and psychologically to a new and different way of life. Assuming one is willing to stay the course, the **adjustment stage** follows eventually, with a growing confidence in one's ability to integrate into the new culture.

This model corresponds to what many people tend to experience in terms of struggling to make adjustments to life in a new environment. Most experience stress, which can lead to feelings of alienation and frustration. The U-curve model also points to the reality that the adjustment often takes time and that it's not realistic to expect a quick and easy transition. At the same time, there are so many individual variations in situations that generalizations, including the U-curve model, will often be wrong. It may be that most travelers experience the range of experience represented by the model but not necessarily in the same order. Some scholars have suggested other models for describing the process. Young Kim (2005) sees adjustments happening in a cyclical pattern of **stress – adaptation – growth**. She sees stress as useful for an individual's growth and prefers "cultural adjustment" over "culture shock". It's also the case that acculturation is not just within the power of the individual. It also depends on the willingness of the host culture to accept (or not) the individual. A physician or engineer from abroad coming into a new country will likely be given a much better reception than poor immigrants; this can have a significant impact on the adjustment process. It can be the case as well that the co-cultures in the new country may be welcoming to the new arrival, if there are similarities which make acculturation smoother, such as national origin, sexual orientation, or professional affiliations.

The return to one's home culture is an experience many people will anticipate with high expectations, as did the student at the beginning of this text, looking forward to sharing one's experiences with those back home and demonstrating the personal growth one may have experienced during the stay. Often those expectations are not fulfilled, resulting in what's sometimes called **reentry culture shock**. The return home does not necessitate any kind of socio-cultural adjustment, as we are already familiar with the culture, but rather a psychological adjustment. Some have suggested that the return home is another U-curve experience, with a similar pattern of high expectations, followed by a feeling of being underappreciated and misunderstood, with a final period of readjustment. Sometimes the two U-curves are put together to form a W-curve, illustrating graphically the kind of roller coaster ride such experiences can prove to be.

The concept of culture shock itself is not universally accepted. It rests on the assumption that individuals have a single "culture" and that the same holds true for the host country. It also involves a wholesale take-it-or-leave-it approach to cultural adaptation. In reality, individuals may well adopt certain elements of the culture, but not others. In some cases, individuals might choose to resist the new culture and maintain aspects of their home cultures. The situation becomes more complex for immigrants who represent established minorities in the new culture. Latinos migrating to the US, for example, will have different experiences depending on where they locate, the presence of family members, and the availability of resources for immigrants such as bilingual schools. In some cases, Latinos coming to the US may not be adjusting to mainstream US culture, but to Hispanic American culture, which has its own distinctiveness and multiple varieties, all different from the cultures of the home countries.

The concept of culture shock has been criticized for oversimplifying a complex situation. However it is a widely known phenomenon and one, which as Ulf Hannerz points out (1999), has led to an industry devoted to helping travelers deal with cultural adaptation:

I mentioned above the concept of 'culture shock', diffusing widely in the late 20th century as a way of referring to the kind of emotional and intellectual unease that sometimes occurs in encounters with unfamiliar meanings and practices. Rather facetiously, I have also occasionally referred to the growth of a 'culture shock prevention industry'. The proper term for its practitioners, I should quickly note, is 'interculturalists' – a new profession of people working commercially as trainers and consultants, trying to teach sensitivity toward cultural diversity to various audiences through lectures, simulation games, videos, practical handbooks and some variety of other means. From an academic vantage point one may be critical of certain of the efforts – they may seem a bit trite, somewhat inclined toward stereotyping, occasionally given to exaggerating cultural differences perhaps as a way of positioning the interculturalists themselves as an indispensable profession. (p. 394).

Much of this kind of training necessarily focuses on typical experiences, painting with a quite broad brush. In reality, individual case histories are much more nuanced and personal.

Cultural schemas

Cultural adaptation is likely to be aided by an awareness of the potential issues and of the typical patterns of acculturation. It certainly helps to have skills in the language of the new culture, including a basic awareness of language pragmatics. It may be helpful as well to have some awareness of the nature and origins of our social behavior. If we assume that the way our culture operates is the default human behavior worldwide, we are likely to reject alternatives as unnatural and inferior. In reality, what we experience as "common-sense" or "normal" behavior is socially constructed and learned. The kind of taken-for-granted knowledge of how things work becomes automatic, not requiring any conscious thought. We can think of such behavior as **cultural schemas** (set patterns of behavior and language) which are typically learned by observing others or performing an action once. Holliday, Hyde & Kullman (2004) describe how this works:

Knowing the cultural schema of events such as dancing a salsa or ordering a meal in McDonald's, is derived from empirical experience of that 'event'. It is reinforced each time that it serves as a useful guide for behaviour in that particular context or 'genre'. Of course the schemas of these different genres can be very different in different countries...The problem is that if we have a schema for an event already established in our national, regional or ethnic cultural milieu, we are likely to make the error of thinking that the event in the other culture should be the same – or similar. When expectations are upset one may experience a certain degree of shock that can perhaps translate into resentment, anger and perhaps negative judgement of the other culture. This is because expectations have not been fulfilled and one may therefore feel vulnerable and 'adrift' (pp. 197-8).

