CRITICAL ISSUES

ICE
INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE
IN ENGLISH

IDENTITY
SELF-AWARENESS
GENDER
COMMUNICATION STYLES
CORPORATE CULTURE

CONTENTS:

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CULTURAL CONCEPTS & LANGUAGE

We have all experienced misunderstanding, confusion or annoyance arising from an unexpected or apparently inappropriate use of language. This can occur when we use English in international contexts. For hidden cultural codes, while not in the language itself, exist nonetheless and are frequently transferred from the native language of the speakers themselves to English. In fact, it may be the very use of English, with the assumption that the same language is being spoken by all, which leads to misunderstandings through its concealment of underlying culture-based concepts, which can be utterly incompatible.

Photo: MS Cliparts

Read the following true scenarios and discuss them with your partner.

(1)

A Puerto Rican woman, who had been living for many years in the United States, was visited by her father. During his stay, he helped her take care of her son (his grandson). When she thanked him for his help, he became angry and felt hurt.

Helen Spencer-Oatey (2008). Culturally Speaking. Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory (2nd ed.). p.46

(2)

This incident involved an American as well as a Korean couple who lived next door to him. When the American returned from the hospital after a night of very little sleep fol-lowing his daughter's birth, he met the couple in the parking lot. When they heard the good news, the Korean woman said, solemnly, that he 'looked much older'.

Adapted from: Yamuna Kachru/Cecil L. Nelson (2006). World Englishes in Asian Contexts. Hong Kong University Press. p.54

TRAINER'S NOTES

AIM
- to emphasize the importance of language in intercultural encounters
- to sensitise participants to the way in which English may be used by people of different cultures

LEAD-IN
Before handing out the text, ask participants to think of standard phrases in their own language (s) and translate these literally into English. Is the way in which the phrase is used conveyed in the translation? An example could be *Auf Wiedersehen* or *Au revoir* (literally "Until we meet again") used mainly if there is no further meeting planned or even possible. Ask participants what the possible reactions would be if the phrase were used in English in its literal translation. A discussion may ensure as to whether Anglo-American conventions should always apply when using English.
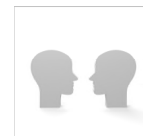
WORKSHEET
The whole group can be divided into two groups and each given one text to discuss using the following questions: Why is this a CI? What possible reasons are there for what happened? Participants can think of several options and present these to the others. How should the affected person react so as to maintain a positive relationship? - In the first incident the parent is upset because it is not common in their own culture to thank members of the family for favours which should be taken for granted. The use of the phrase in this particular situation is not appropriate. However in the USA, thanking someone may be seen simply as showing appreciation and thanks can be given explicitly to anyone in almost any situation without causing offence. The same applies to the phrase "(I'm) Sorry" which is not always an apology but often simply something which is said in certain situations.

In the second incident, the phrase has been translated from Korean and is used to imply that the person is entering upon a new and more mature and responsible phase of his/her life, here taking responsibility for a family, so is a form of congratulation. In many European cultures, saying that someone looks older is an insult.

A possible way of dealing with this type of situation, i.e. where one is not sure of what to say and how to react in a given situation, may be to use meta-communication: "In my language / culture, we say ....." Participants may find it useful to practise phrases of this type.

FOLLOW-UP
Participants can be asked to find a phrase in their own language which may cause a similar reaction if used in English. Here are two examples:

A. Concept of shame, feeling ashamed: In Anglo-English context 'I'm ashamed' would be interpreted to mean "disconcerted by a feeling of distress or humiliation caused by consciousness of the guilt or folly of oneself or an associate." … However, in Persian (Farsi) the expression *sharmandam*, which may be glossed in English as 'I'm ashamed', is associated with various speech acts such as expressing gratitude, offering goods and services, apologising, etc. See Farzad Sharifian (2011). Cultural Conceptualisations and Language. p.102

B. Concept of politeness: e.g. in a culture like that of the U.S.A "polite" and "friendly" are perceived as more or less similar concepts. However, in Japanese culture, polite and friendly are discrete concepts and follow parameters of superior vs. inferior status, in-group vs. out-group and male vs. female. Therefore, a Japanese learning American English needs to learn the American conceptual structure of "polite" and "friendly". Sachiko Ide, Beverly Hill, Yukiko M. Carnes, Tsunao Ogino, Akiko Kawasaki (2005). The concept of politeness: An empirical study of American English and Japanese. In: Richard Watts, Sachiko Ide, Konrad Ehlich (eds.)(2005). Politeness in Language. Studies in its History, theory and Practise. 2nd ed. p.291

BACKGROUND & FURTHER READING
A discussion of the use of "Sorry" in England can be found in Kate Fox: *Watching the English* (2008). There are many languages which have no fixed phrase for "Thank you" or only one which is rarely used. A failure to say anything to express gratitude is therefore not always seen as rude and certainly does not mean that the person does not feel gratitude.

