Intercultural Communication

An Advanced Resource Book

Adrian Holliday, Martin Hyde
and John Kullman

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Theme 1
Identity

This theme will explore how people construct their own identities.

UNIT A1.1
PEOPLE LIKE ME
'This is whom I want to be represented by'

Experience

This unit explores the complexity of people's cultural identity in terms of how they want to represent themselves. Consider Example A1.1.1.

Example A1.1.1 Being represented

Parize had been coming to international conventions on food processing for several years. She had made several good friends, especially from among the Europeans; but there was a gnawing problem which always came back unresolved. She was the only person at the convention who came from Iran; and no matter how friendly and sincere, she knew that her European colleagues saw her in a particular way which just wasn't her at all. It was from their passing comments, their casual, unguarded turns of phrase, in which they seemed to show surprise when she was creative, assertive or articulate, as though she ought to be somehow unable to be good at all the things she did. One of her colleagues did not actually say 'Well done!' but certainly implied it in her tone of voice. She also felt isolated as the only person from her particular background at these conventions. There was nobody else to represent who she was. It also hurt her when someone said that she was 'Westernized' and 'not a real Iranian'. This seemed like a no-win situation. If her behaviour was 'recognized', she was not real; and if she was considered 'real', she wasn't supposed to behave like that.

Then something happened which both confirmed her fears and gave her support. She invited three of her colleagues to see one of the films which was showing as part of a festival of Iranian films at the local university. They came willingly — very interested — and then to another one. When she asked one of her colleagues what she found so fascinating, her colleague replied that she was particularly impressed by the female characters who portrayed such strong women. Indeed, one of them played a major executive role in a film crew. She hired and fired people and drove around in a jeep
Her colleague said that she had no idea such women existed in Iran, and that she always thought Muslim women were supposed to be subservient. Parisa was also pleased because the women on the film were certainly 'real' Iranians in that they wore the hejab, and the woman who drove the jeep wore the black hejab and long coat that she imagined fitted the 'stereotype'.

Shortly after this, another Iranian arrived at the convention. Parisa was very pleased that he was educated, worldly, urbane, well-dressed and also extremely articulate. This was no more or less than she would expect of an Iranian man, but she was pleased because here was further evidence for her other colleagues of the sort of people she belonged to. Moreover, it was very clear that he had tremendous respect for her as an equal, an academic and a professional. Parisa wondered though if they considered him a 'real Iranian'. After all, he wore a tie and didn't have a beard.

**Deconstruction**

Apart from the problem of being stereotyped and otherized, perhaps on the basis of the popular media images, which may depict Muslim women as lacking in power, Parisa's predicament in Example A.1.1.1 is that she lacks other images on the basis of which the people around her can judge who she is. Although her colleagues have got to know her and see her as their friend, they lack real knowledge of what sort of group she belongs to in order to place her. In this sense, they are also in a predicament, and indeed vulnerable to the stereotypes with which they are presented from other sources. Two concepts which need to be focused on are:

- the multi-facetedness of Other people and societies
- the way people talk.

**Multi-facetedness**

At one level one might say that Parisa wants to be associated with a certain type of Iranian person — educated, worldly, a working woman in the same way as her new male colleague is a working man — which she does not perceive as conforming to the popular stereotype. However, at another level it is more complex than this. Her society, like all others, is complex and multi-faceted, and in order for anyone to show who they really are, this complexity has to be visible. The Iranian films that her friends saw show this complexity, as often art forms are able to do more than any other media form. The woman, covered in black Muslim clothes, driving a jeep, being her own person, educated and a working woman, yet looking like all other women, hiring and firing extras for the film she is involved in making, begins successfully to show the layers and depths of a complex society in which identity is multi-faceted and shifting.

Another element in Parisa's quest to be recognized is her desire to be associated with other people. Again, at one level she wants to be associated with people like her in that they are middle class and so on, but at a deeper level, they should represent the same many-faceted complexity that she sees in herself. Thus, the new male colleague is also
different to what she imagines her other colleagues would expect – not conforming to the stereotype, while at the same time being what ‘she would expect of an Iranian man’ in his civility, good manners, worldliness, and, moreover, respect towards her and the qualities she wishes to be noticed for by others.

