Exploring Intercultural Communication

*Routledge Introductions to Applied Linguistics* is a series of introductory level textbooks covering the core topics in applied linguistics, primarily designed for those beginning postgraduate studies, or taking an introductory MA course, as well as advanced undergraduates. Titles in the series are also ideal for language professionals returning to academic study.

The books take an innovative ‘practice to theory’ approach, with a ‘back to front’ structure. This leads the reader from real-world problems and issues, through a discussion of intervention and how to engage with these concerns, before finally relating these practical issues to theoretical foundations. Additional features include tasks with commentaries, a glossary of key terms, and an annotated further reading section.

*Exploring Intercultural Communication* investigates the role of language in intercultural communication, paying particular attention to the interplay between cultural diversity and language practice.

This book brings together current or emerging strands and themes in the field by examining how intercultural communication permeates our everyday life, what we can do to achieve effective and appropriate intercultural communication, and why we study language, culture and identity together. The focus is on interactions between people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and regards intercultural communication as a process of negotiating meaning, cultural identities, and – above all – differences between ourselves and others.

Including global examples from a range of genres, this book is an essential read for students taking language and intercultural communication modules within Applied Linguistics, TESOL, Education or Communication Studies courses.

Zhu Hua is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Communication at Birkbeck, University of London, UK. She is editor of *The Language and Intercultural Communication Reader* (2011, Routledge).
Routledge Introductions to Applied Linguistics

Series editors:

Ronald Carter, Professor of Modern English Language, University of Nottingham, UK

Guy Cook, Chair of Language in Education, King’s College London, UK

Routledge Introductions to Applied Linguistics is a series of introductory level textbooks covering the core topics in Applied Linguistics, primarily designed for those entering postgraduate studies and language professionals returning to academic study.

The books take an innovative ‘practice to theory’ approach, with a ‘back-to-front’ structure. This leads the reader from real-world problems and issues, through a discussion of intervention and how to engage with these concerns, before finally relating these practical issues to theoretical foundations. Additional features include tasks with commentaries, a glossary of key terms and an annotated further reading section.

Exploring English Language Teaching Language in Action
Graham Hall

Exploring Classroom Discourse Language in Action
Steve Walsh

Exploring Corpus Linguistics Language in Action
Winnie Cheng

Exploring World Englishes Language in a Global Context
Philip Seargeant

Exploring Health Communication Language in Action
Kevin Harvey and Nelya Koteyko

Exploring Professional Communication Language in Action
Stephanie Schnurr

Exploring Language Pedagogy through Second Language Acquisition Research
Rod Ellis and Natsuko Shintani

Exploring Vocabulary Language in Action
Dee Gardner

Exploring Intercultural Communication Language in Action
Zhu Hua

‘The innovative approach devised by the series editors will make this series very attractive to students, teacher educators, and even to a general readership, wanting to explore and understand the field of applied linguistics. The volumes in this series take as their starting point the everyday professional problems and issues that applied linguists seek to illuminate. The volumes are authoritatively written, using an engaging “back-to-front” structure that moves from practical interests to the conceptual bases and theories that underpin applications of practice.’

Anne Burns, Aston University, UK, University of New South Wales, Australia
Exploring Intercultural Communication

Language in Action

Zhu Hua
To Andrew (安祝) and Timothy (天祝)
# Contents

*Acknowledgements*  xi  
*Permissions*  xii  
*Transcription conventions*  xiii  
*Series editors’ introduction*  xiv  

## PART I  
*Intercultural communication in everyday life: what are the practical concerns?*  1  

### 1 Language classrooms  3  
1.1 Culture and language learning and teaching  
(Does learning a language mean learning a culture?)  3  
1.2 Culture of learning (How many times do I need to practise?)  10  
1.3 Multicultural classrooms (Why is she so quiet in the classroom?)  14  
1.4 Chapter summary  20  

### 2 The workplace  22  
2.1 Meetings (Has anything been decided in the meeting?)  22  
2.2 Small talk (Haven’t seen you for ages!)  29  
2.3 Humour (I didn’t get that!)  36  
2.4 Chapter summary  41  

### 3 Business  42  
3.1 Advertising (Buy it, sell it, love it)  42  
3.2 International business negotiation (Why do they talk a lot about nothing really?)  49  
3.3 More language and communication matters  
(Dear Respected Mr Lin, How are you?)  54  
3.4 Chapter summary  59
4 Family 60
4.1 Migrant families (I'm British on paper, but am I English?) 60
4.2 Intercultural couples (Can love speak without words?) 67
4.3 Chapter summary 72

5 Study abroad and tourism 73
5.1 Study abroad (Does ‘real’ experience help with my language and intercultural learning?) 73
5.2 Tourism (Can I take a picture with you?) 81
5.3 Chapter summary 90

PART II Developing intercultural communicative competence: how to communicate effectively and appropriately 93

6 What are culture-specific ways of communication and why? 95
6.1 High versus low context: relationship and networks 95
6.2 High involvement: solidarity and connectedness 98
6.3 Directness or indirectness: face, politeness and rapport 100
6.4 Turn-taking: universals vs. cultural variations 106
6.5 Space: the silent language 107
6.6 Chapter summary 110

7 What are the key factors that may cause misunderstanding in intercultural communication? 112
7.1 Defining misunderstanding 113
7.2 Inadequate linguistic proficiency 115
7.3 Pragmatic mismatch 116
7.4 Clash of styles 120
7.5 Mismatch in schemas and cultural stereotypes 122
7.6 Mismatch in contextualisation and framing 126
7.7 Chapter summary 129

8 What contributes to successful communication? 131
8.1 Accommodating towards your audience 131
8.2 Negotiating misunderstanding 137
8.3 Interpreting and mediating interaction 140
8.4 Understanding professional and institutional discourse 144
8.5 Chapter summary 149
9 How to develop intercultural communicative competence 150
  9.1 ICC in foreign language teaching and learning 150
  9.2 A multidisciplinary overview of ICC 154
  9.3 Intercultural learning through education and training 157
  9.4 Intercultural learning from a language socialisation perspective 164
  9.5 Chapter summary 169

PART III
Studying and researching intercultural communication 171

10 The relation between language, culture and thought: the classical question 173
  10.1 The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis: language controls or influences thought 173
  10.2 Colour terms: language influences, but does not determine perception 177
  10.3 ‘The geography of thought’: culture influences thought independent of language 178
      Cultural key words: vocabulary as index of a culture 180
  10.5 The language of thought: language as a window into human nature; and thought exists independently of language 181
  10.6 The bilingual mind: thinking and speaking in two languages 182
  10.7 Thinking back: relevance to intercultural communication 183

11 Theories of culture: a fundamental question 186
  11.1 Compositional approach: culture as a collection of things shared by a group of people 186
  11.2 Interpretive approach: culture as semiotic 192
  11.3 Action approach: culture as a process 193
  11.4 Critical approach: culture as power and ideological struggle 195
  11.5 Overview: complexity of culture 196
  11.6 Thinking back: from what culture is to what intercultural communication is 198
# Contents

12 Language, identity and interculturality:
   a paradigm-shifting question 201
   12.1 Identity: multiplicity and types 201
   12.2 Cultural identity 204
   12.3 Interculturality: from being to doing cultural identities 208
   12.4 Thinking back and looking forward 218

Task commentaries 221
Glossary of key terms 233
Annotated further reading 242
References 250
Index of subjects 275
Index of languages, cultures and geographical areas 278
Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks go to all the people who have helped me with the book in many different ways. In particular, I would like to thank the following individuals:

The two series editors for their comments and advice at various stages of the book, particularly, Guy, for reading through the drafts and nudging me gently along the way, and Ron, for reassuring me that they would support me to write the book in my way.

Louisa Semlyen and Sophie Jaques of Routledge for their assistance and guidance in all editorial matters. The working relationship we have built between us through this and other projects has certainly contributed to the smooth completion of the book. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose feedback is immensely valuable.

Jennifer Watson for proof-reading my chapters timely and efficiently.

Many colleagues and friends from whom I have taken advice on various matters (you know who you are!). I have cited some of the collaborative work with colleagues. It has been a pleasure to be part of the team.

My students at Birkbeck College where I work and teach. I have tried out some of the examples and tasks on the students on my courses and am very grateful for the ideas and comments they have given me.

My extended family in Beijing. Thank you, 爸, 妈, 姐, 妹, 乐乐. Thank you for your unconditional love for an absent daughter/sister/auntie over the years.

And finally, my immediate family in London. They have lived through the book project with me. Thank you, Li Wei, for allowing me to raid your bookshelves from time to time, readily providing advice at odd hours and commenting on the drafts. Thank you, Andrew and Timothy, my two wonderful boys, for understanding why Mum disappeared into her study so often and for so long, and for asking, gently but from time to time, ‘Have you finished the book yet?’
Permissions

The author and the publisher would like to thank the following copyright holders for permission to reprint material:

Figure 2.1 Sequential stages of a meeting. From Handford, M. (2010) *The Language of Business Meetings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (copyright: Cambridge University Press)


Transcription conventions

Conversation examples are re-transcribed where possible, using the following conventions in the interests of consistency. Some less relevant details are omitted. Additional transcription conventions are explained immediately after each example.

