Seminar

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in English for Professional Purposes

Dra. Victoria Guillén Nieto
Universidad de Alicante
victoria.guillen@ua.es

Abstract

The aim of this two-hour seminar is to offer students the opportunity to get to grips with the linguistic rituals of behaviour, rhetorical conventions and communication strategies in English for professional purposes, and use this understanding to communicate with British people effectively and appropriately in the intercultural professional scenario. The seminar will be divided into two parts: (a) exploring the way universal value dimensions have been negotiated into differing culture-specific value orientations in Peninsular Spanish and British English; and (b) acquiring intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in English for professional purposes.

Key words: universal value dimensions, culture-specific value orientations, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), English for professional purposes

Warm-up

a) What is culture?

b) What is intercultural communication?
c) Do you think intercultural communication is important for your future professional prospects? Please provide evidence to support your answer.

Part I: Exploring value dimensions and culture-specific orientations

Can you guess what the cultural clash is in the following communicative situations? Please consider the contextual setting and the participants involved in each situation.

Situation 1

Ms Robson, a British businesswoman, has an appointment with her partner, Ms Martínez, to discuss a project. They are in Spain and English will be used as a lingua franca. The British woman cannot afford to waste any time because she has a tight schedule. The appointment does not start on time and when it does, there are frequent interruptions, with people coming in to get papers signed and Ms Martínez even answers the mobile phone while they are discussing the project. At the end of the appointment Ms. Robson feels frustrated (Guillén Nieto, 2006: 108)

Situation 2

Ms Williams, a British lecturer meets Mr. Ferrer, a visiting lecturer from Spain, on Campus. When he approaches to talk to her, he gets very close and even pats her on the back. Ms Williams looks uneasy and begins to move away. Mr. Ferrer wonders whether Ms. Williams does not like him of if he is talking too much, and feels frustrated. (Guillén Nieto, 2006: 109)
Situation 3

Mr. Bush, the US marketing manager of a multinational, was finding it increasingly difficult to work in Japan. In meetings, his Japanese colleagues hardly ever said anything. When they were asked if they agreed to his suggestions they always said “yes”, but they did not do anything to follow up the ideas. The only time they opened up was in a karaoke in the evening, but that was getting stressful for Mr. Bush, as they seemed to expect him to go out with them on a regular basis. Mr. Bush wonders whether the Japanese are not interested in his business proposals and if he is wasting his time. He feels frustrated as they never seem to get down to business. (Guillén Nieto, 2006: 110; Gibson, 2000: 32-33).

Situation 4

María is an Argentinean student in Sweden. When María takes her speech turn in the master’s course she often finds herself trapped in never ending monologues since no one else seems to be willing to claim the floor from her. She wonders whether her Swedish classmates do not like her or if they think that she always talks nonsense. She feels frustrated and her Swedish classmates also feel unsatisfied because María is the only one who participates actively in the master’s course. (Guillén Nieto, 2006: 112; Cameron, 2001: 94).
Situation 5

Mr. Kaneda: Are you satisfied then, Ms. Walden, with the work of the accounting division?
Ms. Walden: Very much. Their output has improved tremendously.
Mr. Kaneda: They’re very proud of their work.
Ms. Walden: As soon as you put Mr. Yamamoto in charge, things began to turn around.
Mr. Kaneda: Yes, the whole team is working very smoothly now.
Ms. Walden: Will you be giving Mr. Yamamoto some kind of recognition then?
Mr. Kaneda: Excuse me?
Ms. Walden: You know. An award or something?
Mr. Kaneda: I hardly think so. We wouldn’t want to embarrass him after all he has done

Situation 6

Harold: I was wondering if we could hire two temporary people for the next month, to get through this peak period?
Ricardo: I think we’ll have to.
Harold: I could speak to personnel today.
Ricardo: Did you mention this to Señor Ramos?
Harold: The chief? I didn’t want to bother him. He’s got his hands full with those buyers from Japan. Besides, it’s your division. He’ll agree to anything you say.
Ricardo: Yes. I’m sure he’ll approve.

