

Cultural differences awareness

Cultural differences arise from nationality, ethnicity and culture, they may affect our behaviours and what we expect from other people. Taking the meaning of certain human behaviours for granted is a mistake: sometimes

our verbal and non-verbal communication leads to different results according to the culture of the audience. It is impossible that behaviours have the same meaning across cultures and this can lead to serious misunderstandings.



Eye contact: westerners tend to keep eye-contact when talking, conveying informality, spontaneity, and equality; however, a consistent and strong eye contact may be a sign of lack of respect in other cultures.

Physical distance: in areas of the Middle East and South America, people stand very close when talking. European and Americans like to have more distance between them. It is possible to create great discomfort by standing too close to another person.



Concept of time: the concept of time is not so strong in certain cultures.



Physical contact: gestures like a handshake, a hug, or a kiss on the cheeks can make some people feel uncomfortable.

Head nodding: in some cultures nodding of the head may not be a sign of agreement, it can just mean that a person is listening.



Expressiveness & Gesturing: North Americans tend to be moderately expressive when it comes to body language, while most Asians, Latin or Arab cultures love gesturing freely.

Display of emotions: some cultures are very emotional and exhibit their feelings openly while other cultures try to keep their emotions hidden.



Food and eating habits: in some cultures people eat beef (e.g. in the United States), while in others beef is forbidden (e.g. India); in Europe people use forks and knives to eat, while in others people use chopsticks (e.g. Chinese), or their hands (e.g. Indians).

Use of Humour: in some cultures where close attention is paid to preserving the dignity of all people, humour is not appropriate and can even be seen as aggression. In many Asian cultures laughter can be a sign of embarrassment rather than a response to humour.



1. Do a brief search on the Internet and match countries and behaviours. Find others and discuss them with your class.

1. Thailand, Philippines and China

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a. A bunch of flowers must contain an odd number of flowers, even numbers are used for funeral flower decorations.

2. Saudi Arabia

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b. The whole hand is used to point out a person, indicating people using a finger is considered a vulgar action.

3. Russia

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c. Leaving some food in the dish is considered a sign you didn't appreciate it.

4. Brazil

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d. A woman cannot greet a man (except her husband) because this is considered a deeply improper behaviour.

5. Japan, Chorea, Vietnam and China

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e. Our "middle finger" vulgar gesture, means "OK".