( . ) a micropause of less than one second;
( 2.0 ) pause of indicated length in seconds
[ laughter ] paralinguistic features or comments
[ ] Across two or several overlapping turns by different speakers. The brackets indicate beginning and end points of overlap
[ ] Across two turns by different speakers, indicating 2nd turn latched onto the 1st turn without perceptible pause.
: lengthened sound
Stress underlining indicating emphasised syllable or word
? question or rising intonation
( ( ) ) unclear utterance, transcriber’s best guess
... Section of transcript omitted
Series editors’ introduction

The Introductions to Applied Linguistics series

This series provides clear, authoritative, up-to-date overviews of the major areas of applied linguistics. The books are designed particularly for students embarking on masters-level or teacher-education courses, as well as students in the closing stages of undergraduate study. The practical focus will make the books particularly useful and relevant to those returning to academic study after a period of professional practice, and also to those about to leave the academic world for the challenges of language-related work. For students who have not previously studied applied linguistics, including those who are unfamiliar with current academic study in English speaking universities, the books can act as one-step introductions. For those with more academic experience, they can also provide a way of surveying, updating and organising existing knowledge.

The view of applied linguistics in this series follows a famous definition of the field by Christopher Brumfit as:

The theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue.

(Brumfit 1995: 27)

In keeping with this broad problem-oriented view, the series will cover a range of topics of relevance to a variety of language-related professions. While language teaching and learning rightly remain prominent and will be the central preoccupation of many readers, our conception of the discipline is by no means limited to these areas. Our view is that while each reader of the series will have their own needs, specialities and interests, there is also much to be gained from a broader view of the discipline as a whole. We believe there is much in common between all enquiries into language-related problems in the real world, and much to be gained from a comparison of the insights from one area of applied linguistics with another. Our hope therefore is that readers and course designers will not choose only those volumes
relating to their own particular interests, but use this series to construct a wider knowledge and understanding of the field, and the many crossovers and resonances between its various areas. Thus the topics to be covered are wide in range, embracing an exciting mixture of established and new areas of applied linguistic enquiry.

**The perspective on applied linguistics in this series**

In line with this problem-oriented definition of the field, and to address the concerns of readers who are interested in how academic study can inform their own professional practice, each book follows a structure in marked contrast to the usual movement from theory to practice. In this series, this usual progression is presented back to front. The argument moves from Problems, through Intervention, and only finally to Theory. Thus each topic begins with a survey of everyday professional problems in the area under consideration, ones which the reader is likely to have encountered. From there it proceeds to a discussion of intervention and engagement with these problems. Only in a final section (either of the chapter or the book as a whole) does the author reflect upon the implications of this engagement for a general understanding of language, drawing out the theoretical implications. We believe this to be a truly applied linguistics perspective, in line with the definition given above, and one in which engagement with real-world problems is the distinctive feature, and in which professional practice can both inform and draw upon academic understanding.

**Support to the Reader**

Although it is not the intention that the text should be in any way activity-driven, the pedagogic process is supported by measured guidance to the reader in the form of suggested activities and tasks that raise questions, prompt reflection and seek to integrate theory and practice. Each book also contains a helpful glossary of key terms.

The series complements and reflects the *Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, edited by James Simpson, which conceives and categorises the scope of applied linguistics in a broadly similar way. 

Ronald Carter  
Guy Cook

**Reference**

Note

There is a section of commentaries on a number of the tasks, at the back of the book. The TC symbol in the margin indicates that there is a commentary on that task.
12 Language, identity and interculturality
A paradigm-shifting question

‘Where are you from?’

As someone who was born and grew up in China, who has spent the last 15 years working in British higher education and lived in Newcastle and London, I have often found it difficult to answer the above question in small talk. I can never get it right. If I say that I’m from London, I can guarantee that the next question will be ‘But where are you really from?’. People expect to hear that I am from China or somewhere in Asia. But I feel that I am misleading them if I just give them what they want to hear. I am Chinese, but that is not all. I am a Chinese living in London, a professor in a British university and have two children of school age who were born and grew up in England. I have a good idea of who I am, but I need to do a lot of work to explain it to other people, or be selective in presenting myself with some element of audience design. This is because I am an ‘outlier’, living away from my ethnic place of origin.

Identity is multiple and complex. As my own case shows, who you think you are is not necessarily the same as how other people think of you. It is perhaps not surprising to many that identity is a heavily researched concept in a number of disciplines and fields including applied linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, social psychology, politics, anthropology and cultural studies, to name but a few. In this chapter, we start with a brief overview of the multiplicity of the concept of identity and then focus on the relationship between cultural identity and ethnicity. In the third section, we explore interculturality, a line of enquiry that investigates how people employ interactional resources in identification.

12.1 Identity: multiplicity and types
Identity is a difficult term to define, since it is rich with (contradictory) meanings and implicatures both in its ordinary sense and in academic discourse. The paradoxical nature of the term is well demonstrated in Karen Tracy’s attempt to define it as a unitary yet contradictory concept. For her, identities
Part III: Studying and researching intercultural communication

Are best thought of as stable features of persons that exist prior to any particular situation, and are dynamic and situated accomplishments, enacted through talk, changing from one occasion to the next. Similarly, identities are social categories and are personal and unique.

(Tracy, 2002, pp. 17–18, emphasis in original)

Task 12.1 Who am I?

Complete the following ‘I am’ sentence up to twenty times, each time using a different word or phrase to describe yourself. After you have completed, please read the task commentary to analyse your description.

I am: __________

As an alternative way of interpreting the depth and scope that come with the term, some scholars have looked into different types of identity. A selection of different varieties of identity is given below.

Master, interactional, relational and personal identities These four types of identity proposed by Tracy (2002) differ from each other on two dimensions: stable vs. situated and social vs. personal.

• Master identities refer to those aspects of personhood (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, nationality) which are relatively stable and do not change from situation to situation.

• Interactional identities refer to specific and situational roles people enact in a communicative context. A person can be a college student, a volunteer for Oxfam, a passenger and a mother.

• Relational identities refer to interpersonal relationships such as power difference or social distance between people involved in a given situation. They are negotiable and context-specific. For example, in an appraisal meeting, there is power difference between a manager and an employer whose work-related performance is assessed. If they meet in a lift, however, the power difference is less an issue.

• Personal identities refer to personality, attitudes and character which are relatively stable and unique.

Discourse, situated and transportable identities This classification by Zimmerman (1998) differentiates contexts created and invoked by different types of identity in interaction.
• Discourse identities are those that people assume and project in the various sequentially organised activities of talk, e.g. speaker, listener, story teller, story recipient, questioner, respondent, etc. They can shift turn by turn. For example, a person who asks a question may need to respond to some questions first and a story recipient may become a story teller in subsequent turns.

• Situated identities are those that come into play in a particular situation. As an interviewee, where you find yourself, e.g. in a news interview, police interview, or job interview, makes a difference to your expectations. Compared with discourse identities which change constantly, situated identities remain relatively stable.

• Transportable identities are latent identities that ‘tag along’ with individuals as they move through their daily routines, and may or may not be relevant to interactions. Examples include ‘male’, ‘young’ or ‘white’. Participants may be aware of these identities, but they may not orient to identities in interactions.

Imposed, assumed and negotiable identities  This classification by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2003) differentiates identities in terms of acceptability and negotiability.

• Imposed identities are those which one cannot contest or resist at a particular time and place. Pavlenko and Blackledge gave two examples of imposed identities. One was the identification of Jews in Nazi Germany and the other was citizenship-related language testing required from immigrants who apply for a British passport.

• Assumed identities are those accepted and not negotiated by many at a given time. Examples of assumed identities include heterosexual white middle-class males or monolingual speakers of the majority language.

• Negotiable identities are those contested by groups and individuals through their agency and choice. A wide range of negotiable identities were included in the collection edited by Pavlenko and Blackledge, e.g. ethnicity and nationality, gender, race, class and social status, able-bodiedness, sexuality, religious affiliation, linguistic competence and ability.