Situation 7

Mr. Pierce: Enrique, I’d like you to work with Paul on this project.
Enrique: Yes, sir.
Mr. Pierce: You’re hesitating. Is something wrong?
Enrique: Excuse me, sir, but I don’t work very well with Paul. It’s my fault, I’m sure.
Mr. Pierce: No, it isn’t. I know about Paul. But don’t let him get to you. Sure, he’s a little rough around the edges, but he really knows programming. And that’s what counts.
Situation 8

Ms. Hart: Nice to see you again too, Mr. Sen. How’s everything going?
Mr. Sen: Very good, thank you. Did you hear that Mr. Liu’s been promoted? He’s no longer our division chief.
Mr. Hart: Yes. Please offer him my congratulations when you see him.
Mr. Sen: Good. I will.
Mr. Hart: So. What can I do for you?
Mr. Sen: We’ll be needing to make a few alterations in the contract.
Ms. Hart: Alterations? But you already signed the contract.
Mr. Sen: Yes, we’re very happy to be working with you and look forward to a long and mutually fruitful relationship.
Ms. Hart: Yes, we’re very pleased too.
Mr. Sen: Of course. Now about these changes…

Situation 9

Ms. Emery: I see what you mean. That’s a very important point. But…
Mrs. Biaggi: Now if I could explain some of the details.
Ms. Emery: Why didn’t you bring this up earlier?
Mrs. Biaggi: Excuse me?
Ms. Emery: I mean this is something we need to look at very closely. But I’ve got another…
Mrs. Biaggi: Yes, of course. Now if you will just bear with me.
Ms. Emery: Let me ask my secretary to put you on my calendar for Friday.
Mrs. Biaggi: Excuse me?
Ms. Emery: So we can continue then.

Situation 10

Mrs. Ponti: If you’ve got a few minutes, I’d like to show you around and introduce you to some other people.
Ms. Price: No, no thank you, ma’am. I’d better be getting back to my office. They’ll be wondering what happened to me.
Mrs. Ponti: Well, it has been good talking to you, Ms. Price.
Ms. Price: Yes, ma’am. I think we’ve had a very good meeting. I understand your situation much better now. Your explanations were very helpful.
Mrs. Ponti: Yes, yes, a good meeting. We had a good talk. We like your ideas. You must visit again soon. Come anytime.
Ms. Price: Why don’t I come when we get those materials from headquarters? That shouldn’t take more than a month. I’ll bring them by and we’ll go over them. (Storti, Craig 1994. Cross-Cultural Dialogues, p. 103. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press).
Company X is a Spanish toy manufacturing company. Please read carefully the letter below.

Estimado/a señor/señora:

(1) Compañía X, marca europea, española. Diseño y estilo con aroma mediterráneo.

(2) El trabajo bien hecho no tiene fronteras, igual que la sonrisa de un niño. Y la felicidad de una familia, tampoco. Ese es nuestro gran éxito: hacernos cómplices de la diversión.

(3) En Compañía X llevamos 14 años dedicados al mundo de la fantasía y la diversión, fabricando muñecos de tela y peluche para millones de consumidores. Nuestros productos se caracterizan por su diseño, calidad y la competitividad de sus precios, así como la variedad de modelos y la creación constante de novedades. Nuestro catálogo se compone de más de 500 referencias de diferentes estilos, y nos sentimos orgullosos de tener presencia en la mayoría de tiendas especializadas y de regalo informal.

(4) Cuidamos los detalles de nuestros productos, como el pintor mima la acuarela de la que nace su obra, eligiendo los mejores materiales y la tecnología más vanguardista para proporcionar el mejor producto a nuestros clientes. Y no es un camino fácil, ya que el secreto del éxito se guarda en un cofre tan antiguo como el mundo…¡un universo de fantasía! Compañía X, la marca.

(5) Compañía X, S. L., la empresa. Con un largo camino corporativo, y con la gratitud y la lealtad de miles de Clientes satisfechos que nos han ayudado a presentarnos en el mercado norteamericano, con nuevas colecciones cada año. Atendemos pedidos especiales, e incluso proyectos para campañas publicitarias y promocionales. Uno de nuestros grandes “secretos” es estar siempre abiertos a todas las sugerencias y necesidades de nuestros clientes.

(6) Con una intensa actividad de exportación desde 1994, estamos presentes en la actualidad en las principales Ferias, actuaciones y exposiciones comerciales que se celebran a nivel internacional:

[…] Los productos de la Compañía X-avalados por la Asociación Española de Fabricantes de Juegos- están presentes en mercados tan diversos como Dubai (Emiratos Árabes), Polonia, Hungría, Letonia, Santiago de Chile, en casi todos los países de la Unión Europea, o incluso desde hace tres años con distribución exclusiva en Rusia, Ucrania y Letonia o el Grupo Walmart en México. Nuestra nueva dirección en los Estados Unidos se encuentra en Miami, Florida […]

(8) Nuestro éxito para entrar en el mercado americano, depende de su satisfacción. De su sonrisa. De la alegría que sienta al regalar nuestros productos. Otórguenos la oportunidad de conocernos…estamos a su servicio.