The way in which these elements contribute to a person’s recognition of where she comes from is depicted in Figure 1. As well as evidence of complexity, layers and facets, there is the unexpected juxtaposed with what is expected. The unexpected is inevitable where any society must always be far more than any outsider can imagine.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1** Elements of where we come from

The principle of discovery is also implicit in *thick description* – seeing the complexity of a social event by looking at it from different aspects. The figure shows that the knowledge derived from understanding the juxtaposition of unexpectedness (e.g. the woman in the film), complexity (e.g. the layers in the film), and encounters with people, artefacts and instances (e.g. Parisa’s new colleague, the film, how the new colleague treats Parisa) results in thick description. Thick description as a term comes from anthropology and qualitative research and involves two elements:

- deriving meaning from a broad view of social phenomena which pieces together different, interconnected perspectives
- exploration, in which sense is made from an ongoing emergence of social phenomena, which may not immediately seem to connect, and which may indeed be unexpected.

One possible explanation of Example A1.1.1 is that something which troubles Parisa is the knowledge that her colleagues feel she is not a ‘real’ Iranian because she appears ‘Westernized’. She also suspects that her new compatriot colleague will also be seen as
not being 'real'. The fact that her colleagues consider her Westernized is more to do with their essentialist view of culture and the way in which they construct her particular 'national culture'. Because they see it as essentially different (Table 1 cell v) from their own 'Western' culture they cannot imagine that it would share features which they consider essentially Western. There is also a marked 'us'–'them' attitude. Hence, if Parisa in any way behaves like 'us', she must have become like 'us' and left the essentialist attributes of 'them' behind. The non-essentialist view has no difficulty with the notion that cultural attributes can flow between societies (Table 1 cell vi). Parisa desperately needs her colleagues to understand that her society is sufficiently complex and big to include the cultural attributes which they consider Western, but which are in fact normal for many people who come from Iran.

**The way people talk**

At a deeper level than these issues is what Parisa gleans from 'passing comments, their casual, unguarded turns of phrase, in which they seemed to show surprise when she was creative, assertive or articulate' – 'no matter how friendly and sincere' her European colleagues seemed. There are several possibilities here.

1. The thinking implicit in these comments is essentialist. Once again, there is the belief that the behavioural traits belonging to 'that' culture must be all packaged in the same stereotypical personality (Table 1 cell ix). Hence, if Muslim women are 'subservient', they cannot be 'creative, assertive or articulate'.
2. This thinking is deep in everyday discourse; and people are probably unaware of it.
3. They do not see it as derogatory.

In all three cases the passing comments are in conflict, in Parisa's view, with apparent friendliness. The possibility of 1 is especially worrying because it implies a deep-seated essentialism in people's attitudes and socialization – an issue which will be taken up in Theme 2 Otherization. If 2 is the case, her colleagues are in effect being profoundly patronizing in that they assume they think it appropriate to comment on, perhaps praising, unexpected 'achievement' for someone from 'her culture' – rather than they would a child who achieves above their years – 'well done!'

**Communication**

Especially considering the above points about the way people talk, there are important considerations in this unit with regard to communication. We have seen how Parisa herself feels, not only about direct communication but also about asides and tones of voice. Parisa may be more sensitive than many, but this one instance – as in the case of any qualitative analysis – illuminates a particular predicament which makes one see intercultural communication in a certain way. It becomes clear that for Parisa's colleagues to communicate with her effectively they do not need information about her presumed national culture. This would be prescriptive and indeed essentialist in that it
Introduction: Defining concepts

would tend to define the person before understanding the person. Rather than being a matter of prescribed information, the non-essentialist strategy is a moral one to do with how we approach and learn about a person as a human being (Table 1 cell xii). There are several disciplines that might be observed here.

1. Respond to people according to how you find them rather than according to what you have heard about them.
2. Avoid easy answers about how people are. Bracket – put aside simplistic notions about what is ‘real’ or ‘unreal’ in your perception of ‘another culture’.
3. Appreciate that every society is as complex and culturally varied as your own.
4. Learn to build up thick descriptions of what happens between you and others – to work out how to communicate as you go along.

Task A1.1.1 Thinking about Parisa

► Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Parisa example and describe it in similar detail.
► Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of Figure 1 and the disciplines listed above.
► What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

UNIT A1.2 ARTEFACTS OF CULTURE
Telling cultural stories, closing ranks

Experience

This unit continues to unravel the complexities of cultural identity by looking at what might lie behind what people say about their culture.