Self-disclosure is one of the main things which people do when they develop personal relationships. This applies to almost all cultural or ethnic groups. Self-disclosure is what you do when you give significant information about yourself that others would not normally know.

Know thyself !
How much information do you reveal about yourself and to which people?

Instructions: Answer the following question without thinking about your answers for too long. Choose one of the following answers for each:

SA = Strongly Agree
MA = Moderately Agree
MD = Moderately Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

1

Generally, I am happy to talk to anyone about the following

		SA	MA	MD	SD
1.	My interests and hobbies	4	3	2	1
2.	My ambitions and dreams	4	3	2	1
3.	My work or studies	4	3	2	1
4.	My earnings	4	3	2	1
5.	My political opinions	4	3	2	1
6.	My views on race	4	3	2	1
7.	My ideal partners	4	3	2	1
8.	Family conflicts	4	3	2	1
9.	My feelings about my appearance	4	3	2	1
10.	My feelings about my body	4	3	2	1
11.	What I like about myself	4	3	2	1
12.	What I dislike about myself	4	3	2	1

2

Generally, I am happy to talk to my best friends about the following

		SA	MA	MD	SD
1.	My interests and hobbies	4	3	2	1
2.	My ambitions and dreams	4	3	2	1
3.	My work or studies	4	3	2	1
4.	My earnings	4	3	2	1
5.	My political opinions	4	3	2	1
6.	My views on race	4	3	2	1
7.	My ideal partners	4	3	2	1
8.	Family conflicts	4	3	2	1
9.	My feelings about my appearance	4	3	2	1
10.	My feelings about my body	4	3	2	1
11.	What I like about myself	4	3	2	1
12.	What I dislike about myself	4	3	2	1

3

Points: Add up your scores for anyone and best friends

Anyone: _____

Best Friends: _____

You can have a number of points between 12 and 48. The higher the number of points the more ready you are to talk to people about the topics.

Compare your scores with others. Have you learnt anything about yourself? How do you react to people who behave differently to you?

Adapted from S.Ting-Toomey/L.C.Chung (2005). Understanding Intercultural Communication.183ff.

TRAINER'S NOTES

ICE CRITICAL ISSUES - Train-The-Trainer Course

INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION PROCESS: SELF-DISCLOSURE

Self-disclosure is one of the key factors in developing a personalised relationship in any culture or ethnic group. Self-disclosure is the deliberate process of revealing significant information about oneself that would not normally be known.

Know Thyself
Assessing Your Readiness to Self-Disclose to Strangers Versus Best Friends

Instructions: Recall how you generally feel and communicate in various situations. Let your first inclination be your guide and circle the number in the scale that best reflects your overall impression of yourself. The following scale is used for each item:

SA = Strongly Agree
MA = Moderately Agree
MD = Moderately Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

1 Generally speaking, I readily disclose to _strangers_ about the following topics:

		SA	MA	MD	SD
1.	My interests and hobbies	4	3	2	1
2.	My goals and dreams	4	3	2	1
3.	My work or study situations	4	3	2	1
4.	How much money I make	4	3	2	1
5.	My political opinions	4	3	2	1
6.	My racial beliefs and viewpoints	4	3	2	1
7.	My dream dates	4	3	2	1
8.	Conflicts with my family members	4	3	2	1
9.	My feelings about my face	4	3	2	1
10.	My feelings about my body	4	3	2	1
11.	My positive qualities that I really like	4	3	2	1
12.	My own negative personality traits	4	3	2	1

2 Generally speaking, I readily disclose to my _best friends_ about the following topics:

		SA	MA	MD	SD
1.	My interests and hobbies	4	3	2	1
2.	My goals and dreams	4	3	2	1
3.	My work or study situations	4	3	2	1
4.	How much money I make	4	3	2	1
5.	My political opinions	4	3	2	1
6.	My racial beliefs and viewpoints	4	3	2	1
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10.	My feelings about my body	4	3	2	1
11.	My positive qualities that I really like	4	3	2	1
12.	My own negative personality traits	4	3	2	1

3 **Scoring:** Add up the scores on all the 'strangers' disclosure items and you will find your stangers disclosure score. *Strangers Disclosure score:* _____ Add up the scores on all the 'best friend' items and you will find your best friends disclosure score. Best Friends Disclosure score: _____.

