

*Intercultural competence means possessing the necessary attitudes and reflective and behavioural skills and using these to behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations.*

Interkulturelle Kompetenz – Schlüsselkompetenz des 21. Jahrhunderts.  
Thesenpapier der Bertelsmann Stiftung auf der Basis der interkulturellen  
Kompetenzmodelle von Dr. Darla Deardorff (2006). Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, p. 5.  
Translated by the authors.

# Introduction

This book is intended for trainers of Business English (BE) who want to enter into the area of training in intercultural communication. They may be teaching in a range of situations such as companies, universities, universities of applied sciences or further education colleges. The increase in international business as a result of globalization has led inevitably to an increase in the demand for courses in intercultural communication. In many ways language teachers are in an ideal position to provide this training, in other ways they may feel ill-equipped.

The field of intercultural competence and intercultural communication has been made into something which only 'experts' have had access to up to now. Many BE trainers may feel they have to attend special courses or obtain further qualifications before they can run courses but at the same time realize intuitively that intercultural communication must have something to do, not only with culture and communication, but also with business and with English, both things they are dealing with all the time. As well as this, most of us will realize that basically communication means the use of language, so surely language experts must have something to contribute.

If you are reading this book, you have probably been asked either to run a course in intercultural communication or you are thinking of doing so yourself. Of course, as there are often units dealing with culture in general English and BE course books, you may just want to know more about the field. You may also be responsible for running courses in intercultural communication at a college or university without actually teaching them yourself, or you may want to select or design material.

## Focus

The main focus of this book is on Business English (BE), i.e. the English used to conduct business internationally and interculturally. It is estimated that 80% of all business

encounters now take place with no English native speakers present so that it is clear that the English used in these encounters may not be (perhaps cannot be) a particular native speaker variety, whether British, US or whatever. Instead it will be something else, often known as International English, EIL or EFLF or even BELF. We will discuss in this book what this form of language is. Participants in intercultural encounters who are using English will also not always have the same level of English as each other. Although it is possible to do business (even successfully) with a low level of a common language without an interpreter, it is usually more difficult than if all parties to the business speak a common language at about the same level. These particular features of business nowadays (no native speakers present and different levels of English) may complicate the situation slightly but make it all the more necessary to provide learners of BE with the appropriate training and the appropriate language for their international business.

As you will see, we distinguish between **intercultural competence** (the title of this book) and **intercultural communication**. We see intercultural competence as the ultimate aim of any training course and as something which learners can achieve through training in intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is an essential part of intercultural competence and applies to the practical training and its application.

This book is primarily about intercultural communication training for BE trainers. We have conducted many courses on this subject for teachers of general English as well as BE trainers and hope to be able to make the topic as easy to understand as possible and to deal with the practical issues facing BE trainers in their everyday work. Any BE trainer who has started to become involved with intercultural communication training will know that it is an extremely large field with very many academic and specialized books available. There are several groups and mailing lists as well as journals dealing only with the subject. This is in addition to the treatment of intercultural communication as a topic in general ELT and BE publications.

Culture is not a theoretical subject, although it may sometimes seem that way. Most people will relate the theory to their own experience, and culture and intercultural encounters are things which most BE trainers will often have first-hand experience of. The theory on its own may be of interest to BE trainers but if they need it professionally, then it will be the practical application they will be looking for. Much of the discussion and controversy on intercultural issues is a result of the different academic areas which regard the subject as their own special domain. These include anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, organizational theory and, of course, language, to name but a few. The approaches used by academics from these fields differ, as they see the subject from different and sometimes incompatible angles. While we are quite convinced that it is valuable for BE trainers to know something about the theory behind culture and intercultural communication, we assume that readers of this book will not initially have the time (perhaps also not the inclination) to go into the theory in great detail. We hope to provide enough theory for your purposes and enough ideas on where to find out more. Most importantly, we want to provide you with the information you need to train your learners in the best possible way.