The multiplicity of identity as highlighted in these classifications is a reflection of three broad paradigms in theorisation of identities in scholars’ quest (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). These paradigms are:

• identity as a project of the self;
• identity as a product of the social; and
• identity as constituted in discourse.
Historically, identity was regarded as a project of the self (a concept equally difficult to define) and as something to do with ‘the mind/body/soul/brain’ and therefore subjective, internal and unique (Riley, 2007). It has roots in philosophy and flourished in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis. The recognition by scholars in the nineteenth century (e.g. Hegel, 1807/1977) that self cannot exist without the other paved the way for the second paradigm, which emphasises the social and collective nature of identities as embodied in a range of social variables and group labels such as middle class, elderly, northerners. Examples of scholarly approaches that build on the social nature of identities include variationist sociolinguistic theory, which explores the link between linguistic variables and social factors such as gender, age or social class. The third paradigm, identity as constituted in discourse, has two parallel lines of enquiry. One focuses on the process of identification and treats identity as a discursive performance, constructed and negotiated through interactions. This line of enquiry provides a backdrop to the interculturality approach which will be explored in Section 12.3. The other is to examine dominant discourse and ideology that impact and reproduce identity. A fairly detailed review of these three paradigms can be found in Benwell and Stokoe (2006).

In the next section, we shall look at a specific case of identity, i.e. ‘cultural identity’, which people often refer to in intercultural communication.

### 12.2 Cultural identity

Cultural identity is very often described as a collection of multiple identities, consisting of predominantly ethnic identities along with other intersecting identities such as race, nationality, gender, class and religious affiliation. One possible take on the relationship between cultural identity and other types of identity can be found in Orbe and Harris (2001), who took a more dynamic view of the multi-faceted nature of cultural identity. They proposed that while race and ethnicity are a part of cultural identity, other variables such as abilities, age, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, spirituality and socio-economic status interact with these two and act as cultural identity ‘markers’. Some markers can become more salient and intense than others in the process of communication.

Although cultural identity is not only about ethnicity and race, ethnicity and race are central to cultural identity to the extent that ethnic or racial identities are often conflated with cultural identity in practice. This raises the question, why do ethnicity and race play such a prominent role in cultural identity? The answer partly lies in habit
and the need to categorise others’ ethnicity and race, as observed by Omi and Winant (1994, p. 59):

One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them (along with their sex) is their race...This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize – someone who is, for example, racially ‘mixed’.

There are plenty of examples in everyday life when a person has been assigned ethnic or racial identity that either conforms to or differs from what the person considers him or herself to be. One of the interesting anecdotes I have heard was a colleague’s experience as a visiting teacher on an exchange programme in Australia. When she was introduced to the children in an Australian primary school, they asked her where she came from. She duly confessed that she was from Germany. However, one child was quick to point out that it could not be true, since she was not wearing a scarf like all the other previous visiting teachers from Germany!

The fact is that when we categorise others’ ethnicity and race, we use a range of audible, visible and readable cues and rely on our prior experience and knowledge of the salient features of a species – in other words, schemata, the idea we discussed earlier in Chapter 6.

**You are how you sound** An example of audible cues is the way we speak language(s), in particular, accent and fluency. There have been some interesting and fruitful studies linking perception of dialectal accent and identification of ethnicity. Linguistic profiling studies by John Baugh and other scholars (Baugh, 1999, Purnell et al., 1999) are such an example. In these studies, the researcher called the same landlord for an appointment but used three different varieties of English: Standard English, AAVE (African-American Vernacular English) and Chicano English. The results were that in areas where the population was predominantly white, a much higher percentage of the requests made with the Standard English were successful, while those with non-standard varieties achieved a lower success rate. Other studies (e.g. Anisfeld et al., 1962; Fayer and Krasinski, 1987) have shown that, similar to dialectal variations, ‘foreign’ accents or accents of second language users were often judged to be less educated, less intelligent or poorer.

Fluency in a heritage language is often used as a marker of the strength of one’s orientation towards ethnicity of the community. According to Fought (2006), speaking the language of the community may be a way of asserting ethnic identity amongst members of the community; those members who do not speak the language of the community may find their ethnicity called into question.
You are how you look  The visible cues we use in categorisation of ethnicity include one’s appearance. Much anecdotal evidence can be found in the literature documenting how people ascribe ethnicity according to one’s appearance. Ien Ang, the author of *On Not Speaking Chinese* (2001), was born into a family of Chinese descent in Indonesia and grew up in the Netherlands. She wrote about her predicaments of Chineseness: ‘In Taiwan I was different because I couldn’t speak Chinese; in the West I was different because I looked Chinese’ (p. vii). Fought (2006, p. 6) also reported a Panamanian girl of African descent who was told by her teacher to check ‘black’ on the form because, in the teacher’s words, ‘that is what people see when they look at you’.

Some studies (e.g. Rubin, 1992, reported by Lippi-Green, 1997/2012; Williams, F., 1983) identified the link between visual and audio cues, in particular, how we hear and ‘imagine’ accent through someone’s appearance (e.g. whiteness, blackness, Asianness, etc.). In Williams’s study (1983), a group of European-American students were shown three videos which used the same audio file, but with three speakers of different ethnicity: European-American, African-American and Mexican-American. Despite using the same audio file, the last two videos were rated as of significantly lower standard than the first. These studies revealed how one’s prior knowledge of ethnicity and categorisation of ethnicity through racial phenotype (e.g. skin colour, hair, facial features, etc.) can lead to bias in perception and result in ‘linguistic discrimination’.

You are what you are on paper  Categorisation of ethnicity also takes place through written, hence, readable cues. One such cue is name. Those who carry ‘foreign’ names may find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to applying for jobs. Shahid Iqbal, as reported by Sangita Myska (2012) in the *BBC News Magazine*, adopted a British name, Richard Brown, when he realised at the age of 18 that his name proved problematic in getting a job. He then found the vacancies for which he had previously applied but which, allegedly, were ‘filled’, were now available. He is now the owner of an engineering company in Birmingham and has decided to keep the name of Richard Brown.

Apart from names, how you write tells others about yourself. Studies have shown that second language speakers’ texts differ from native speakers’ in a variety of linguistic and rhetorical aspects (e.g. Hinkel, 2002) and in the degree of flexibility (e.g. Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007, discussed previously in connection with an email request in Chapter 1). My study on presentation of self in application letters (Zhu, 2007) also found that when it comes to presenting themselves as desirable, there were salient differences in several aspects between
British students and those ‘international’ students from China in a postgraduate course in a UK university.

Crossing and passing

Some studies in sociolinguistics have identified a phenomena described as crossing, in which speakers use the language varieties of social and ethnic groups to which they do not normally belong. Classic studies on crossing have examined the use of an English-based Caribbean Creole among white teenagers in South London (Hewitt, 1982) and the use of Panjabi, stylised Asian English and Creole, among three groups of white, Afro-Caribbean and Panjabi teenagers in the southern Midlands of England (Rampton, 1995, 1999). In the following example, Asif and Salim switched from Panjabi to stylised Asian English in their response to Miss Jameson’s first use of ‘after you’.

Example 12.1

Asif and Alan were in detention under the supervision of a teacher, Mr Chambers. Miss Jameson, who came to swap with Mr Chambers, arrived at the room at the same time as Kazim and Salim, two of Asif’s friends. SAE: stylised Asian English.

Kazim and Salim arrive at the door.

1 Asif: Kaz [in Panjabi] stay here stay here.
2 Mr C: (see you messing around)
3 Alan: (.....)
4 Asif: [chants, in Panjabi] your [obscenity] nonsense
5 Miss J: after you
6 Asif: [in SAE] after you::
7 Salim: [higher pitch, in SAE] after you::

(Rampton, 1995, p. 72, transcription slightly altered. [ ] = notes on language)

Crossing occurs very often among adolescents who borrow phonology, syntax or lexicon from another language variety for a variety of reasons. In a review by Fought (2006), she identified some common themes. For example, crossing can be used to undermine parents’ or teachers’ authority as a form of rebellion; to disguise the use of taboo and offensive language; to achieve humorous effect in verbal play; and to signal a desire to affiliate with the values of the borrowed code, such as ‘tough, cool and good to use’, which may or may not be directly attributed to ethnicity. In the above example, Asif and Salim’s dramatised switch to SAE in replying to Miss Jameson’s ‘polite’ formulaic expression in Lines
6 and 7 could be interpreted as a part of ‘verbal duelling’, and a way of
marking their resistance and undermining the teacher’s authority.

In contrast to crossing, passing refers to ‘the ability to be taken for
a member of a social category other than one’s own’ (Bucholtz, 1995,
p. 351). Riley (2007, p. 233) cited a case of a call centre in India where
young people were trained to ‘pass’ for Americans. Part of the call
centre training course was designed to erase all traces of their Indian
accent in English and to acquire a ‘pleasant middle American (not
educated American) accent’. They were given names such as Nancy,
Sally Jane, Bill, Jim, etc., and biographies of their American identities:
place and date of birth, parents’ occupation, etc., while few of them
had ever been to America. In Bucholtz’s study (1995), she documented
several cases in which people affiliated with ethnicity that was not a
part of their biological origin. In the following extract, a light-skinned
Black woman described how she found ‘a kind of psychological shelter’
in being a Spaniard.