Example A1.2.1 Chinese teachers

Janet is American and got to know Zhang and Ming, who are Chinese, when they were doing their master’s course together. She found that Zhang talked a lot both in class and at other times about Confucianism and how it was the basis of Chinese culture. They soon got into an ongoing discussion about what teachers and students could be expected to do in his university English classes. He said that because of Confucianism, just as it was impolite for children to question their parents, it was impolite for students to question their teachers. This meant that all sorts of things which happened in classrooms in the West, like discovery learning and classroom discussions, were culturally inappropriate in China.
As the master's course progressed, Janet noticed that Zhang was getting increasingly unhappy. She asked Ming what Zhang's problem was. He explained that some people found it more difficult than others to cope with being in a foreign environment. She had noticed that Zhang was very silent when there was a class discussion, and she asked Ming if this was to do with Confucianism. Ming said that this was certainly a factor; but when Janet told him what Zhang had told her about students having to obey their teachers in China, Ming said that this was not strictly true — that he knew lots of teachers who were prepared to be engaged in discussion by their students, that students were certainly not always prepared to submit to teachers who would not listen to them, and that in modern China many parents no longer held the sort of authority that Zhang was talking about. Janet told him that this shocked her because it was not just from Zhang that she had heard about this. There were so many books she had read about Chinese culture which reported how it was bound by Confucianism. There were also two other people on the course who said that all the Chinese people they had met said the same thing. Ming said that there were different ways of looking at this. On the one hand, it could not be denied that Confucianism had been a very powerful influence on Chinese society for thousands of years. On the other hand, not everyone had to be bound by this influence; and different people could be influenced in different ways.

Janet then read an article which said that people in the developing world had tended to exaggerate their own cultural identity in order to counter the powerful influence of the West. She read Kubota (2002). When she put this idea to Ming he said that there was no need to read too much into Zhang’s statements about Confucianism. He thought it was really far more simple than that. He had seen so many American people in China who had seemed far more 'American' than anyone he had seen here. Surely was it not the case that all people drew more heavily on certain cultural resources when they felt culturally threatened by strange behaviour. So does that mean that Confucianism is a ‘cultural resource’ she wondered.

Deconstruction

In this example we see an American teacher trying to make sense of conflicting messages about Chinese culture. The first impression that Zhang presents her with tends towards the essentialist view — that ‘Chinese culture’ is characterized by Confucianism, which in turn determines the behaviour of parents, children, teachers and students (Table 1 cell ix). The conflicting impression that Ming presents is more non-essentialist — that what Zhang says is not necessarily true, that the influence of Confucianism is far from straightforward. If we assume that Janet has read Unit A1.1 and learnt that the essentialist view denies the complexity of one’s identity and society, Zhang’s point of view becomes even more puzzling for her. What, therefore, are the reasons for Zhang’s essentialist point of view? Ming and Janet herself have already gone some way in answering this question.

- When people are in a difficult, strange environment, they can close ranks and exaggerate specific aspects of their cultural identity.
Introduction: Defining concepts

- Different cultural resources can be drawn upon and invoked at different times depending on the circumstances.

In both cases, because of the strength of statement, there can be an appearance of essentialist national culture. We shall now look in more detail at these phenomena, and at a related third.

- What people say about their cultural identity should be read as the image they wish to project at a particular time rather than as evidence of an essentialist national culture.

Closing ranks

The factor which Janet read about, reaction to a powerful cultural threat from the West, could certainly be a reason for closing ranks – though there could also be threats from other national, international or global quarters. In this case they could be invading a person’s, or indeed a whole society’s, home territory. There may indeed be a connection here with religious and ethnic fundamentalism. Difficult, strange environments are also encountered, as Ming states, when travelling to foreign places. Adrian Holliday remembers an example of this where otherwise left-wing, long-haired young Englishmen displayed a deep interest in British military music from the Coldstream Guards while living in Iran in the 1970s. An interesting inverse of this may be where people in strange environments also construct essentialist descriptions of ‘local people’. British people in very diverse foreign locations commonly see the ‘locals’ as ‘subservient, hierarchical, corrupt, inhibited by extended families and arranged marriages, lacking in individualism, unable to make decisions’ and so on. Such descriptions are more likely to be British constructions of the opposite of what they consider themselves to be than grounded in the behaviour they observe around them.

The case of the Chinese people reported by both Zhang and Janet’s British colleagues to be Confucian in all their actions, and that of the interest in military music for the young Englishmen abroad, may be a reaction to perceived Western pedagogies or at least ‘modern’ pedagogies which they find too difficult to deal with. This reminds one also of the observed behaviour of Japanese students in British classrooms. Their silence and apparent ‘passivity’ may be more a reaction to the, to them, strange classroom rules which confront them than an effect of cultural behaviour in Japan.

