Chapter 2— Culture and Communication

At a Glance

Understanding Cultures and Co-Cultures

Components of Cultures and Co-Cultures

How Culture Affects Communication

Communicating with Cultural Awareness

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

1. Define culture and explain how culture is acquired.

2. Differentiate in-groups and out-groups.

3. Define co-culture and identify examples of co-cultures.

4. Differentiate the components of culture and co-culture: symbols, language, values, and norms.

5. Contrast individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

6. Distinguish between low- and high-context cultures.

7. Differentiate low- and high-power-distance cultures.

8. Summarize how cultures vary in views about masculinity and femininity, and about men and women's roles.

9. Describe how cultures vary in their orientation toward time and uncertainty avoidance.

10. Describe strategies for communicating with cultural awareness.

11. List and summarize communication codes that vary across cultures.

Lecture Outline

I. Understanding cultures and co-cultures.
    A. What is culture?
        1. A **culture** is the totality of learned, shared symbols, language, values, and norms that distinguish one group of people from another.
        2. A **society** is a group of people who share a common culture.
    B. Distinguishing between in-groups and out-groups.
        1. **In-groups** refer to groups with whom we identify.
        2. **Out-groups** refer to groups we see as different from ourselves.
        3. Facebook exemplifies both in-groups and out-groups.
        4. Challenges of out-group status include higher stress levels, feelings of discomfort, and potential discrimination.
    C. Acquiring a culture.
        1. Culture is not necessarily related to or based on our **ethnicity**, which is our perception of our ancestry or heritage.
        2. Culture is not necessarily related to our **nationality**, which is our status as a citizen of a particular country.
        3. Culture is learned. **Enculturation** is the process of acquiring a culture.
    D. What is a co-culture?
        1. **Co-cultures** are groups of people who share values, customs, and norms related to mutual interests or characteristics besides their national citizenship.
        2. Culture is based on many variables, including shared activities and beliefs and mental and physical abilities.
        3. Many people identify with multiple co-cultures simultaneously.
        4. The Internet offers multiple opportunities for people to develop and participate in online co-cultures.

II. Components of cultures and co-cultures.
    A. Cultures vary in their symbols.
        1. A symbol is something that represents an idea.
        2. Each society uses symbols that carry particular meanings for its members.
    B. Cultures vary in their languages.
        1. Language allows for written and spoken communication.
        2. Language ensures that cultures and cultural ideas are passed from one generation to the next.
    C. Cultures vary in their values.
        1. Values are the standards a culture uses to judge how good, desirable, or beautiful something is.
        2. Values are cultural ideas about what ought to be.

D. Cultures vary in their norms.
   1. Norms are rules or expectations that guide people's behavior in a culture.
   2. What might be "normal" for one culture may be very different for another.
E. Co-cultures' distinctive symbols, language, values, and norms.
   1. Co-cultures frequently use jargon, or terminology that is only understood by others in the same co-culture.
   2. Co-cultures often arise precisely because their members share specific values.

III. How culture affects communication.
   A. Individualistic versus collectivistic cultures.
      1. In an **individualistic culture**, people believe that their primary responsibility is to themselves.
      2. In a **collectivistic culture**, people are taught that their primary responsibility is to their families, their communities, and their employers.
      3. A culture's individualistic or collectivistic tendencies can affect how members experience conflict and how comfortable people are with public speaking.
   B. Low- versus high-context cultures.
      1. In a **low-context culture**, people are expected to be direct and to say what they mean.
      2. In a **high-context culture**, people are taught to speak in a less-direct way and to infer meaning from contextual cues such as nonverbal signals.
      3. The communicative context can affect how people handle criticism and disagreements.
      4. When individuals from low- and high-context cultures communicate with each other, there is potential for misunderstanding.
   C. Low- versus high-power-distance cultures.
      1. A **low-power-distance culture** believes that all people are equal, and that no one person or group should have excessive power.
      2. In a **high-power-distance culture,** certain groups (royalty, the ruling social class) have great power, whereas the average citizen has much less.
      3. Power distance affects views on friendships and romantic relationships, and the way people think about authority.
   D. Masculine versus feminine cultures.
      1. A **masculine culture** is composed of people who cherish traditionally masculine values such as ambition, achievement, and the acquisition of material goods.
      2. A **feminine culture** is composed of people who value nurturance, quality of life, and service to others.

E. Monochronic versus polychronic cultures.
   1. A **monochronic** culture views time as a commodity that can be earned, saved, spent, and wasted.
   2. A **polychronic** culture conceives time as more holistic, fluid, and less structured.
F. **Uncertainty avoidance** is the extent to which people try to avoid situations that are unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable.
   1. **Uncertainty-avoidant** cultures are unlikely to take risks, for fear of failure.
   2. **Uncertainty-accepting** cultures are more open to new situations and more accepting of people and ideas that are different from their own.

IV. Communicating with cultural awareness.
   A. Be open-minded about cultural differences.
      1. Be mindful of differences, which involve an awareness of how others' behaviors and ways of thinking are different from our own.
      2. Avoid **ethnocentrism**, the tendency to judge other cultures' practices as inferior to our own.
   B. Be knowledgeable about different **communication codes**, the verbal and nonverbal behaviors whose meanings are often understood only by people from the same culture.
      1. Cultures use different idioms whose meanings are not necessarily obvious to people from other cultures.
      2. Cultures use different jargon, or language whose technical meaning is understood by people within a given co-culture, but not necessarily by those outside it.
      3. Cultures use different gestures, or movements, that express ideas.
   C. Be flexible and respectful when interacting with others.
      1. Expect ambiguity.
      2. Appreciate differences in access to communication technology.
      3. **Adapt** to others, or change your behavior to accommodate what others are doing.