Due to a complex combination of socio-economic circumstances, I
happened to find a kind of psychological shelter in Latino heritage
and even grew to identify more with it than with my own culture(s)...It wasn’t until years later I realised why I had such an obsessive
drive to learn Spanish and why I felt so at ease, relaxed and at home
in Spain, a country whose people had the exact same skin color I
did. I had simply been searching for a kind of psychic shelter,
wherever I could find it.

(Zook, 1990, cited in Bucholtz, 1995, p. 357,
emphasis in original)

To sum up, in this section we have looked at some possible definitions
of cultural identities. Through the discussion of audible, visible and
readable cues of cultural identities, I hope to illustrate that the
categorisation of cultural identities is subject to both self-selection and
ascription-by-others. In the next section, we explore the role of self-
orientation and discuss how the battle of self-orientation and
ascription-by-others plays out in interactional practices.

12.3 Interculturality: from being to doing cultural identities

Recent years have seen growing use of the term ‘interculturality’ in
public discourse, intercultural learning and education, and other
related fields. In public discourse, interculturality, derived from the
adjective ‘intercultural’, is used largely to refer to interaction and
active engagement between different cultural groups and communities,
in contrast to multiculturalism, which concerns organic co-existence
of cultural groups and communities. In the field of intercultural
learning and education, interculturality represents a language-and-culture learning pedagogy which believes that the goal of language learning is to become intercultural speakers, mediating between different perspectives and cultures, rather than to replace one’s native language and culture with ‘target’ ones (see Chapter 1 for further discussion of the intercultural approach).

As an emerging research paradigm, interculturality represents a line of investigation that departs from traditions of seeing cultural memberships or cultural differences, largely, if not always, as something ‘given’, ‘static’, or as something ‘one either has or does not have’. Instead, it problematises the notion of cultural identities and emphasises the emergent, discursive and inter-nature of interactions.

By examining interactional practices, particularly sequences of talk, interculturality seeks to interpret how participants make (aspects of) cultural identities relevant or irrelevant to interactions through interplay of self-orientation and ascription-by-others and interplay of language use and identities. This theoretical perspective originates in Nishizaka’s seminal work (1995), extended by Mori’s work on Japanese and American students’ talk (2003). Two journal special issues (Higgins, 2007; Sercombe and Young, 2010) present some recent, concerted efforts by scholars to develop the approach theoretically and methodologically. The main agenda and contributions can be summarised through the following six questions:

1. Are cultural memberships always relevant to intercultural interactions?
2. What do participants do with cultural memberships?
3. How do participants do cultural identities?
4. What interactional resources are available for doing cultural identities?
5. Why do people bother with interculturality?
6. How far can participants go when doing interculturality?

We shall look at each question in turn.

Are cultural memberships always relevant to intercultural interactions?

This is the starting point for the interculturality approach. Echoing the arguments of many scholars who advocate multiplicity of social identities (e.g. Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998), the interculturality perspective argues that an individual has a number of identities and belongs to many membership categories, but not all identities are equally salient or relevant at a given point in differing social interactions. Cultural memberships such as ‘being Japanese, American,
Jamaican, Spanish, etc.’ cannot be taken for granted. Instead, they are contingent on participants’ self-orientation and ascription-by-others, and brought about in interactions as a situated, practical accomplishment (Higgins, 2007). Example 12.2 is an extract from an interview about foreigners’ experience in Japan on a radio programme, from Nishizaka (1995, p. 304). Read the extract first. What could you say about A’s cultural membership? Is he a non-Japanese just like B?

Example 12.2

A: interviewer; B: interviewee. The interview was conducted in Japanese, transcribed broadly and then translated into English.

1 A: One thing I want to ask you is: when Japanese people talk in Japanese, they are sometimes only diplomatic,
2 B: Yes.
3 A: [they] are just apparently sociable,
4 B: Yes.
5 A: [they] are sometimes so, aren’t [they]?
6 B: Yes.
7 A: For example, ‘Well, Shiri-san, come to my home uh next holiday,’ say [they] very easily.
8 B: Yes.
9 A: If you actually go there on the next holiday, [they] will say, ‘Oh? For what have you come here,’ may be. hhhh
10 B: hhhhhhhhhhh Yes.
11 A: I mean, what [they] say and
12 B: Yes.
13 A: what [they] mean seem different,
14 B: Yes
15 A: this way Japanese often
16 B: Yes.
17 A: talk, don’t [they]. [they] often talk so.
18 B: Yes. Yes.
19 A: How about this.
20 B: This is a little troublesome to foreigners, [they]
21 A: It’s troublesome, isn’t it.
22 B: Yes, wrongly, [they] will take what is said for what is meant,

(Nishizaka, 1995, p. 304, transcription slightly altered: [ ] = text added in translation)
In fact, the interviewer A was Japanese and the interviewee B was a Sri Lankan living in Japan. The point Nishizaka was trying to make is that a speaker could make their cultural membership irrelevant through interactive work. During the interview, the interviewer, a Japanese himself, deliberately distanced himself from ‘being a Japanese’ by repeatedly referring to Japanese as ‘Japanese people’ or ‘they’. In doing so, the interviewer oriented to his interactional role as an interviewer rather than his Japaneseness. The interviewee accepted his alignment and tried to establish himself as a representative of foreigners living in Japan. He confirmed the interviewer’s assertions in almost every turn by saying ‘yes’ and elaborating occasionally (e.g. Turns 21, 23, etc.). In Turn 21, he used the word ‘foreigners’ as if he was talking about other people, not about himself.

In arguing that cultural memberships of participants are not a priori, interculturality studies distance themselves from those approaches to intercultural communication research which assume cultural differences as default, and attribute mis- or non-understandings in interactions to cultural differences. In fact, interculturality studies have demonstrated that cultural memberships may not be the source of breakdown in intercultural interactions, in that

- Cultural memberships are not always salient or relevant in interactions; participants can make cultural memberships irrelevant.
- Cultural memberships, when relevant to interactions, do not always lead to problems of talk.

What do participants do with cultural memberships?

As Antaki and Widdicombe (1998, p. 2) eloquently put it, cultural memberships can be ‘ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored)’. Participants can do a number of things with cultural membership. They can make their cultural membership irrelevant as shown in Example 12.2, above. They can ascribe membership to others in social activities. They can claim memberships of groups to which they do not normally belong (recall the discussion we had earlier on crossing and passing). They can resist cultural membership assigned by others. Day (1998) identified some ways in which resistance occurs. These include:

- dismissing the relevance of the category;
- minimising the supposed ‘difference’ between categories;
- reconstituting the category;
- ethnifying the ethnifier, i.e. turning the table by assigning cultural memberships to those who assign memberships in the first place;
- actively avoiding it.
In Example 12.3, Lars suggested Chinese food for the party they were planning. Rita took the next turn and made a comment about Chinese food. Since it was not clear from the data how the following turn was allocated, we could only speculate that Xi, an ethnic Chinese, felt obliged to take the floor when her cultural expertise was made relevant. She faced two choices: either dismissing the potential relevance of the category of being a Chinese or continuing the flow of the discussion by commenting on Chinese food as a cultural insider. She opted for the first by suggesting that she was fine with any type of food, thus presenting herself as an individual rather than a cultural expert on Chinese food. Her subtle resistance to making her Chinese background salient in the conversation, however, encountered admonishment from Lars, who was quick to point out that this was not just about Xi herself.

Example 12.3

Participants were workers in a Swedish factory. They were planning a party.

51 Lars: don’t we have something that, one can eat
52 that, China or
53 Rita: Chinese food is really pretty good
54 Xi: haha (( )) it doesn’t matter, I’ll eat anything
55 Rita: ah ((that’s [what I that])
56 Lars: [yeah, but this concerns everyone
57 doesn’t it?

(Day, 1998, p. 162; transcription slightly altered)

How do participants do cultural identities?

Participants ‘do’ cultural identities through a range of interactional work and discursive practice. The key mechanism of interculturality can be summarised in the following points.

1 membership categorisation as a prerequisite;
2 whether a person’s cultural membership is relevant or operative is achieved locally through moments of identification by participants of interaction;
3 the paradox of identification on the spur of the moment and control;
4 indexical and symbolic cues of relevant category-bound activities and features.

Membership categorisation as a prerequisite The prerequisite for a person to ‘have an identity’ is that the person is cast into a category with associated characteristics or features (Antaki and Widdicombe,
This principle draws on the concept of the Membership Categorization Device (MCD, Sacks, 1972). Sacks observed that people use language to order objects of the world into categories such as family, Londoner, Mexican, student, etc. There are conventional expectations about what constitutes a category’s normative behaviour. If someone displays a certain set of features or carries out particular actions usually associated with a category (category-bound activities, in Sacks’ terms), she would be cast as a member of the category. For example, if you take lectures, are registered on a course or have a student ID card, you may be categorised as a student. A person can belong to several categories. For example, a student could also carry the categories of female, mother, stamp collector, Irish, musician, tourist, shopper, etc.