Cultural resources

Confucianism for the Chinese teachers thus becomes a convenient cultural resource around which to marshal their threatened identity (Table 1 cell x). As can be seen by the way in which the British abroad define the foreign Other as opposite to themselves, the particular resources which are chosen may well be the ones which are most opposite to the cultural features of the threat. There are also arguments that the very strong description of Japaneseness which has recently pervaded international commerce is actually a ploy to promote a marketable exoticness (e.g. Moeran 1996).
Artefacts of culture

Figure 2 Making use of culture

Figure 2 is a rough attempt to show how different cultural resources can be used by a particular person in particular settings. By cultural resources we mean aspects of culture that exist in our society which we can draw on at different times and for different reasons. The central bubble lists quite randomly the sorts of things which might be resources. There could be many other things on the list. The surrounding bubbles are examples of cultural settings which are ‘foreign’ and present a particular threat in different ways. The arrows match resources to settings, showing that only some resources would be relevant to dealing with each setting. ‘Particular’ is the key word here because this is by no means a set of universals. Every person who reads this would use different resources to deal with each setting, and you might indeed find it fascinating to imagine how the arrows might link different resources to the settings if it were you. It is also important to note that you would appear quite culturally differently in each setting. If you used the resources in the same way as in the figure, in each setting your ‘culture’ may appear to be characterized by the following.

- You find the politics of the society or social group in Setting 1 ‘distasteful’. You counter this by drawing on a particular aspect of personality, literature and ideology from your own society or group and present your culture as being left-wing activist.
- You find the moral code in Setting 2 ‘strange’. You reassure yourself by drawing on religious beliefs, clothing and etiquette in your own society or social group and present your culture as a religious one with particular dress codes.
- The people in Setting 3 do not understand who you are because they have no knowledge of where you come from. You strengthen your identity by drawing on ceremonies, festivals and family values in your society or social group and present these as the basis of your culture.
You cannot identify with the 'high culture' (arts etc) of Setting 4. You draw on the
fine arts, 'cuisine' and music of your society or social group and present these as
the defining ingredients of your culture.

One may think that the 'you' in each of these cases is being deceitful or duplicitous,
playing with or selecting what they like from their culture in this way. This would be an
essentialist view. The non-essentialist view would be that culture is a shifting reality
anyway, and people make of it what they need to as live their identities in different
circumstances. This view of culture as a shifting reality can be compared with Text
B0.1.1 by Hannerz in Unit B0.1, where there is a reference to people being 'more or less
Confucian', and to the multiplicity of cultural identity reported by Baumann in Text
B0.1.2, also in Unit B0.1.

Artefacts of culture

There are dangers with the non-essentialist view just as there are with the essentialist
view. It would be a grave mistake for the essentialist to think Ming was not a 'real'
Chinese because he did not conform to the Confucian essence. In the same way it would
also be a grave mistake to think that Zhang was not to be taken seriously because he was
being 'naive' about the role of Confucianism. Even though it might be the case that
Zhang's statements about how Confucianism determines the behaviour of teachers and
students might be considered essentialist, these statements are still extremely meaningful
to him, just as the behaviour of all the people mentioned in this unit would be extremely
real to them. In each case, these are constituents of how individuals need to work their
own personal identities. If we as communicators are to take people from other back-
grounds seriously, we should take every fact of what they do and say seriously. In this
sense, every instance of behaviour becomes an artefact of who people are. Thus, what
can be said about Zhang is that his discourse about Confucianism is part and parcel
of his cultural identity. The way he talks about Confucianism is an artefact of what he
believes about Confucianism; and this in itself may indeed be cultural. Indeed, if more
and more Chinese were heard to talk about Confucianism in this way, one may conclude
that there is a tendency for some Chinese to say that Confucianism influences every part
of their lives. Table 2 demonstrates this. On the left, essentialist descriptions are based
on prescription, while on the right, non-essentialist descriptions are very cautious and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essentialist description based on stereotypes</th>
<th>Non-essentialist description based on observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Chinese culture people's behaviour is determined by Confucianism.</td>
<td>Some Chinese feel it important to say that their behaviour is determined by Confucianism. Others say that this is an overgeneralization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Japanese culture students are silent and passive in the classroom.</td>
<td>Some Japanese prefer to remain silent when in British language classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 1970s British culture young people liked military music.</td>
<td>Some young British people found military music comforting while living abroad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
qualified, based on no more than what can be observed. Indeed, the non-essentialist descriptions should also be ephemeral – that is, perhaps true at a particular time, but changing. For those British readers, the bottom left statement will show the ridiculousness of some essentialist comments; yet it would have been easy for Iranians to generalize thus when they saw the way two particular British people behaved while in their country.

Communication

The lessons to be learnt about communication from Example A1.2.1 build on those in the previous unit. Janet has indeed learnt some of the lessons from Unit A1.1 and listens carefully to Zhang and Ming and places what she learns against what she has heard from her own compatriots about things related to Confucianism – thus creating her own thick description. Taking a non-essentialist line, she sees Ming, despite his doubts about Confucianism, as just as ‘real’ a Chinese as Zhang. If she believes Ming’s doubts about Confucianism, how should she therefore respond to Zhang? The answer may be that she should follow these disciplines, which follow on from the four disciplines listed on page 10.