**This book aims to condense the most important, and in particular the practical, aspects of training in intercultural communication and make them accessible to practising BE trainers so that they can do the best job possible when teaching courses in intercultural communication.**

There are certain aspects of intercultural communication which are not covered in depth in this book, although we have attempted to touch on as many as possible. For those who want to know more, a reading list is provided with suggestions for further reading. All of

### What is it?

EIL is the abbreviation for *English as an International Language*, ELF for *English as a Lingua Franca* and BELF for *Business English as a Lingua Franca*.

### To think about

This book is intended as a guide to the theory but more importantly how theory is related to and affects the practical issues facing learners in intercultural business encounters and the content of training.

### ► Further information

the books on the list have references to other books. The difficulty is sorting out what you really need to know from the literature available. This book is intended to provide some help with this.

### Terms

In this book, we use the term *trainer* to refer to BE trainers. We assume that the courses will take place with adults so, although we occasionally use the verb *to teach*, this is used either very generally or very specifically to refer to school teachers. When we say *learner*, we mean any participant in a course, whatever term may be used in your context (*student, trainee, coachee*). The term *(business) partner* is used to mean the partner in communication, the person with whom the communication takes place. We use the term *business partners* to mean anyone with whom business is conducted and at whatever level, i.e. not only as a legal partner in business.

So far, in this introduction, we have only spoken of intercultural communication but BE trainers will have heard many other terms such as *intercultural competence, cross-cultural communication, interculturality, third culture, transcultural familiarization* etc. We have tried to keep things as simple as possible and have made the following assumptions both about the course and about the nature of the communication which learners want to be able to deal with. These are that

- the first and second encounters in business communication are the most important for laying the foundations for successful business dealings, of whatever kind and however low- or high-level.
- We are not dealing with intercultural communication either in the context of long periods of residence in or emigration to another country or culture, although there are certainly parts of this book which will be useful for courses leading to this.
- We are also not talking about romantic encounters, although again, some of the content may apply to these.

### Some important points

There are several basic things which language teachers should remember about intercultural communication. All these apply just as much to BE.

**The most important thing to be said is that intercultural communication is not rocket science.** Intercultural communication is something many of us experience and practice every day without thinking about it. This book will introduce you to the most important things you need to know and should make it easier for you to run a course in intercultural communication for business purposes. This will involve acceptance on your part of certain things, some of which we mention below.

**Intercultural competence is not a matter of psychology.**

**First and second encounters are what count in business.**

**There is no such thing as general interculturality.**

**You never deal with cultures, always with individuals.**

**Communication without language is hardly possible.**

**Intercultural communication may affect business. Mistakes may have serious consequences and affect your learners' careers.**

**Mistakes are not usually grammar mistakes and may not even be language mistakes.**

#### Remember

Real-life intercultural communication is never theoretical and does not take place in a vacuum. It is always for a purpose, whether business, romantic, official or educational, among others. It always involves individuals, each with their own personalities and skills.

### This book and how to use it

The book consists of this introduction and 15 chapters. It is divided into two parts, which can roughly be called theoretical and practical. Part I is only for trainers and is intended to replace the necessity for reading a large amount of books. Part II covers the practical implications for courses and provides examples of material and activities. The book also includes a list of suggestions for further reading with relevant websites, a glossary and a CD-ROM.

Each chapter starts with a quotation and some introductory questions to give you an idea of the content of the chapter. There are boxes in the margin providing cross-references to other relevant chapters as well as boxes which are headed **Remember**, **Did you know?**, **To think about** and **What is it?** There is an example of each of these in this introduction. Each chapter ends with further questions for you to consider and answer in relation to your own (cultural or training) context.

**Chapter 1** is essential reading as it will help you to understand how culture can be defined and how this has been done in the past.