Making cultural membership relevant locally through moments of identification by participants of interaction A person can belong to several categories at the same time, but not all of them will be relevant to a social activity or practice at a given time. Omoniyi (2006) proposed a model of ‘hierarchy of identity’, arguing that a person’s various identities are allocated in a hierarchy based on the degree of salience it claims through ‘moment of identification’. Moments of identification are specific points in interactions or social activities for participants to signal their identity work through various means and resources.

The paradox of identification on the spur of the moment and control On one hand, identification appears to occur on the spur of the moment during interactions; on the other hand, it is a controlled decision made by participants. Participants need to pick up ‘cues’ of identification, assess options of identification available at that particular moment, take into account their prior knowledge about and experience of a membership category, or do a quick calculation of costs and benefits that may come with each option, e.g. desirability of resistance and ascription of categorisation to them and their interactional partners.

Indexical and symbolic cues of relevant category-bound activities and features Participants in interactions, at moments of identification, rely on the combination of symbolic and indexical cues that evoke the relevance of particular category-bound features and activities associated with cultural identities. This principle draws upon Gumperz’s idea of ‘contextualisation cues’, which refer to ‘any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions’ (1982, p. 131). Examples of symbolic and indexical cues include accent, code-switching, address terms and culture-specific terms, among other things. The audible, visible or
readable cues of ethnicity as discussed in the previous section are all indexical and symbolic in nature. It is through these indexical and symbolic cues that participants make demonstrably relevant certain aspects of their own cultural identities or those of others, intentionally or inadvertently. Their recipients may choose to align with, avow, resist, or ignore cultural identities evoked by these cues. In some cases they may misread or fail to pick up the cues, which leads to misunderstanding.

What interactional resources are available for doing cultural identities?

As our discussion about indexical and symbolic cues shows, participants have a range of linguistic forms and interactional resources at their disposal to do identity work. The following list represents some of the areas and analytical focuses reported in interculturality studies.

- **Topical talk related to cultural expertise and practice.** In Zimmerman’s study (2007), she examined how topics about two traditional cultural foods, *kimuchi* (pickled spicy vegetables in Korea) and *tsukemono* (pickled vegetables in Japan), were used to evoke relevant cultural identities and as a conversation strategy for establishing and demonstrating solidarity among conversation participants. She also found that cultural expertise was often claimed by non-members of the culture and that presumed cultural experts did not always enact their cultural memberships. One type of topical talk on cultural practice is comment about the degree of appropriacy of social, cultural and linguistic behaviour in specific contexts, which is termed as ‘talk about social, cultural and linguistic practices’ in my work (Zhu, 2008, 2010; an example can be found in Chapter 9).

- **Cultural references by names and address terms.** Ryoo (2007) reported a conversation in which a Korean shop owner introduced himself as Jackie Chan, a Hong Kong movie star, in his attempt to avoid the hassle of dealing with a salesperson. In my study of Chinese diasporic families (Zhu, 2008), the choice and avoidance of a particular address term as well as the choice of Chinese or English names were found to function as indexical and symbolic cues of Chinese cultural values and identities.

- **Use of the language or a code normally associated with a group.** Cutler (2007) examined the practice of a white teenager who marked himself linguistically as white by overemphasising his pronunciation of /r/. Day (1998) gave several examples of how linguistic expertise is often used as an index of cultural identity. In
one example, a participant challenged another participant’s self-orientation to Swedish by questioning whether a presumably Swedish word spoken by him is Finnish.

Why do people bother with interculturality?

There are various reasons for and consequences of ‘doing cultural identities’. My own study on interculturality (Zhu, 2010) showed that interculturality plays an important part in reinforcing and negotiating social relationships among different generations of diasporic families who, more often than not, face the tension between cultural values of diasporic communities and those of the local communities, and the need to deal with different language ideologies and discrepancies in linguistic abilities. Elsewhere, Higgins argued that interculturality can be used as ‘a source for comity, affiliative positioning and mutual understanding’ (2007, p. 3). Interculturality also helps participants to organise their participation in conversations by selecting possible respondents for category-bound activities or features evoked by indexical and symbolic cues (Mori, 2003). References to cultural memberships are frequently employed as a strategy in the context of tandem language learning, a language exchange activity in which each learner is a native speaker in the language which the other learner wants to learn (Woodin, 2010).

How far can participants go when doing interculturality?

This is perhaps the most challenging question for scholars working on identity. Interculturality studies have argued that cultural identities cannot be taken for granted and therefore, in this sense, they are neither given nor fixed. Few of them, however, have gone further to argue that cultural identities are socially constructed and entirely up to participants’ orientation and negotiation, a position advocated by many studies following a poststructuralist approach in recent years. As Block (2006) commented, the poststructuralist approach, which seeks to frame identity as ‘socially constructed, a self-conscious, ongoing narrative an individual performs, interprets and projects in dress, bodily movements, actions and language’, has become dominant among theorists and researchers interested in how individuals do identity work. In some studies following the poststructuralist approach, agency of participants in doing identity has been taken to an extreme to imply that all choices become possible (cf. May, 2001) and identity has become a ‘free-floating’ concept (Dervin, 2012).

This reluctance on interculturality scholars’ part to adopt a poststructuralist stance on cultural identities, in my opinion, is justifiable. As May (2001) argued, although negotiation is the key to
construction of cultural identity, there are limits to it. The limitation partly comes from the fact that certain parts of cultural identity, such as how we look and how we use language, are visible, audible and readable, and is partly due to the fact that some national and ethnic categories such as Chinese, European American, Jewish, black, etc., are socially and politically defined and reiterated through public discourse and social practices. In what follows, Matthews (2000) used a cultural supermarket metaphor to vividly highlight the limitations of choices as a consequence of social structures and (unequal) power relationships between individuals.

just as the modern supermarket offers foods from all over the world, in all shapes and sizes, so the international media and advanced technology together make available to individuals around the world a range of identities to be assumed. However, the cultural supermarket is not a completely free market where any self identity under the sun can be assumed; nor is it a reality in an equal way for all of the inhabitants of this planet. In the former case there are social structures within which individuals exist (be these state governments, peer groups or educational systems) which constrain the amount and scope of choice available to individuals. In the latter case, there are individuals living within social structures that do not allow them to make as many choices (e.g. societies where the role of men and women are circumscribed by tradition).

(Matthews, 2000, cited in Block, 2006, p. 36)

For interculturality studies, what can be negotiated by participants is the extent of alignment or misalignment between ascription-by-others and self-orientation and the relevance of cultural memberships at a specific time in interactions (see Figure 12.1). Interculturality studies have shown that participants can use a range of interactional resources to acknowledge, uphold or avow others’ ascription on the one hand, or to resist, challenge, rebut or ignore others’ ascription on the other.

In interpreting the relevance of cultural memberships and understanding the nature of negotiation between participants, interculturality studies benefit from Conversation Analysis (CA), a theoretical and analytical approach to social interaction with the purpose of understanding how meaning is produced, interpreted and negotiated in conversation through an analysis of linguistic features. Two ideas are of relevance to our current discussion: the role of context and the issue of ‘demonstrable’ relevance. In CA, no references are made to participants’ internal states (e.g. goals, expectancies, motives, etc.). The sociolinguistic variables such as power relations, gender and formality only become relevant when participants themselves publicly display some orientation to them. The issues of
Figure 12.1 Alignment and misalignment between self-oriented and ascribed identities

demonstrable relevance also help analysts to focus on what is really relevant at a given time rather than what can be assumed to be relevant. As Schegloff explained:

Showing that some orientation to context is demonstrably relevant to the participants is important...in order to ensure that what informs the analysis is what is relevant to the participants in its target event, and not what is relevant in the first instance to its academic analysts by virtue of the set of analytic and theoretical commitments which they bring to their work.


Task 12.2 ‘This is for the UK passport holder’

Read the following conversation that took place at Heathrow airport border control. B was waiting at the head of the queue for UK nationals. She did not realise that a desk was available until A, a ‘Chinese’-looking man standing behind her, alerted her in Line 1. Discuss what happened in Lines 2 and 3.

1 A: Excuse me, would you like to go to the next one over there?
2 B: (turning around) This is for the UK passport holder.
3 A: I know, but do you want to go to the next one?
In sum, interculturality, as a new and emerging research paradigm, provides an analytical stance that focuses on the role of interactions and discursive practice in negotiating relevance of cultural identities. It examines whether and to what extent participants bring about, align with each other, or resist cultural memberships oriented to by themselves or ascribed by others in interactions. It takes cultural identities as a process and outcome of negotiation, rather than something *a priori*. By doing so, it restores the central role of language practice in intercultural communication.