Company X
Person’s name
President
President
Example 1. Spanish letter

- What is the purpose of the letter? Please give your opinion on: (a) the influence of cultural values in its communication style and (b) its effectiveness in Spanish.

Example 2 reproduces the English translation of the Spanish letter in Example 1. Please read it carefully.

Dear Sir/Madam

(1) Company X is a European Spain Company, with a Mediterranean design and style.

(2) A family happiness or a good job has no boundaries just like a child smile. That is our success: we become part of their entertainment.

(3) We have been for 14 years dedicated to the world of entertainment and fantasy, manufacturing stuff and fabric dolls for our customers. Our variety of models and creations are constantly renewed and are characterized by our design, quality and of course our prices. Our catalog has over 500 styles/models and our pride is to have our merchandize to be present in main chain of Gift Shops.

(4) We take care of every detail, just like the painter does on his oils masterpieces. We use the latest technology and materials to manufacture the best product for our clients. It is not an easy path; we all know that success is a secret hidden inside a casket as old as the world…a fantasy universe! Company X, the Brand name.

(5) Company name X, S. L. has an extensive corporate experience and with the loyalty and satisfaction of our customers we have been helped to introduce us in United States with a new collection every season. We not only work special orders, but we also work any publicity or marketing campaigns you may need. “Our Secret” We welcome any suggestion from our clients. The company has been exporting since 1994; we are present in major commercial events worldwide. […]

(6) Company name Products, endorse by the Spain Association of Toys Manufacturers are present in markets like DUBAI (Arabian Emirates), Poland, Hungary, Letonia, Santiago de Chile, almost in every single country of the European Union. Moreover, for the past three years distributing in Russia, Ucrania y Leetonia and in Mexico to the Walmart Store. Our new address in United States is:

(7) Your satisfaction is our guarantee; your smile and the happiness will lead us to succeed in the American Market. Give us the opportunity to meet you. You won’t regret it.

Sincerely yours,

Company X
Person’s name
President

Example 2. English translation of the Spanish letter
o Please analyze the above English translation and give your opinion on: (a) the influence of cultural values and (b) its effectiveness in English.

Table 1 below will help you to orientate yourself when communicating and interacting with Britons in international professional settings.
Table 1. Hypothetic correlation between culture-specific value orientations and culture—and language—specific patterns of behaviour in Spanish and British national cultures (Guillén-Nieto 2009: 29-63).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value dimension</th>
<th>National culture</th>
<th>Culture-specific values</th>
<th>Language-specific behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Polychronic</td>
<td>Multifocus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High tolerance for interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High tolerance for simultaneous speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Monochronic</td>
<td>Single focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low tolerance for interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low tolerance for simultaneous speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal space</strong></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Non-contact culture</td>
<td>Promotes the use of independence strategies (negative politeness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Contact culture</td>
<td>Promotes the use of involvement strategies (positive politeness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fairly high context</td>
<td>Promotes implicitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relies on contextual cues and non verbal codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Low context</td>
<td>Promotes explicitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relies on symbolic language and the verbal code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individualism index</strong></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Very high 89</td>
<td>Form of reference to self as an individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Average 51</td>
<td>Uses independence strategies (negative politeness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power distance index</strong></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Average 57</td>
<td>Honorifics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Moderately small 35</td>
<td>Terms of address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V/T forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculinity index</strong></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Moderately high 66</td>
<td>Task-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Average 42</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty Avoidance Index</strong></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Strong 86</td>
<td>Turn-taking system is asymmetrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Moderately weak 35</td>
<td>Long turns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low tolerance of silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows preference for digressiveness, circumlocutions, long explanations, long texts, and long sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Needs to provide background information and context, Purpose statement is postponed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thesis/purpose statement is delayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indirectness in purpose statement Requires confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turn-taking is symmetrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Short turns More tolerance of silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows preference for linearity, short explanations, short texts, and short sentences Purpose statement is anticipated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Directness in purpose statement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following questionnaire is designed to help you understand your own cultural tendencies. Select the answer that most closely approximates your beliefs and behaviour.

1. Your group has been assigned a new project. What is your feeling about it?
   (a) You would just as soon do it on your own and finish faster.
   (b) You look forward to learning more by working with the team.

2. The division in your company that has the most sales for the third quarter will win a 10 percent bonus. There is an additional 10 percent bonus for the person with highest sales in the overall company. How would you approach the contest?
   (a) Double your efforts to win the 10 percent individual bonus.
   (b) Meet with your group to devise a plan to ensure that your division wins.