Key Terms

Culture

Societies

In-groups

Out-groups

Ethnicity

Nationality

Enculturation

Co-cultures

Individualistic culture

Collectivistic culture

Low-context culture

High-context culture

Low-power-distance culture

High-power-distance culture

Masculine culture

Feminine culture

Monochronic

Polychronic

Uncertainty avoidance

Mindful

Ethnocentrism

Communication codes

Adapt

Additional Lecture Ideas

1. If your college hosts a "Global Awareness Day" or "International Fair," seize the opportunity! Take a field trip during class time to allow your students to soak in cultures they might not otherwise experience.

2. Invite a professional to class who has made a career in the international marketplace. Ask students to prepare questions concerning cross-cultural challenges. Here are a few to get you started:

   - Have you ever had a language barrier that seemed insurmountable? Have your words ever been "lost in translation?"

   - How have you adapted to a culture's customs to be more effective in your career?

   - Describe the most challenging experience you have had in a culture different from your own.

3. Invite a representative from your college's Study Abroad program to come to class and discuss educational travel opportunities with your students. If possible, assemble a panel of previous student participants who can share about their own unique experiences in cultures very different from their own.

Classroom Discussion and Activity Topics:

1. Spend a day having your own in-class cultural fair. Have students prepare a short 1-2 minute speech of introduction on their cultural background and specific symbols, language, values and norms. Encourage students to bring in clothing, food samples, photographs, mementos, etc., that represent their culture. Be sure to allow time for peer interaction after all speeches have been presented.

2. If the Olympics are taking place during the year, have the students research an Olympian of their choice from <u>outside</u> the United States. Ask students to identify unique characteristics about the chosen Olympian's culture. This could be presented either in an essay format or given as a speech. If utilized as a speech assignment, consider creating a grading rubric that includes the following considerations:

   • Physical delivery style (Does the speaker make eye contact? Does the speaker smile at the audience? Does the speaker incorporate appropriate gestures and limit unnecessary ones?)

   • Vocal delivery style (Does the speaker project his or her voice loudly? Does the speaker present at an appropriate pace? Does the speaker avoid using vocal fillers ("ums") and pausing excessively?)

   • Strength of content (Does the speaker spark audience interest in his or her chosen Olympian? Does the speaker engage the audience with facts about the Olympian's culture?)

   • Organization of content (Is the speech of introduction easy for the audience to follow? Does the speaker remember to express pleasure in introducing the chosen athlete, and does the speaker build suspense when introducing the Olympian?)

   • Visual aids and props (Are props, costumes, photographs, etc. used to enhance the presentation?)

   • Overall effectiveness (Overall, does the speaker execute the speech in a professional, well-rehearsed, manner? Does the speaker refrain from distractive behaviors such as dressing unsuitably, chewing gum, using inappropriate language, etc.?)

3. In small groups, have students exchange answers to the "Sharpen Your Skills" question presented in Chapter 2. Ask students to select the best story from the small group to share with the larger class.

   > Describe an interaction you have had with someone whose language, values, or traditions differed markedly from your own. What communication challenges did each one of you face? How did you manage those challenges? How might you have managed them more effectively?

4. The Dark Side of Communication—Cultural Intolerance: Discrimination against Muslim Students on U.S. College Campuses. For homework, assign students the article presented in the Chapter 2 Dark Side of Communication, which may be found at http://sbstatesman.webfactional.com/2003/02/19/muslims-face-discrimination-and-intolerance/
   In class, ask students their opinions and perspectives on the article, and regarding discrimination in general.

5. Divide the class into six teams, and assign each team one of the six major cultural differences that influence how people communicate with each other (individualism/collectivism, communicative context, power distance, masculinity and femininity, orientation toward time and uncertainty avoidance). As a research project, have each group define the cultural characteristic, and then provide a country and example that represents each side. If you have access to computers, this may be done as an in-class assignment; it may also be used as a more formal group project and presentation.

6. Have students complete the ethnocentrism survey, and ask your class the follow-up questions provided in the chapter:

   - Were your surprised by your score? Why or why not? What factors do you think your score reflects?

   - How can learning about cultural influences on communication affect tendency toward ethnocentrism?

   - Based on your results, do you have any goals for yourself concerning cultural understanding?

Additional Reading and Websites

The World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

> The World Factbook provides information on the history, people, government, economy, geography, communications, transportation, military, and transnational issues for 266 world entities. Our Reference tab includes: maps of the major world regions, as well as Flags of the World, a Physical Map of the World, a Political Map of the World, and a Standard Time Zones of the World map.

Foundation for Endangered Languages: http://www.ogmios.org/home.htm

> The Foundation for Endangered Languages supports, enables and assists the documentation, protection and promotion of endangered languages. This website describes activities, and includes the newsletter *Ogmios* and details of their conferences.

Pew Internet and American Life Project: http://www.pewinternet.org

> The Pew Internet & American Life Project is one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. The Project produces reports exploring the impact of the internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life. The Project aims to be an authoritative source on the evolution of the Internet through surveys that examine how Americans use the Internet and how their activities affect their lives.

http://studyabroad.com

> StudyAbroad.com is the Internet's leading source of information on educational opportunities for students to study in other countries. It is a comprehensive directory of study abroad programs, including summer study abroad, internship, service learning and volunteer abroad programs, high school study abroad, intensive language programs, and more, all organized by subject or country or city. International education support through the study abroad handbook provides a guide to education abroad, health and safety and study abroad scholarship/financial aid information.

Pease, A., & Pease, B. (2004). *The definitive book of body language: The secret meaning behind people's gestures*. London: Orion Books.