Interpretation: Scores on each self-disclosure dimension can range from 12 to 48; the higher the score, the more you are ready to self-disclose to strangers and/or best friends on a variety of topics.

Reflection Probes: Check out your two scores with a colleague. Interview each other and ask each other the following questions: Where did you learn your self-disclosure habits? How do you feel about people who self-disclose too much? How do you feel about people who self-disclose too little?

elc - European Language Competence
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Adapted from S.Ting-Toomey/L.C.Chung(2005). Understanding Intercultural Communication.183ff.

AIM
- To raise awareness of what may seem 'normal' or 'abnormal' behaviour in communication.
- To discuss one of the aspects from the Worksheet in more detail.
- To learn and practice techniques for giving and avoiding giving personal information.

LEAD- IN

Participants discuss what personal information they would usually give (and not give) to one person in an initial business encounter. Does this differ if they are talking to a group? Depending on how homogenous the group is and how varied the answers, it may be necessary to point out that this may vary considerably from culture to culture and even within one culture.

Ask participants to think back to the information they gave about themselves at the beginning of the course. Which information did they NOT give? Why not?

Ask participants to say what questions they consider too personal or even rude and how they deal with these.

WORKSHEET

Participants answer the questions individually and then compare with one person and then with others. Discuss the reasons for their answers.

Ask participants to answer the questions as if they were a "typical" person from their culture. Do the answers differ? How do the answers differ from those which might be given by someone of an older or younger generation / from a different part of the country / a different job or social class?

FOLLOW-UP

Any small talk activity is suitable. Participants can think of suitable questions for small talk and conduct a conversation which may take place at a first meeting.

Discuss ways of answering difficult questions and / or asking for possibly sensitive information.

BACKGROUND AND FURTHER READING
This is an adapted version of a questionnaire given in S.Ting-Toomey/L.C.Chung (2005). Understanding Intercultural Communication.183ff. *"Culture is defined in this book as a learned meaning system that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meanings and symbols that are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community." (p. 28)* One of the first steps in intercultural training should, therefore, consist of raising awareness of what may seem 'natural' or 'normal' to me, but which may, in many cases, be the expression of the culture(s) I share.

For more training material in this context see ICE—INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH — Course Material: Section 2 "My Own Cultural Programming"

Self-Disclosure:
SHOWING GRIEF

Read the incident and think about what has happened. Then discuss the incident with the group, paying particular attention to the questions.

The following incident is reported by Richard Gesteland, a Danish businessman, in his book *Cross-Cultural Business Behavior*: When working in Singapore he decided to learn Mandarin. So he hired Stefanie, a pleasant young woman who had recently immigrated from Taiwan, to tutor him. But due to the unexpected death of both of his parents he was forced to stop the lessons for about a month. It was on a Saturday after he had got back to Singapore that Stefanie dropped by to enquire why he had missed over a month's worth of lessons. Suffering from grief compounded by jet lag and exhaustion, he briefly said that both of his parents had just died. A stricken look flashed across Stefanie's face for just a fraction of a second, and she gasped. Then the young woman suddenly laughed out loud, right in his face, and proceeded to giggle for several seconds. A few weeks later Stefanie stopped coming and Richard had to find a new Mandarin tutor.