In our everyday lives in our own cultures, we carry out tasks routinely and without thinking. This leads to a sense that such behavior is universal. Being confronted with alternative models can be upsetting. The authors give an example in the contrast between visiting a pub in Britain and a bar in Spain:

In Spain the schema may be: enter the bar and greet the people there with a general 'Buenos dias', go to the bar; see if there are any friends around; offer to get them drinks; order the drinks at the bar; drink and accept any offers of other drinks from others; when you want to go ask how much you owe, often clarifying with the barman/woman which drinks you are responsible for;

make sure you say goodbye to everyone you know and to those you don't with a general 'Hasta luego.' A Spanish man greeting strangers in a bar in England would probably be disappointed in the lack of reciprocity of his greeting. The locals would be suspicious or amused; the Spaniard would feel the locals are perhaps unfriendly. He may be seen as dishonest or evasive if he doesn't offer to pay for the first drink he asks for upon being served that drink. An Englishman entering a Spanish bar may be seen as a little odd or ingenuine if he uses 'please' and 'thank you' all the time. These terms tend to be reserved for asking favours and for having rendered a favour, and are thus not used so 'lightly'. The Englishman would also be seen to be a little over-zealous or ill at ease if he attempts to pay for his drink immediately. In both instances the transgressor of norms would seem to reinforce larger suspicions and negative traits that may be attributed to non-locals of various origins.

The example shows that we have to rebuild our schemas in different cultures, in order to navigate our way successfully through new cultural situations.

Sometimes the cultural schema relies on a sequence of actions, as in a British pub, or it may be primarily related to language use. Sharifian (2005) illustrates how a particular Persian cultural schema known as *sharmandegi* (sometimes translated as 'being ashamed') is rendered in a number of speech acts:

Expressing gratitude: 'You really make me ashamed'

Offering goods and services: 'Please help yourself, I'm ashamed, it's not worthy of you.'

Requesting goods and services: 'I'm ashamed, can I beg some minutes of your time.'

Apologizing: 'I'm really ashamed that the noise from the kids didn't let you sleep.' (p. 125)

Sharifian suggests that in all cases, the *sharmandegi* schema "seems to encourage Iranians to consider the possibility that in the company of others they may be doing or have done something wrong or something not in accordance with the other party's dignity" (p. 125). According to the analysis by Bowe and Martin's excellent introduction to intercultural communication (2007):

Sharifian relates the sharmandegi schema to a higher level 'overarching' cultural schema which defines a core value of culture related to social relations that he calls "adab va ehteram", roughly glossed as 'courtesy and respect' in English. He suggests that '(t)his higher-level schema encourages Iranians to constantly place the presence of others at the centre of their conceptualizations and monitor their own ways of thinking and talking to make them harmonious with the esteem that they hold for others'. (p. 42)

Another way to formulate this is that one needs to learn the special **discourse** of the cultural event or action. Discourse often refers to specialized language use (as in the discourse of airline pilots) but in postmodern use it often is used to go beyond language. J.P. Gee (1999) describes discourse as "different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language 'stuff,' such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities" (p. 13). According to Gee, discourses are embedded into social institutions and often involve the use of various "props" like books, tools, or technologies. One might need a whole host of resources in any given context to come up with an appropriate discourse strategy, involving use of an appropriate language register, expressing the correct politeness formulas, wearing the right clothing, using appropriate body language, etc.

Mediated cultural encounters

Experiencing other cultures can happen through personal encounters or travel, but it can also be a mediated experience, in which we are experiencing new cultures vicariously or virtually. This might be at a fairly superficial level, through reading or watching news reports dealing with other countries. Of course, news from abroad is highly selective, often focusing on dramatic or disastrous events, inevitably filtered through the lens of the reporter's own culture. We tend to gain little insight into day-to-day lives through the nightly news. More in-depth information may be supplied by longer written pieces in serious newspapers/magazines or the Internet, or through TV or other documentaries. We can't travel everywhere or have the opportunity to meet an endless number of people from diverse cultures. From that perspective, the second-hand information we can obtain from mass media can provide basic knowledge and starting points for serious study.

More informed information comes from first-hand accounts of encounters or from personal cultural trajectories. Of particular interest are what are sometimes called language autobiographies, in which others recount their process of adapting linguistically and culturally to a new environment. An excellent example is Eva Hoffman's memoir *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989). She recounts her early life, moving with her family from Poland to the US when she was a child. One of the early significant cultural experiences she had was a change of her name and that of her sister from Ewa and Alina to "Eva" and "Elaine":

Nothing much has happened, except a small, seismic mental shift. The twist in our names takes them a tiny distance from us – but it's a gap into which the infinite hobgoblin of abstraction enters. Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself . . . [They] make us strangers to ourselves. (p. 105)

The change may seem a small matter, but for Hoffman it represents a separation from how she sees her place in the world. She has become someone unfamiliar to herself, with a name she cannot even pronounce correctly. Eventually, she finds herself in a kind of linguistic and psychological no-man's land, between two languages:

I wait for that spontaneous flow of inner language which used to be my nighttime talk with myself . . . Nothing comes. Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences, they're not coeval with any of the objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In English, the words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private connection could proceed. (p. 107)

She has difficulty ordering and making sense of the events of her life. Slowly she begins a reconstruction of her self in English. Initially, this comes through listening and imitating:

All around me, the Babel of American voices, hardy midwestern voices, sassy New York voices, quick youthful voices, voices arching under the pressure of various crosscurrents. . . . Since I lack a voice of my own, the voices of others invade me as if I were a silent ventriloquist. They ricochet within me, carrying on conversations, lending me their modulations, intonations, rhythms. I do not yet possess them; they possess me. But some of them satisfy a need; some of them stick to my ribs. . . . Eventually, the voices enter me; by assuming them, I gradually make them mine. (pp. 219-220)

Step-by-step, Hoffman learns both the verbal and nonverbal codes, and can adapt to US cultural schemas:

This goddamn place is my home now . . . I know all the issues and all the codes here. I'm as alert as a bat to all subliminal signals sent by word, look, gesture. I know who is likely to think what about feminism and Nicaragua and psychoanalysis and Woody Allen. . . . When I think of myself in cultural categories – which I do perhaps too often – I know that I'm a recognizable example of a species: a professional New York woman . . . I fit, and my surroundings fit me (pp. 169–170).

An account like that of Hoffman's provides a detailed, insider's story of cultural adaptation. Both fiction and nonfiction can supply insights into individual lives, which puts a human face on the theories of cultural encounters. This is true of films as well. Life stories convey the emotional turmoil that often accompany cultural transitions, something we sometimes lose track of in scholarly studies.

Technically speaking: Reflective writing

For Eva Hoffman, the diary she kept chronicling her new life in the US was a crucial factor in making sense of her experiences and in recovering her own voice. It's significant that she did this in written form; she expresses her new English self in this format. Writing provides her the opportunity to reflect on her experience, as she needs to put down in words what it is that she is experiencing. This can be a valuable tool for anyone struggling with identity issues or trying to make sense of other life experiences. It can be of particular importance for those studying or working abroad, as there is often a need to explore the meaning of experiences, analyze how they fit in to previous experiences, and what they might mean for continuing to develop our cultural and linguistic repertoire.

In addition to writing for one's own self, it may be helpful to share one's thoughts with others. Today, the Internet supplies a host of options for doing that. Blogging about one's experience provides an easily accessible mechanism. Including pictures and videos can provide others with more concrete representations of one's experiences. Smart phones allow that to be done in any location and without the forethought and equipment that used to be necessary. Services like *Twitter* or *Instagram* offer those opportunities as well. Using online communication options can supply a continuous channel of contact between the sojourner and the friends and family back home. This can be instrumental in allowing others to share in one's personal development, thus potentially mitigating the sense on returning that no one can understand or appreciate what one has experienced and learned. In her model of cross-cultural adaptation, Young Kim advocates continued communication with people from one's own culture, as they can serve as a bridge between the two worlds. She also stresses the importance of media, with one's own culture media serving also as a bridge and as a resource upon return to reduce reentry culture shock. Paying attention to host media can also help in the adjustment process.

If traveling abroad as a student, one might consider other ways to document one's experience abroad. One way to do that is to create an online portfolio in which one includes written reflections, as well as media and cultural artifacts. There is increasing interest in the academic and professional worlds in documenting not just formal learning from in-school experiences, but also informal learning. Maintaining a portfolio is one way of doing that. One of the available tools for that purpose is the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, developed by the Council of

Europe, which enables input from a variety of possible sources; it is in the process of adding a companion tool for incorporation of visual media. A portfolio has the benefit of showing development over time.

From theory to practice...

– *Practice active listening and mindful observation.* That includes watching out for tones, gestures, body language, and facial expressions. Pauses or silence may be sending a message. Hearing the other person out "gives face", showing that you respect that person and his/her views.

– *In intercultural encounters, be prepared and willing to have your ego bruised and your worldview challenged.* It's difficult for many people to be open to alternative views in particular areas, such as lifestyle, politics, or religion. Successful intercultural encounters do not require you to change your views and convictions, but they do require a willingness to accept that others have a right to different beliefs. It's helpful to keep in mind that worldviews are socially constructed.

– *Have realistic expectations of both traveling and returning home.* Imagined journeys often have little relationship to the lived experience. Knowing the language of the host culture can be a tremendous boost in adjusting, but it won't necessarily provide a seamless transition. You may well find that the language you learned in the classroom is quite different from what's spoken on the streets. Upon your return, you shouldn't expect friends and family to be as enthusiastic as you about aspects of the culture you have experienced. Be prepared for indifference.

– *Be as informed as possible about the host country (i.e. customs, geography, politics), but also about your own country.* When abroad, others will see you as an informant when it comes to your own culture and expect you to have knowledge about cultural institutions, politics, sports, etc. They may well expect you to have an opinion about current events they have read about or seen on the news. Before you leave, it's good to learn basic facts about the physical and cultural geography of the country you are visiting, such as largest cities, major transportation networks, regional differences.

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