12.4 Thinking back and looking forward

We explored how language and culture are interrelated in Chapter 10 and how the boundaries and scope of the field reflect diverse conceptualisations of culture in Chapter 11. In this chapter, we revisited these issues from another route through a closer look at the link between cultural identities and language practice. The issue of cultural identities and language practices cross-cuts many key issues of intercultural communication. It concerns language learners/users, multilingual speakers, lingua franca speakers, immigrants and transnational populations, and people in general in everyday life. Through the discussion about interculturality and the relevant issues in various chapters, we have come to the view that language practices and identity are mutually dependent and interconnected. Language practices index and symbolise identities, which in turn impact on and feed back into language practices.

Some of the issues which have been discussed in relation to cultural identity and language practice in the previous chapters are:

- the notion of third culture or third place as the goal of culture and language learning (Chapter 1);
- learner identity as a contributing factor in classroom participation (Chapter 1);
- the use of a foreign language or multilingualism in advertising as a strategy of invoking cultural or national images associated with the language (Chapter 3);
- the development of cultural identity among ‘third culture kids’ or transnational populations who are exposed to possibly conflicting sets of cultural values and practices (Chapter 4);
- the issues of identity, language ideologies and language choice of intercultural couples and of children in transnational families (Chapter 4);
- the issue of ‘staged’ cultural identity and the potential risk of reducing culture to commodity at cultural heritage sites (Chapter 5);
• communication accommodative behaviours motivated by the need to maintain one’s own group identity (Chapter 8);
• the issue of synthesising personal and institutional self in professional and institutional discourse (Chapter 8);
• the notion of symbolic competence as an alternative to the notion of third place (Chapter 9).

The range and diversity of these issues not only demonstrates the centrality of the issue of language and identity in the field of intercultural communication, but also reminds us of the highly multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of the field. Intercultural communication draws insights from a number of different perspectives. Three broad types of intercultural communication studies can be identified as follows, together with their connections with other disciplines or field of studies.

1. Studies that are concerned with the identification and interpretation of cultural differences, applying theories and methods from sociology, social psychology, (cross-)cultural psychology, education, race and ethnic studies, anthropology, cultural studies, communication studies and business management.

2. Studies that focus specifically on interplay between cultural differences and language use. These studies draw insights from disciplines such as linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, discourse and conversation analysis, language learning and teaching, and pragmatics. Some have developed into their own sub-fields, such as interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics.

3. Studies that examine the impact of structures of power, socio-economic relations and ideologies on communication among people of different cultural backgrounds. These are the key issues of a newly emerging field of critical intercultural communication. It benefits from many discussions in critical discourse analysis, cultural studies, gender studies and politics.

Following my earlier argument (Zhu, 2011) that language is key to understanding culture, and culture is an indispensible part of studying language, the present book explores the role of language in intercultural communication, paying particular attention to the interplay between cultural differences and language use. By examining how intercultural communication permeates our everyday life in Part I, what we can do to achieve effective and appropriate intercultural communication in Part II, and why we bother to study language, culture and identity together (Part III), I hope that this book can bring together different, either current or emerging, strands and themes in the field of language and intercultural communication. The book focuses on intercultural
interactions in which people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interact with each other, and regards intercultural communication as a process of negotiating meaning, relevance of cultural identities and above all, differences between ourselves and others.

Intercultural communication as a field was founded in the 1950s to address the need among American diplomats to ‘familiarise’ themselves with the ‘cultures of their enemies’. It has yet to convince many of its critics of its theoretical coherence and practical value. There are still many misconceptions about the field. Toby Miller wrote in his endorsement for *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication* (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010) that ‘for too long intercultural communication was derided as a means of selling things to people who weren’t the same as you’. As we have discussed in this book, intercultural communication issues may have an increasingly strong and visible presence in the business world because of the trend of globalisation and the international nature of many businesses. But there are many other sites in our everyday lives where intercultural communication issues are relevant, such as education, family, travel, study abroad, the workplace, politics, the media, law, medical communication and service encounters, some of which this book only touches upon. Another misconception is the belief that the field aims to pursue and promote ‘communion’ rather than acknowledge difference (Scherle and Nonnenmann, 2008). The truth, I believe, is that intercultural communication provides an analytical lens to differences we see and experience in our interactions with other people who may look different from us, speak a different language, or speak the same language in a different way. I hope this book goes some way to redress these misconceptions.
1.1 ‘It will be just a bunch of facts to memorize’

The student’s comment articulated the following concerns:

1. Teaching culture takes away time from teaching grammar, which is more important for language learning.
2. Teaching and learning culture, if not managed well, could become a matter of memorising a bunch of historical facts. And above all,
3. Language and culture are separate ‘things’.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there are different interpretations of what culture is and related teaching methodologies. The student made an analogy between ‘learning culture’ and ‘learning history’. The student’s comments also contradicted the growing consensus that language and culture are inseparable, a view strongly endorsed by those advocating teaching language-and-culture as an integrated whole, those promoting an intercultural approach and those arguing for a more dynamic and hybrid view of culture as the section suggested. A good argument for not treating language and culture as separate entities can be found in Kramsch (1993, 1998a). In the introduction to her seminal book *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (1993), Kramsch writes:

Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them.

1.2 A little boy

The poem tells the story of how a child’s creativity is lost due to (over)-control by the first teacher. It raises a general question about the role of the teacher in children’s learning and the development of creativity,
and shows the undesirable consequence of telling children what they should do; and how they should be encouraged to create, explore and discover. Debate and discussion about roles of the teacher is widely available in the literature. As an example, Hampden-Turner (2003) mapped out three scenarios using two dimensions: ‘teacher as authority’ vs. ‘teacher as resource’. The first scenario is an authoritative, sage-like teacher who provides no real resources and fails to relate what he does to students. The second scenario occurs when a teacher is regarded as resource, but not authority. In this case, the teacher ends up guiding on the side, with students pursuing their own agendas. In the third scenario, the teacher becomes ‘conductor of talents’ when he is regarded as both authority and resource.

2.1 ‘OK just going back over the previous minutes’

Lines 1–4 constitute the pre-meeting stage prior to the start of the meeting. The main purpose of the sequence is to check whether everyone is ready to open the meeting. Line 5 signals the transition from pre-meeting to the stage of opening of the meeting. Jaeson takes up the role of chair and officially opens the meeting with a discourse marker ‘OK’, a directive ‘get into it’, an acknowledgement, and a welcome to a new member.

Jaeson has the most turns, due to his status as the nominated chair. Many of his turns are pre-allocated in the sense that he fulfils the function of a chair by opening the meeting, acknowledging everyone’s presence, introducing the new member, making evaluative comments (Lines 16, 34), and moving the meeting to the main agenda (Lines 17, 28, and 30).

2.2 ‘Waiting for my mother to tell me what to do!’

In the extract in Task 2.1, Lines 11–12 are witty comments from Jaeson and Harry on why IS (Information Systems) rather than IT (Information Technology) is used, following Paul’s request for clarification in Line 10. Humour can be interpreted as a face-saving strategy by Jaeson in his response to Paul’s question, which could give a ‘not quite with it’ impression. The quip from Harry gently challenged Jaeson’s authority and made light of the potentially face-threatening situation facing Paul.

In the extract in the hospital, the patient made a self-denigrating joke by comparing the role of herself and the technician as child and mother. The use of humour has an added value of alleviating anxiety and defusing embarrassment often experienced in the procedure.
3.1 My Tempus does that

The two different versions of the advertisement are designed as part of Hoeken et al.’s study, which aims to investigate whether differences in uncertainty avoidance impact on the persuasiveness of advertisements. The text on the left appeals to those with high uncertainty values who regard uncertain or unknown situations as threatening, while that on the right appeals to those with opposite values, i.e. low uncertainty avoidance. In Hoeken et al.’s study (2003), they found that people tend to think those advertisements conforming to their values more appealing, but the association between value preferences and persuasive language remains at an individual level. No cross-cultural differences among the cultures in the study (i.e. Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain) were found.

3.2 Price or quantity first?

Let us look at differences first before revealing the cultural backgrounds of the seller and buyers.

In the three extracts, the potential conflict arises when the seller weighs up unit price against quantity in the negotiations. There are clear differences in the buyers’ response to the seller’s tactics. In the first extract, the conflict is resolved smoothly. The buyer seems to understand the seller’s approach after two turns and makes a compromise by stating the quantity while making a firm commitment. The buyer also uses ‘we’, a collective pronoun, in his response, which helps to diffuse responsibilities from himself to his company. In the second extract, the buyer starts with a comment on a difference between the seller and other sellers. It may be seen as a negotiating tactic. The seller skilfully ‘dodges’ the threat. However, the buyer in this extract does not give in easily. He uses the singular personal reference ‘I, in my case’ several times, perhaps to emphasise that the negotiation needs to be done on his own terms. In the third extract, similar to the second extract, the arguments on price vs. quantity are recycled over the turns. The buyer stresses that he needs to know the ‘real’ prices. Both sides are very blunt in their negotiation, with only occasional phrases from the buyer such as ‘I’m afraid…’, showing some face concerns to the other party.