Photo: MS cliparts

TRAINER'S NOTES
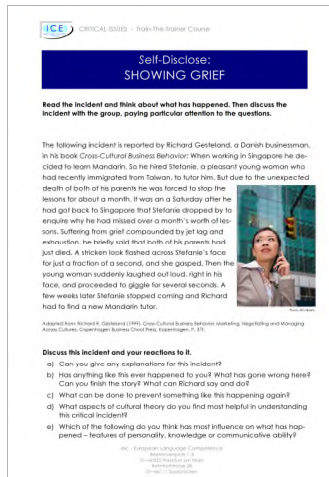
AIM
- To make participants aware of different communication styles
- To give participants ways of dealing with difficult situations

LEAD-IN
Ask participants how they would react if someone told them that they had suffered a personal tragedy (i.e. death of a close member of their family). Collect reactions without comments.

WORKSHEET
Use the 4-step method as described on page 4f.

FOLLOW-UP
Discuss the following questions:
- Can you give any explanations for this incident?
- Has anything like this ever happened to you? What has gone wrong here? What can Richard say and do?
- What can be done to prevent something like this happening?
- What aspects of cultural theory do you find most helpful in understanding this critical incident?
- Which of the following do you think has most influence on what has happened – features of personality, knowledge or communicative ability?

SUGGESTED ANSWERS & BACKGROUND

This worksheet provides an example of differences in the display of emotions and in personal disclosure in a critical encounter between Richard (Danish) and Stefanie (Chinese). Both seem to be unaware of each other's concept of 'appropriate' communication in this context, although they have worked together harmoniously for some time. This incident provokes a crisis of trust on both sides and the eventual break-off of contact. In fact, everything seems to go wrong in this episode. Stefanie would have considered the way the information was given as highly inconsiderate and inappropriate. Therefore, the reason given by Richard for his extended absence and the way it was expressed might have appeared to her, perhaps, as not true. For her, any information of such a serious character touches on levels of personal feeling (in this case grief) and would need to be addressed more indirectly or even not at all, given the nature of their relationship. Finally, breaking off contact could only be done without explicitly addressing Richard's faux-pas.

Richard Gesteland, the author of this episode, distinguishes between the cognitive and emotional aspects of relationship building and points out that, intellectually, he was quite aware that people from some Asian cultures hide their nervousness, embarrassment or severe stress with a laugh. Raised in the Confucian way, Stefanie probably revered her parents. So the sudden and, in her eyes, inappropriate revelation of Richard's loss might have come as a terrible shock to her. Nevertheless Richard's immediate reaction to her laugh was visceral. Even though he understood rationally what had happened he had difficulty relating to Stefanie as he had before the incident." (see Richard R. Gesteland (1999). Cross-Cultural Business Behavior. Marketing, Negotiating and Managing Across Cultures. Copenhagen Business Chool Press. Kopenhagen. 37f.)

In other words: Knowledge about cultural codes 'behind' the language used, in this case English as a lingua franca (ELF), is not enough. The use of ELF by both parties (i.e. neither is a native speaker of English) may even mean that culture-bound attitudes, expressed in diverse discourse strategies, are largely concealed from the other participant. What remained concealed in this incident were incompatible views about the time, location, communication and other circumstances of personal disclosure (e.g. how close the relationship was before the incident) which caused the irreconcilable clash. It should therefore be made clear that the global use of ELF requires its interculturally appropriate use. This undoubtedly presents a challenge both for trainers and participants , requiring intercultural knowledge and sensitivity but also, and perhaps primarily, meta-communicative skills,.

"Metacultural competence … involves an awareness of the need for conceptual negotiation strategies to make communication of cultural conceptualizations smooth and effective…In general… metacultural competence enables interlocutors to communicate and negotiate cultural meanings during the process of intercultural communication.(see: Sharifian, F. (2013): Cultural Linguistics and Intercultural Communication. In: Sharifian, F. / Jamarani, M. (eds.): Language and Intercultural Communication in the New Era)

A D A P T A T I O N   O R   I D E N T I T Y ?

David is a French engineer who has recently been assigned to his company's sub-sidiary in Finland. Here is his report about something that happened soon after he arrived in Helsinki.

"After two weeks, we had one of those afternoons that are meant to consolidate team spirit […] and there, first shock, huge cultural shock, well, I had my first sauna at that time, and, well, I started to adopt a little bit … the Finnish spirit regarding partying [laughs] […] The first sauna, it was quite an experi-ence. The day after, I had written a long e-mail to all my friends in France, explaining all the details […]
I'm not very modest, but well, to be there with your boss… and then again the heat, it had burnt my nose, it had burnt my mouth, everything. And then the cold in the sea, because we went to bathe then, with water which was around 12-13 degrees!"