5. While respecting whatever people say about their own culture, take what they say as evidence of what they wish to project rather than as information about where they come from.
6. Take what people say about their own culture as a personal observation which should not be generalized to other people who come from the same background.

Task A1.2.1 Thinking about Zhang and Ming

- Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Zhang and Ming example and describe it in similar detail.
- Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of the explanations in the Deconstruction section, Table 2 and the disciplines listed.
- Use Figure 2 and describe what sorts of cultural resources were being used by one of the participants and why.
- What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?
IDENTITY CARD

'I am who I can make myself and make others accept me to be'

Experience

This unit explores the principle that while one person may be exchanging information with another person, they are both, be it intentionally or unintentionally, also sending messages about their cultural identity – about how they want the other person to see them. The example is different to those in previous units in that it does not concern people from different societies. It is about people in the same society, but from very different cultural groups. This is to illustrate the non-essentialist point that cultural difference by no means has to be connected with national difference (Table 1 cells vi and viii). Also, by looking at a small, rather than a large culture, it is easier to see the details of cultural formation. See the discussion of small cultures in Holliday in Text B0.2.3, Unit B0.2, Section B. Consider the event given in Example A1.3.1.

Example A1.3.1 Girls on the bus

A public bus in south-east England was mainly occupied by school children returning home to the villages after attending school in the city. Several of the other passengers were annoyed by what they considered noisy bad language from some of the children. The most vociferous and extreme swearing was from a group of girls. The bus stopped and a further schoolgirl got on. She joined the group, one of whom shouted, 'Hello, you big fat tart', to which the new girl loudly retorted, 'F**k off bitch'. This exchange seemed to serve as a greeting as the two did not appear in any way genuinely angry with each other. The volume of their utterances was also noticeably loud enough for all the bus occupants to hear – in other words, it was unnecessarily loud for communication to occur just between themselves. The first interactant then admired a new item of jewellery her friend had around her neck; 'Where did you get that, you dirty slag?' The friend answered; 'None of your business, you fucking noisy cow!

After this, the first interactant's attention became fixed upon a school boy, who was smaller than the girls, sitting several seats away. 'Darren! Oi, Darren! Fucking listen to me Darren! Are you a poof, Darren?' The girls laughed and the boy looked embarrassed and at a loss as to how to reply. 'No I'm not,' he finally protested, and looked out of the window, no doubt hoping the girls' attention would wander to someone else. Then another girl's voice: 'Darren, Michaela says you're a poof.' Darren's bus journey was going to be a longer one than he might have hoped.

There are a lot of terms you might not be familiar with in this example. See Task C1.4.2, in Unit C1.4.
Deconstruction

In this example we see a group of schoolgirls asserting their cultural identity to the outside world who are represented by the culturally different Other people on the bus, who are in turn shocked and perhaps disgusted by their explicit display. In many ways, the girls are doing the same as Parisa in Unit A1.1 and Zhang in Unit A1.2, but whereas they were pulling elements from their distant homes to reinforce identity in the face of strangers, these girls are on their home ground and we see the details of actual cultural formation – still, though, in the face of strangers. There are several related concepts at work:

- the multiplicity of identities
- the creation of an identity card
- the marking out of territory.

Cultural identity and multiplicity

The two girls derive and achieve an identity by signalling belongingness to the particular culture of swearing girls on the bus. Belongingness among the members of any group partly involves the learning and use of particular discourses. It is a person’s familiarity and ease of use of these discourses that demonstrates their membership of a particular group – that is, the cultural territory to which they stake a claim. In the case of Example A1.3.1, the discourse is one of swearing – the mastery of a complex code which only insiders can fully understand and which can be used to exclude outsiders. Thus, apparent insult is read as greeting or endearment between the initiated girls, but as real insult and exclusion when directed at the boy.

However, the two girls are not only members of the culture of swearing girls on the bus. As with Parisa, Zhang and Ming in Units A1.1 and A1.2, they belong to a complex society which allows a multiplicity of choices. They could also define themselves as members of an age group, a nationality, an ethnic group, a social class, a religion, a scout group, an aerobics class, a hockey team, a school class group. We are all, as individuals, members of a vast number of different cultural groups (Table 1 Cell viii), and hence have a multiplicity of identities. Adrian Holliday notes that he has an identity as a member of his family, part of which (through his wife) is Iranian, the university where he did his graduate studies, a professional group, part of which (through Applied Linguistics) is international, a university department, a local community of artists, and so on, besides being a member of a particular nation, which at the moment is moving between ‘British’ and ‘English’. With each identity he has a certain communal bond with a group of other people: we are linked through a common experience, we have our icons, our ideologies and our communal history to draw on, and we encapsulate all of this in our discourses. Because all of us inhabit different cultural groups, we are in fact all unique in our cultural identities.
Identity card