3. You are taking a train or entering a restaurant. Neither the train car nor the restaurant is full. Which of the following options would you choose?
   (a) You select a seat away from other people.
   (b) You select a seat near other people.

4. Your company is expanding to South America and you have been sent to meet with the Venezuelan representative. How do you approach the meeting?
   (a) You fly to Caracas, plan to meet, and return the following day.
   (b) You fly to Caracas a day early to tour, so that you can comment on the beauty of the countryside and the history of the nation when you meet with the representative.

5. Your meetings with the international team have lasted all day. What do you do after hours?
   (a) Make your excuses and retire for the night.
   (b) Believe it is your obligations to go out with the group no matter how tired you are.

Calculate your score. If you answered with more As, you probably come from an individualistic culture. More Bs may indicate that you come from a collective culture.

6. You usually pick up the body language of others and know intuitively if something is bothering them.
   (a) No
   (b) Yes

7. Your colleague says, “This department has never lost so much money”. How do you feel about the comment?
(a) The comment annoys you because you know that several years ago the department had a loss that was a quarter-of-a-million more than the present problem.
(b) You understand that your colleague didn’t mean what he said literally; rather, he was commenting on the difficulties the company has been facing.

8. The new department head hands down a list of rules for employees. You react as follows:
(a) You tack up the rules in your cubicle, so that you can refer to them periodically.
(b) Your glance at the rules and plan to follow them or bend them depending on the situation.

9. Your manager has given her analysis of the department’s losses in the first quarter. You disagree with the manager’s assessment.
(a) You openly state your disagreement.
(b) You cross your arms, lean back, and wait to be asked your opinion.

10. When deciding on a person to promote in your department, you face the problem of choosing between two equally qualified individuals, one of whom is your cousin. What do you do?
(a) Choose the applicant who is not your cousin.
(b) Choose your cousin.

Calculate your score. If you answered with more As, you probably come from a low context culture. More Bs may indicate that you come from a high context culture.

11. You are on vacation. The mass transit arrives late and the platform is quite crowded. What do you do?
(a) Push forward.
(b) Wait patiently to board.

12. At the office, you are on the phone when you see a colleague walk toward you. Because he’s been travelling, you haven’t seen him in a month. What do you do?
(a) Smile and wave and hold up your finger to indicate, “Wait a minute”.
(b) Terminate the call so you can greet your colleague.

13. Do you carry a day planner or calendar with appointments?
(a) Yes
(b) No

14. Are you comfortable doing multiple tasks at the same time?
(a) No
(b) Yes

15. Are your business colleagues and the group you socialize with usually similar?
(a) No
(b) Yes
Calculate your score. If you answered with more As, you may tend toward a linear
time orientation. If you scored more Bs, you may be from a flexible or cyclical time
orientation.

16. You’ve worked with the new vice president for several months and have formed
an opinion of her. You like her for the following reason.
(a) She listens to various opinions and seeks consensus.
(b) She takes charge and doesn’t put up with any nonsense.

17. You have been selected by the head of your department to be a team member on
a big project. At the first team meeting, some people suggest that the team select
a leader.
(a) You disagree. No one should be singled out as higher in rank than the others.
(b) You agree. The team will accomplish more with clear leadership and structure.

18. Your division is facing cutbacks, and you must decide how this should be
accomplished. What would you do?
(a) Call a meeting of employees to discuss options.
(b) Cut everyone’s salary 3%.

19. You’ve been introduced to an economist from a prominent university in Madrid.
You address him in the following manner:
(a) It’s nice to meet you, Rodrigo.
(b) It’s food to meet you, Dr. Barbato.

20. You will be meeting with representatives of a South Korean electronics firm.
You decide to wear the following:
(a) Business casual attire.
(b) Business attire.

Calculate your score. If you answered with more As, you may tend toward a more
democratic view of organizational culture. If you scored more Bs, you probable
have a more hierarchical view of organizational culture.

References

& Sons, Inc.

Press.

Guillén Nieto, V. 2009. “Crossing Disciplines in Intercultural Communication
Research”. In Guillén Nieto, V., Marimón Llorca, C. Vargas Sierra, Ch. (eds).
*Intercultural Business Communication and Simulation and Gaming

Guillén Nieto, V. 2006. “Understanding *social distance* in intercultural
communication.” In González Cruz, Mª I. (ed). *Lengua, sociedad y cultura:
Estudios interdisciplinares*, pp. 99-117. Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran
Canaria: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran
Canaria.