Photo: www.iStockphoto.com

Martin Fougère (2008). Adaptation and Identity. In Helen Spencer-Oatey (ed.) (2008). Culturally Speaking. Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory. p. 197f.

DISCUSS:

- David talks about an all-male sauna visit. How do you feel about mixed saunas?

- What would you do and say if you were invited by your host / business partner to a sauna?

- At what point would you reach your limits?

- What do you do and say if this happens?

TRAINER'S NOTES

AIM
- To raise awareness concerning individual limits of adaptation.
- To practice polite strategies of dealing with difficult invitations.

LEAD-IN
Ask participants at what point they would reach their limits. Examples include such things as attending certain sporting events (e.g. blood-sports, bull-fights, boxing matches), eating certain foods or taking part in mixed-sex activities or activities involving scant clothing or nudity.

WORKSHEET
Participants discuss the following questions:
David talks about an all-male sauna visit. How do you feel about mixed saunas?
What would you do and say if you were invited by your host / business partner to a sauna?
At what point would you reach your limits?
What do you do and say if this happens?
Practise refusing politely

FOLLOW-UP
Identify more difficult issues which might take learners to their individual limits: e.g. Food, Karaoke, gender roles and practise communication strategies for dealing with critical situations of this kind without risking a positive relationship.

BACKGROUND
"Bicultural or multicultural organizations can potentially offer a hybrid cultural space that enables people from different cultural groups to work together in a good atmosphere, and to develop and change together. [David and three colleagues] … experienced saunas with their Finnish workmates, in socialising events organized by their workplaces. All four present it as a fascinating discovery after an initial shock, and at least two of them […] argue that it significantly affected their whole experience at the Finnish workplace and much enhanced their appreciation of it. The Finnish idea of sauna as a social place, where people are all equal, have nothing to hide and thus speak frankly and calmly in a spirit of togetherness, explains why it turned out to help tremendously in getting to know the Finnish workmates better."

Martin Fougère (2008). Adaptation and Identity. In Helen Spencer-Oatey (ed.) (2008). Culturally Speaking. Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory. 198.

For discourse strategies which might be used for refusing politely see

MONA ELTAHAWY LOSES HER DEBATE AGAINST AN ISLAMIC WOMAN

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmZ1qKcsDv8

Mona Eltahawy is an award-winning columnist and an international public speaker on Arab and Muslim issues. She is based in New York. Mona was born on Aug. 1, 1967 in Port Said, Egypt and has lived in the U.K., Saudi Arabia and Israel. She calls herself a proud liberal Muslim. In 2005, she was named a Muslim Leader of Tomorrow by the American Society for Muslim Advancement and she is a member of the Communications Advisory Group for   Musawah, the global movement for justice and equality in the Muslim family.

WIKIPEDIA

Hebah Ahmed is a Muslim American with a Masters Degree in Mechanical Engineering from UIUC*. She was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee to Egyptian immigrants. She currently resides in Albuquerque, NM with her husband and two children. Hebah is a social activist who works to dispel the myths about Islam and women in Islam through community presentations and panel discussions. She also heads *Daughterz of Eve*, a local Muslim girls youth group.

* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

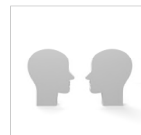http://muslimmatters.org/author/hebah/

TRAINER'S NOTES

AIM
• To confront learners with a possibly distressing example of reciprocal intercultural perception.
• To discuss ways of dealing with controversial issues in a non-confrontational way.
• To identify personal limits of accepting 'otherness'.

LEAD-IN
Make sure all participants know what a burkha is. If necessary, let them collect information in the Internet. Discuss what they know and their views briefly and give them the information on the debate.

WORKSHEET
Before showing the clip, divide the group into two smaller groups and give each group one side. Ask them to note down all the arguments given by the woman for her position. When they have watched the clip, allow them to discuss the arguments. Depending on the time and the interests of the group, these can then be exchanged verbally but should (also) be collected on two flip chart sheets in the form of notes or guiding points. Each group can briefly present their arguments. Give participants a number of points each. The number will depend on the size of the group but should be between 3 and 5. Ideally each person should be given this number of stickers. Each participant can then give his/her votes to the best arguments, dividing them up as he/she wants (from all for one argument to one for 3-5 arguments). Make it clear that these votes should not be given for the participants' own personal viewpoint but for what they feel is the validity of the arguments given by the two women. The results can be discussed with the whole group.