There is also a very strong sense of cultural assertion in Example A1.3.1: ‘This is how we are! We use bad language; we shock; we make boys feel uncomfortable; we don’t care about annoying people around us.’ And in the paragraph above we use the term ‘define themselves’ rather than simply ‘are’. The two girls are not simply being members of a culture; they are doing the culture in order to communicate something to the people around them. In this sense, they are playing a particular identity card.

In a way they are playing with the cultural stereotypes expected by other members of their society. Swearing is often considered a territory occupied only by males displaying their toughness. Indeed it would seem that girls have invaded this traditional male territory and taken it over. They have also invaded the misogynistic male lexicon of derogatory terms for women: ‘slag’, ‘bitch’, ‘tart’, ‘cow’. They thus subvert the potentially wounding power of these terms, neutralize them by their frequency of use, and convert them into the normal phatic functions of greeting and ‘small talk’. And in so doing, they increase the shock effect by voicing yet twisting what the audience of bus passengers may consider taboo. On the other hand, these terms have become very much the domain of women generally in their in-talk, whereas outsider men will use them at their risk.

The girls are very vocal and thus also occupy the acoustic space of the bus: the old notions of men not swearing in the presence of the ‘weaker’ and ‘daintier’ sex are completely challenged – indeed inverted – here. This incident would seem to have a lot to do with the notion of ‘girl power’. Further attack is made upon maleness by the bullying of the boy and the questioning of his sexuality. Again the weapons of reductionist and derogatory sexual labelling are used by the girls on the boy rather than vice versa.

Although we are not fully in control of the resources that make up our identity, and we cannot choose our ethnicity, sex and so on, we can decide how to play the hand of cards that we have been dealt. We can work with the discourses available to us according to how we wish others to see us and how we wish to influence others’ perceptions of the hand of cards we have been dealt. Indeed, through such discourse action over time these very cards can become viewed in different ways. This is true, for example, of how women have changed the way femininity is constructed and perceived over the last century, or of how anti-slavery discourses in the early 19th century changed the way that Black Africans were perceived in British society. Identity is therefore not in essence a stable concept, but one that is achieved through the skilled manipulation of discourses in society.

Territory

By being creative with the act of swearing the girls are in effect marking a powerful new territory – an identity terrain which they occupy in their struggle for presentation of self against the identities that are imposed upon them by others. This territory is fought over and at times conceded during interactions. In the case of Example A1.3.1, the act of swearing becomes a critical marker of this territory.
Identity card

Figure 3 Two sides to identity

Figure 3 shows two sides to cultural identity. The left-hand bubble represents a state of affairs which, though imposed by the way in which society defines us - and indeed other societies define us, in the case of national cultural perceptions - can be seen as the resources of the material that we have to work with. In the case of the girls on the bus, these might comprise 'traditional' notions that girls do not swear, but are sworn at. The right-hand bubble signifies a dynamic movement away from this establishment, in which, through playing with the resources, individuals or groups can create new identities and, indeed, create culture change. Although a similar process, this is subtly different to what can be seen in Unit A1.2, as represented in Figure 2. There, cultural resources are used ephemerally to defend identity, here they are used to create the fabric of identity.

Communication

Being sensitive to and understanding others’ cultural productions and the way in which they play with the various identities available to them (discourses on their identities currently available in the context of their interactions) is a crucial part of good intercultural communication. A good interpersonal communicator, therefore, needs to be aware of issues surrounding the concept of identity. Before we can communicate with people who are different to ourselves, we need to understand something about how they present themselves as being or belonging to certain groups. This goes deeper than the observations about Zhang in Unit A1.2, where we note that one should respect what people say about themselves and see this as an artefact of who they are without over-generalizing. The creative element in Example A1.3.1 takes this further. Hence the first discipline for this unit must be that we should do the following (disciplines 1–4 appear on page 10, and 5–6 on page 15).

7. Understand how people are creating and indeed negotiating their cultural identity in the very process of communicating with us.
INTRODUCTION: DEFINING CONCEPTS

We need therefore to see communication with anyone as a dynamically creative process. Also, this surely teaches us something about ourselves, which should be evident from all the examples in this theme – that the whole thing is, of course, a two-way process, in that we should also do the following.

8. Appreciate that you are creating and negotiating your own cultural identity in the process of communicating with others.