The seller in the three extracts is an Urdu speaker from Pakistan. The buyers in the three extracts are Iranian, Italian and German respectively. Now, does the knowledge of cultural backgrounds change the way you read the extracts? Gimenez (2001) argues that cultural factors may lie behind the differences observed. In his view, the Iranian and Pakistani negotiators may share similar national characteristics and organisational culture and therefore could reach agreement more
smoothly. In my opinion, it is rather problematic to attribute differences to cultural factors without other information. We need to take a cautious approach in making a link between national characteristics and one’s behaviour. In this case, three buyers seem to have different expectations with regard to what is negotiable and how to negotiate and to make concessions. We simply do not know whether this expectation is cultural.

4.1 Language migrant

Learning the language of the host community you are settling into can be emotionally and linguistically challenging. The rules or norms are not written down and most of them are context-sensitive (i.e. depending where, when and with whom you are speaking). You learn through mistakes and perhaps most importantly, through self-reflection. An unexpected outcome of this process is that you will become more aware of some special features of your native language/dialects. The following story is told by a former postgraduate student of mine studying in a UK university. Born and grown up in Japan, she has studied Spanish and lived in Mexico for approximately 6 years. She commented on her experience of adapting her voice to the local culture:

First thing I noticed in Mexico is the difference in the types of voice we use. In Japanese society, especially young women, use a relatively high pitch voice and tend to speak somehow ‘childish’. ‘Childish’ behaviour of a woman, not only the type of voice but also her behaviour itself, is considered as something ‘cute’ or ‘favourable’, and very widely accepted in our society. In Mexican society, however, they use a lower and deeper tone of voice than in Japan; it is required for both men and women as to speak and act as ‘adult person’, in every setting of life and naturally in business setting. In Mexican society, to use a childish voice, as many Japanese women do, could be a disadvantage, not something ‘favourable’, and doing so it is possible that you will not be treated properly. After a couple of month[s] of my living in Mexico I noticed about this fact and started to try using a different kind of voice, deeper and softer one, so that I am treated as an adult person (especially because an Asian woman looks much younger than a Latin American woman!).

4.2 Language choices and practice in an intercultural and multilingual family

Many issues come up in the case. First of all, the language choice: the couple. Fernando and Hiroko have chosen English as the main language of communication between themselves, probably because
English is their only shared language. Second, the language learning environment and choices available to Diego: along with the choice of English as the language of communication between them, Fernando and Hiroko have adopted the One Parent One Language policy with Diego. They speak to Diego in their own heritage languages respectively. Diego is exposed to Spanish primarily from his dad, and Japanese from his mum, and English from his parents’ conversations, the television, and the general environment. But this is not all. Diego is also exposed to language mixing of all sorts in his parents’ conversation, perhaps more mixing of Spanish and English than that of Japanese and English. Diego’s language ability at the age of three seems to suggest that his parents’ efforts have paid off. He is able to speak Japanese and Spanish fluently, with some knowledge of English.

There are many challenges facing children growing up with multiple languages. The issue of language mixing, for example. It requires a lot of effort and commitment from the parents to adjust language choices according to with whom they are speaking. It is still under debate whether parents should police the mixing of languages in their own speech or whether they should simply speak ‘naturally’. Other challenges include how to keep up a particular language and motivate the child to learn it, especially when the language is not the majority language. Sometimes changing circumstances can lead to changes in language choices altogether. Other challenging issues include literacy in the minority language, socialisation into the cultures of different languages, and related identity matters such as connections with the community.

5.1 Curvy culture shock

We all have own stories to tell about a time when we relocate to a new culture and upon returning home. The process of cultural adaptation is often depicted as a U curve or W curve upon returning home. You can google the term culture shock and click on images to see different shapes and diagrams used by people in describing the process. The essence of these curves or shapes is that cultural adaptation is a process whereby your satisfaction level goes up and down.

5.2 Tourist websites and guidebooks: guidance or stereotypes?

In a small collection of DK Eyewitness travel guidebooks at home, I found only the guidebooks on Tokyo and Thailand have a separate section on etiquette under the heading of Practical Information. No etiquette is mentioned in the guidebooks for Singapore (surprisingly), Greece, Australia, Britain, Washington, etc.
Both guidebooks comment on culturally appropriate ways of greeting, as well as how to greet and return greetings as a foreigner.

The Thai Greeting is known as the wai...The wai is layered with intricacies of class, gender, and age: each of these dictates a certain height at which the two hands must be held. The inferior party indicates the wai and holds it higher and for longer than the superior, who returns it according to his or her social standing.


The traditional greeting in Tokyo is a bow, its depth reflecting the relative status of participants. Visitors, however, rarely need to bow – a handshake is fine.


While advice like the above helps to bring attention to cross-cultural differences, some advice or comments on norms of interaction readily offered in guidebooks and websites do not stand up to scrutiny. Some of them ignore regional or individual differences and changes a country has undergone as the result of globalisation and modernisation. To give an example, a website offering advice on touring in China (www.chinaodysseytours.com/travel-guide-book/proper-protocol-etiquette.html) comments on Chinese people’s modesty: ‘Chinese people are inherently shy and modest. They do not display emotion and feelings in public and find speaking bluntly unnerving.’

As someone who was born and grew up in Northeastern China and has spent a good number of years living in the UK, I found these comments unfounded, misleading and irritatingly simplistic. It is true that some Chinese people may be reserved and do not like to show their emotions openly. But not all Chinese people are like this. ‘Reserved’ people can be found in every culture. There is nothing inherently Chinese about it. The British ‘stiff upper lip’, Japanese ‘stoic’ facial expressions and ‘silent’ Finns are similar stereotypes. On speaking their mind, yes, some Chinese will do everything to avoid giving a negative response directly to their friends, colleagues or acquaintances and there seems to be general preference for indirectness rather than directness, both culturally loaded concepts. But whether one can say ‘no’ directly depends on to whom one is speaking and in what context. For some people, saying ‘no’ to a stranger, someone from ‘out-group’ may be more forthcoming than saying ‘no’ to someone you know already, someone from ‘in-group’. Things are also changing rapidly in China with the open door policy and economic
reforms implemented since the 1980s. These changes have cascading effects on the way people behave and interact.

6.1 Performing ‘high involvement’

The conversation can be turned into high involvement style by employing some linguistic devices associated with, but not specific to, high involvement style. The conversation was originally used by Jennifer Coates (1994) to demonstrate the unique turn-taking patterns (i.e. no gaps, lots of overlaps, as the title of her article shows) among female friends. Mercer (2000) called this kind of conversation ‘cumulative talk’, because ‘speakers build on each other’s contributions, add information of their own and in a mutually supportive, uncritical way construct shared knowledge and understanding’ (p. 31).

6.2 Where would you stand/sit?

Please see the main text for the suggested answer regarding elevator behaviour.

Seating in a train: this is a question about how comfortable you find yourself sitting next to someone in a train. Does gender influence your choice of seats?

There is a video clip that shows how people react when you break these silent rules, e.g. choosing to sit very close to someone when there is plenty of space around. The clip, entitled ‘KLM Personal Space Experiment’, can be accessed at www.break.com/surfacevideo/klm-personal-space-experiment/family-off/.

7.1 Please answer me as soon as possible

Some features suggest that the sender may not be a native speaker, while other features suggest that the sender might have assessed the staff’s obligations and duties differently and breached ‘unwritten rules’ of e-politeness.

1 It starts with the lecturer’s first name.
2 The text in general lacks downgraders or politeness markers such as ‘could’, ‘just’, ‘maybe’, ‘please’.
3 It is composed from the sender’s perspective rather than the recipient’s perspective. See the discussion about different perspectives associated with different types of requests in Biesenbach-Lucas (2007).
4 There are a number of requests in the email: asking the lecturer to read through some study notes, making an assessment on the
relevance of the key points and seeking advice on references. They are different in the weight of imposition and the degree of obligation.

5 The requests are made in a tone of urgency: ‘please answer me as soon as possible’, ‘I will write tomorrow’. The number of the requests made and the amount of time these requests require make it very unlikely for them to be responded to by tomorrow.

Do these differences impact on how staff members perceive email requests? Hendriks (2010) found that the under-use of request modifications in emails had a negative effect on evaluation of the personality of the sender of the email. Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidou (2011) found that lack of lexical modification can cause ‘pragmatic failure’. However, Vignovic’s study (2010) suggests that non-native speakers may not always be penalised for their language mistakes: once recipients discover that the sender is a non-native speaker, their negative perception of the appropriateness of emails will be significantly reduced. However, the same does not apply to breach of etiquette. In the words of Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996): ‘teachers tend to think less favourably of those email requests that either assess staff obligations and duties inappropriately or incur greater cost than staff can afford in terms of time and commitment’.