FOLLOW-UP
• Discuss ways of dealing with this topic neutrally or reacting when it is brought up.
• Encourage learners to do internet research on current political and judicial cases in Europe and elsewhere concerning women wearing a burkha, e.g France banned the wearing of burkhas in public in 2010.
• Discuss the growing number of intercultural and multilingual couples — the group's experience with this, what advantages and difficulties they associate with this.

BACKGROUND
"Understanding gendered historical contexts and the gendered relationship of culture and power, we argue, is crucial for a critical consciousness of intercultural communication. … British and French colonial sojourners to Muslim regions, such as North Africa, would have had different reactions to gender divisions in the 18th, 19th and even the early 20th centuries, when even in the West there were established cultural and institutional structures that forbade women's and girls' immodesty in the public sphere."

[Lengel, L. / Martin, S.C. (2010). Situation Gender in Critical Intercultural Communication Studies. In: Nakayama, T.K. / Halualani, R.T. (eds.)(2010). The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication. p. 338.]

For intercultural intimate relationships cf. Piller, I. (2011). Intercultural Communication. A Critical Introduction. Chpts. 7&8.

My Personalitity and My Culture(s)

Meet Mr. Kim

Korean
language community

Lives in Seoul,
married, 2 young children

Corporate
culture

Mechanical engineer
for Kolon Co., Seoul

Prestigious company

Age: early forties

Generational
discourse

His parents grew up during
Japanese occupation.

His children grow up in an affluent
environment.

Member of professional association
for mechanical engineers

Professional
group

Korean male community practice,
i.e. social relaxation mostly with other men

Gender discourse

Worked on a joint-venture team
in Frankfurt/M.
May 2012- June 2014

Utilitarian
discourse

Confucian
community of values

Adapted from Ron Scollon & Suzanne Wong Scollon (2001). Intercultural Communication. A Discourse Approach. 2nd ed. p.181f

TRAINER'S NOTES

ICE CRITICAL ISSUES

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Photo @istockphot.com

AIM

- To illustrate a non-essentialist concept of 'culture' and 'personality'.
- To raise awareness of the multi-facetted and dynamic character of individual identity.
- To emphasise (once again) that in international encounters we meet individuals rather than 'cultures'.

LEAD-IN

Ask participants what they know about 'THE' Americans, Russians, Koreans etc. Then ask them where their perceptions come from and whether they have met people from the respective country. It may be helpful to address stereotypes in this context and the inevitability of using these. Nevertheless we should be clear about their being stereotypes.

WORKSHEET

Hand out the worksheet and ask participants to identify the meaning of each of the boxes. 'Utilitarian discourse' e.g. refers to a type of communication which is primarily goal-oriented (as opposed to one focussing on relationship-building).

FOLLOW-UP

Following Mr. Kim's example, ask participants to draw a design of their personal 'cultural mix' and perhaps even quantify their relevance. Ask them what aspect of their personality they see as purely individual and what they consider as culture-based.
Encourage them to consider fields of communication such as hobbies and other interests and activities.

BACKGROUND

To explain the dynamic and principally 'fuzzy' character of both culture and personality it may be important to note that, firstly, all the white boxes represent stereotypical simplifications of the respective category. Language communities, for example, are not homogenous, but are composed of numerous regional and social varieties. (Note that standard language variations, e.g. of Oxford-English, Français Parisien, Hochdeutsch etc., are political constructs and not language-inherent!) Similarly, Confucian values are not shared in the same way by all members of so-called Confucian cultures, generational discourse is not homogenous etc.

Secondly, it may be helpful to relate to research findings of personality theory. The following six points are shared by most contributors in the field: (1) personal identity is not fixed, (2) personal identity is constructed within established contexts and may vary from one context to another, (3) contexts are moderated and defined by intervening social variables and are expressed through language, (4) personal identity is salient in every communicative context, (5) personal identity informs social relationships and also the communicative exchanges that characterize them, and (6) more than one identity may be articulated in a given context in which case there will be a dynamic of identities management. [Omoniye, T. / White, G. (ed.) (2006): The Sociolinguistics of Identity. p.2]