Furthermore, as the process of communication is also personal – as all the examples in these units are to do with interaction between individuals – we should do the following.

9. Appreciate that the creation and negotiation of cultural and personal identity are the same thing.

TASK A.3.1 THINKING ABOUT THE GIRLS ON THE BUS

➤ Think of a situation you have been in that is like the girls on the bus example and describe it in similar detail.
➤ Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of Figure 3 and the disciplines outlined.
➤ What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?
Theme 2
Otherization

This theme will explore a major inhibition to communication by looking at how, so easily, we can construct and reduce people to be less than what they are. Continuing from Units A1.1, A1.2 and A1.3 within the Identity theme, the angle on communication will be how we must discipline our own perceptions if we are to communicate successfully. However, Units A2.1, A2.2 and A2.3 will look more deeply at the forces that prevent us all from seeing people as they really are. The weight of responsibility is on 'us' to understand ourselves, rather than on essentialist categories of 'them'.

COMMUNICATION IS ABOUT NOT PRESUMING
Falling into culturist traps

Experience

Continuing to follow the principle that we should try to understand people before we can communicate with them, in this unit we explore how easy it is to be misled by our own preconceptions and to fall into the trap of otherization. As with Unit A1.3, we use an example from within our own society to demonstrate how the tendency to reduce the foreign Other is deep within the roots of society generally. We hope therefore to show how even easier it is to misconstrue people from other societies. Consider the experience given in Example A2.1.1.

Example A2.1.1 The Smith family

A while ago John had neighbours, the Smiths, who belonged to a Christian sect related to the Amish. John and his family took this as a matter of fact because Mr Smith told them so several weeks after moving in during a residents' meeting. However, from the very first John's family saw or heard of, they had suspected something of the sort. There were six children. The girls and Mrs Smith were dressed in long dresses with aprons, which came down to their mid-calf, and wore headscarves over long hair. The boys had long shorts with braces [US, suspenders], which also came down to mid-calf. Mr Smith was clean-shaven, except for a beard around his chin. As they were moving in John and his family could see that their furniture was like old-fashioned wooden school furniture; and they didn't seem to have a television, stereo or video. There was, however, a piano
and John could hear them making their own music for entertainment in the evenings. They were also American.

Several events took place after the family moved in which began to reveal the way in which John was thinking about them.

One afternoon, John was in his garage pottering about when Mr Smith came out and got into his large people carrier. He guessed he was waiting for the rest of his family before going out with them. He really was amazed when Mr Smith turned on the car's CD player and listened to music. He had thought that because the Smiths didn't have a television or stereo in the house that religion forbid them from listening to such things.

It was the time when the whole country seemed involved in the events surrounding Princess Diana's death. Mr Smith's American parents were staying with them and his wife had encountered his mother in the driveway. Mrs Smith senior told her that because there was no television or radio in her son's home, and no one was allowed to read newspapers, it was difficult for her and her husband to find out what was going on, and they felt they were missing a critical aspect of being in England. Despite the incident with the car stereo, this confirmed to John that the Smith family were indeed fundamentalists, and that he had been right all along about how they abstained from modernity. He was therefore shocked and indeed concerned that it would be an inconsiderate invasion of their religious culture when his wife suggested inviting Mr and Mrs Smith senior, and indeed the whole Smith family, in to watch Diana's funeral on the television. John really felt that this invitation would put the whole family in a very difficult position. It would be like inviting Muslims to eat pork. His wife said that it would be impolite to invite Mr and Mrs Smith senior alone, and that anyway they all had the choice to refuse.

John was amazed again when the whole Smith family accepted the invitation and all ten of them came into their living room, the children sitting on the floor, to watch the whole funeral. He was even more amazed when Mrs Smith later wrote his wife a note to say that they had all really appreciated the opportunity.

Deconstruction

This example shows John reducing his neighbour according to a prescribed stereotype — very much as Parisa's colleagues reduced her to a stereotype in Unit A1.1. What makes this particularly significant is that it is so easy to fall into traps like this. It is therefore extremely important to deconstruct exactly how this can happen.

It seems clear from Example A2.1.1 that John had made a mistake both about the nature of the Smith family and about how to communicate with them, whereas his wife had been successful at least to the extent of achieving significant interaction that seemed to be appreciated by both sides. In an attempt to explain why this happened we are going to explore the four interconnected concepts, some of which will be familiar, some less so, and link them with the concept of essentialism introduced in Units A1.1, A1.2 and A1.3:

- stereotype
- prejudice
Otherization

Culturism.