**Chapter 2** is about the relationship between culture and language.

**Chapter 3** is about the four big names in the intercultural field (Hall, Hofstede and Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner) as you will not be able to avoid contact with these if you venture into training in intercultural communication. We attempt to describe the current position on what was, in its time, ground-breaking research and also to provide alternatives to the mainstream view of culture thus disseminated, still highly prevalent today and often accepted unquestioningly. To do this, we give you the essential information about the work done so far by the four scholars mentioned and then include a description of work done by other scholars, perhaps less well-known, bringing it up to date with reference to criticism of the approaches used and further developments.

As the question of language level is always an important one, **Chapter 4** has been devoted to the Common European Framework of Reference for Foreign Languages (CEFR) and its increasing importance. Although this may not be obvious, the CEFR is closely linked to intercultural communication and the promotion of intercultural competence in Europe.

**Chapter 5** is about one of the key issues in intercultural communication, politeness. We describe the different views on politeness and, most importantly, the different ways in which politeness is expressed in different cultures.

**Chapter 6** addresses what will certainly be one of the main issues in BE trainers' minds, that of International English, what this is and how it affects the individual trainer's and learner's ideas of what to teach and learn.

The topic of **Chapter 7** is corporate culture. Much of what is said about culture in the previous chapters can be applied to companies as well as countries. Learners will almost always be dealing with individuals not only representing a culture but also representing a company, which may or may not have its origins in the culture of the employees.

**Chapter 8** deals with what to teach as well as the practical issues faced by BE trainers when starting or taking on a course in intercultural communication. This is what we feel, based on the state of research in the field, BE trainers should be doing in their courses, in particular with regard to language. Our recommendations relate directly to the practical suggestions in Part II of the book.

**Chapters 9 to 14** deal with the main sections of a course in intercultural communication. Whether you read all these chapters or concentrate on the ones you feel will be of most use to you and your learners may depend on the answers to the questions about the course. Although you can select the chapters according to your and your learners'

#### Did you know?

The CEFR has been adopted officially and unofficially not only all over Europe, but in many countries outside Europe too.

particular interests and needs, we would nonetheless encourage you to go through them all and then decide which sections of a course are most relevant for you and to what extent.

**Chapter 15** deals with the question of assessment of intercultural competence, how this has been done up to now and what lessons can be learnt from language testing and assessment.

The book ends with some concluding remarks on the first and second parts as well as the content and the views on intercultural competence and training covered in the book.

It has not always been possible to avoid using technical terms in the text, so those which may be unfamiliar are explained briefly in the **Glossary**.

Clearly a book like this can only cover a certain section of the whole field of intercultural communication, and although we feel we have concentrated on the most important parts, we have also provided some suggestions for **Further information**.

The **CD-ROM** contains worksheets and additional material (such as checklists) for trainers as well as material for trainers to use in a course. Some of these can be adapted to suit your needs and the needs of your learners. It also includes relevant links.

▶ See page 200.

### One final point

The approach suggested in this book may be different from what you have expected, especially as far as the theory of intercultural communication is concerned. Our findings and conclusions are based on recent research. We have drawn conclusions from them which we feel may affect the nature of intercultural training courses and link them far more closely than has been the case so far with language courses, in this case BE courses. Thus, the content of the book combines possibly new and unexpected elements with familiar elements, possibly in a way which has not been made obvious before. We feel that BE trainers may intuitively have been doing something similar in their courses for some time and hope very much that this new approach will be welcomed and adopted so that the role of language in intercultural training achieves more prominence.

### Where do I go from here?

■ As Chapter 1 is a general overview, it is best to read this first. You can then proceed to the chapter which applies most to your situation or interests you most. We would recommend you read at least some of Part I before going on to Part II and of course are quite happy if you read the whole book from beginning to end!

Whether you read all these chapters or concentrate on the ones you feel will be of most use to you and your learners may depend on the answers to the questions about the course. Although you can select the chapters according to your and your learners' particular interests and needs, we would nonetheless encourage you to go through them all and then decide which sections of a course are most relevant for you and to what extent. ■