7.2 What brings you here?

Donal Carbaugh’s recounting of his experience has a subtle sense of humour. In the stranger’s attempt to identify the author, he activated his various schemas on the idea of visiting an Oxford college: ‘a student’ (Line 5) or ‘a member of a college’ (Line 9). However, none of these labels seemed to fit. Donal Carbaugh, as a visiting fellow, considered himself as a student only ‘in a broad sense’ (Line 6). Nor did he think himself as a member of a college in its strict sense. He was there ‘at the invitation’ (Line 10). He rejected the label of ‘anthropologist’ straight-away and revealed ‘communication processes’ as his subject area.

8.1 Foreigner talk

Ferguson was interested to test the hypothesis that there was a conventional ‘Foreigner Talk’ for English. He gave the task to a group of sociolinguistics students and collected a corpus. Despite some individual differences, some common grammatical features of Foreigner Talk are noted. These are:

Omissions: Omission of the article ‘the’ (e.g. ‘where’s the money’ → ‘where money’), plural and possessive markers of nouns (e.g. ‘guns’), the third singular present suffix (‘carries’),
past tense markers (e.g. ‘saw’), progressive tense marker (e.g. ‘going’), future tense marker (e.g. ‘will’) and perfect tense (e.g. ‘have seen’), conjunctions (e.g. ‘and’), and the auxiliary verb (e.g. ‘did you understand’ → ‘you understand’).

Expansions Adding the subject ‘you’ to imperatives (‘come and see me tomorrow’ → ‘you come, see me tomorrow’) and tag questions (e.g. Yes? OK? See? No?) as comprehension checks.

Replacement Replacing negative constructions with a ‘no’ (e.g. ‘don’t forget’ → ‘no forget’).

In addition to these grammatical features, some speakers also paraphrased or replaced some lexical items. E.g. tomorrow → next day; always → all (the) time; father → papa; gun → bang-bang.

8.2 Strategies of managing misunderstandings

The conversation is an example of interactive repair. S1 was rephrasing S3’s argument, but he seemed to struggle with the choice of words, although it is not clear from the extract whether he signalled the problem. S2 joined in and ‘repaired’ S1’s trouble with a suggestion of a possible expression in Turn 2. His repair was well received by S1, who repeated the phrase and acknowledged it in Turn 3. Towards the end of S3’s reply to S1’s initial question in Turn 5, she used the phrase ‘I don’t know’, which could be interpreted either as a device to hedge her argument or an indication of her uncertainty with the word ‘consciousness’. This time S2 stepped in again and offered an alternative phrase ‘sense of security’. S3 recognised his help (‘yeah’), but made it clear that this was not exactly what she was looking for (‘but eh on the other hand’).

9.1 Defining ICC

As an example, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) proposed a term, InterCultural Interaction Competence (ICIC), to ‘refer to the competence not only to communicate (verbally and non-verbally) and behave effectively and appropriately with people from other cultural groups, but also to handle the psychological demands and dynamic outcomes that result from such interchange’ (p. 51). The term is coined partly as an umbrella term for the purpose of reviewing existing literature and partly to reflect the authors’ focus on interactions. The authors further list three key skills, i.e. affective, behavioural and cognitive components, which are in short, the ABCs of ICIC. The model is multidimensional and easy to remember, but it does not seem to include any skill specific to interactions.
9.2 A reflective journal entry

A simple format for a learning journal would be to:

- Briefly describe the task, event or experience for reflection.
- Make note of your feelings at the time and now.
- Note any interpretations, analysis, conclusions and actions you had at the time.

Potential problems in journal writing:

- It can be time-consuming to keep a journal along with other activities/events taking place.
- Entries may be descriptive and emotional. Capturing what has happened is one thing; taking one step further to analyse and interpret what has happened is another.
- Reflection may be superficial and biased with the best intention. One common mistake is that learners generalise from a single and isolated event.
- There are also ethical implications. Writing a journal for one’s own purposes is different from writing as part of an assignment and with the knowledge that another party will read it.

10.1 Languages differ from each other

The first sentence was provided by Jandt (2001, p. 128), who cited examples of different word order from a variety of languages from *The Atlas of Languages* (London: Quarto, 1996). These are (S: subject; V: verb; O: object):

SVO   cats eat mice; e.g. English, Chinese, Swahili
SOV   cats mice eat; e.g. Japanese, Korean
VSO   eat cats mice; e.g. Classical Arabic, Welsh, Samoan
VOS   eat mice cats; e.g. Tzotzil (a Mayan language)
OSV   mice cats eat; e.g. Kabardian (a language of the northern Caucasus)
OVS   mice eat cats; e.g. Hixkaryana (a language of Brazil).

The second sentence was made up by myself. A Chinese translation with gloss is:

她奶奶/姥姥给了她两本书。
(Gloss: she paternal grandma/maternal grandma give (了/le particle indicating past tense) she two volume book)
Putonghua Chinese differentiates paternal from maternal grandma. There are no plural semantic markers for nouns. Plurality is instead indicated by numbers and/or lexical words.

The third example is from Slobin (1996, p.83). The closest Spanish translation with gloss is:

El pájaro salió del agujero del árbol volando hacia abajo.
(The bird exited of the hole of the tree flying towards below)

10.2 Cultural key words

Wierzbicka (1997b) discussed some criteria for selecting cultural key words. These include: whether the word in question is a common word, whether the word is frequently used in domains such as emotions or moral judgements, and whether the word is at the centre of a cluster of phrases or words (e.g. duša in Russian is related to na dušë (on the soul), v duše (in the soul) pod duše (after/to the soul), etc.).

The challenge in explaining what the cultural key words mean and what core cultural values they reflect is well demonstrated in Cortazzi and Shen’s study (2001), in which the researchers identified considerable differences in the understanding of six Chinese key words between Chinese university students and British university students who are learning Chinese.

11.1 Cultural paradoxes

The three examples are from Osland and Bird (2000), where the authors argued for a model of ‘cultural sensemaking’ (taking into account contexts, schema, the influence of cultural values and cultural history in making sense of cultural paradoxes). To account for the paradoxical individualistic vs. charitable behaviour among Americans, they argued that American society has long possessed an extensive network of associations and regarded the act of giving as prestigious. Financial arrangements such as tax relief also encourage philanthropy. In the case of missing simpatía among Costa Ricans, they argued that simpatía is applicable among in-group members, i.e. family members or friends. Customers are considered to be out-group members and therefore simpatía does not apply to interactions between bank employees and customers. In the third example, they suggested that when signing a contract, Japanese business people are guided by collectivism, a different value, taking precedence over uncertainty avoidance (a phenomenon they called ‘value trumping’). Another possibility is that many Japanese recognise the limits of contracts and the difficulties of foreseeing all contingencies.
These paradoxes, in my view, illustrate some major problems if one tries to provide a cultural account of behaviours and patterns identified among a group of people. While culture influences ways of thinking and behaviour, not everything is accountable in terms of cultural values. In the case of Japanese contracts, ambiguity may result simply from the lack of technical knowledge and resources in drawing up contracts. Resorting to value trumping can only weaken the general applicability of cultural values. See further discussion on problems with a cultural account in the main text of Chapter 11.

11.2 Why choose a Filipina?

Written in English, the extracts pitch themselves at an English-speaking audience through a spin on generalisations and stereotypes associated with the cultural groups.

The first text ‘sells’ Filipinas as being beautiful, family-oriented, and easy with regard to communication. Interestingly, it talks about cultural compatibility. It assumes that sharing the same religion leads to greater compatibility. It also positions Filipinas against other Asian groups.

In the second text, a comparison is made between Filipinas and other Asian groups, especially the groups who eat with ‘chopsticks’ (Chinese) or bow all the time (Japanese). It refers to frequently cited ‘face’ in Asian cultures. The colloquial style and occasional grammatical mistakes, whether or not by design, help to create a sense of informality and casualness and, most importantly, a sense of otherness.

12.1 Who am I?

The Twenty Statement Test (TST), designed by Kuhn and McPartland (1954), is a test about one’s sense of self and identity. One way to analyse your own description is to classify your answers in two groups, for example, whether you are talking about your social roles (such as son, teacher and friend) or personal traits (such as happy, funny and big). There are age- and gender-related differences in self-statement. Younger persons are likely to describe themselves more in terms of personal traits while older people more in terms of social roles. Cross-cultural differences in the frequency of categories used for self-statements were reported in Bond and Cheung (1983).

12.2 ‘This is for the UK passport holder’

In the conversation, B did not respond to A’s request in the subsequent turn. Instead, she made a statement, assuming A, who looked like a Chinese, was queuing in the wrong place, since there was a separate area for non-British nationals. However, A ignored the ascription of ‘foreigner’ by saying ‘I know’ and reinstated his previous request.