From stereotype to otherization

John had formed a stereotype based on his observation of wooden furniture, abstention from exposure to the media, austere clothing, a large family, Mr Smith's chin beard, Mrs Smith's and the daughters' long hair, put together with the popular image of the Amish presented in the Hollywood movie, *Witness*. Many argue that it is natural to form stereotypes and that they indeed help us to understand 'foreign cultures' - that they act as a template, or as an ideal type, against which we can measure the unknown. We disagree with this view. One reason is that we do not behave sufficiently rationally in intercultural dealings to be able to work objectively with such templates. A major reason for this is that stereotypes are often infected by prejudice, which in turn leads to otherization. This process is summarized in the top half of Figure 4. We have chosen the words for the bubbles in the figure carefully because this is a complex, dangerous area.

The 'foreign Other' (bubbles A and C) refers not only to different nationalities, but also to any group of people perceived as different - perhaps in terms of so-called ethnicity, religion, political alignment, class or caste, or gender. This is 'so-called' ethnicity because the term is particularly relative and disputed (e.g. Baumann 1996 in Unit B0.1). We also do not list culture because all the other things listed can be said to have cultures or to be cultural. Interest (bubble B) could similarly be ethnic, religious, political, class or caste, or gender. This would colour, bias or infect the way in which the foreign Other is seen. Emergent evidence (bubble B) would be based on what can be learned on the basis of deeper understanding. This is clearly very difficult to achieve, as interest of one sort or another is always with us. Attempts are made in various types of social science. Reduction (bubble C) is where the different facets, the variety of possible characteristics and the full complexity of a group of people are ignored in favour of a preferred definition. In our view, as the figure implies, stereotyping, prejudice and otherization interact with each other; however, it is the negative impact of the latter which makes the other two undesirable.

A basic feature of this process is the way in which information is brought from outside the situation, a priori. The reference to the movie, *Witness* (above), shows that it was images that John already had about Amish people that gave rise to his stereotype of his neighbours. (We shall explore the influence of such social representation in more detail in Theme 3.) If he had simply observed what he saw and heard of them in situ, without these prior images, he would have had a far more complex picture of them. To compound this, were his a priori negative feelings about so-called 'fundamentalist' Christians - his prejudices - so that his final otherization of his neighbours reduced them to people who would never watch television, would always think it evil and, by extension, would not appreciate the complexities of such modern phenomena as Diana's funeral. One may think, so what? Amish people are strange and odd, and restrict their behaviour and opt out of 'normal' life. The point is that John judged his neighbours, and categorized them, and decided what they would and would not be before really investigating who they were as individuals.
**Introduction: Defining Concepts**

- **A Stereotyping**
  - Ideal characterization of the foreign Other

- **B Prejudice**
  - Judgement made on the basis of interest rather than emergent evidence

- **C Otherizing**
  - Reducing the foreign Other to less than what they are

- **E Culturism**
  - Reducing the members of a group to pre-defined characteristics of a cultural label

- **D Essentialism**

*Figure 4 Constituents of otherization*

**Culturism**

The lower half of Figure 4 reveals another aspect of otherization, which addresses the issue of culture. Following our comment regarding bubbles A and C (23), the groups of people who we characterize as the 'foreign Other' can be said to share between them something cultural. The problem is that 'we' can very easily take this too far and allow the notion of 'culture' to become greater than the people themselves. Just as we too easily form stereotypes which can pre-define what people are like, we can imagine or reify 'cultures' as objects, places and physical entities within which and by which people live (Table 1 cell i). By reification we mean to imagine something to be real when it is not. Hence, essentialism is born (bubble D). Therefore, in Example A2.1.1:

- John saw the Amish as a religious culture characterized by the stereotypical traits of austere appearance, disdain for modernity and so on, which would govern the behaviour of the Smith family. He thus saw them through the filter of 'in Amish culture... ' (Table 1 cell ix)

From essentialism there is just a small step to **culturism** (bubble E). This is similarly constructed to racism or sexism in that the imagined characteristics of the 'culture' (or 'women' or 'Asians') are used to define the person. Thus:

- whatever Mrs Smith did, John *explained* it as being Amish. And if she did something which did not fit the explanation, it was that she had somehow lost her culture, was no longer, or 'not really' Amish, or had been 'secularized'.

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Again, the reader might think this argument inconsequential, because 'everyone knows' that the Amish 'are in fact like that'. Nevertheless, if one applied the same cultural rule to women, we would get:

- whatever Mrs Smith did, John explained it as being due to her being a woman. And if she did something which did not fit the explanation, it was that she had lost her femininity.

Communication

The disciplines for intercultural communication arising from this unit carry the same basic message as those in Unites A1.1, A1.2 and A1.3, except that here they can draw attention to the factors which help prevent us from misinterpreting other people's realities. In the light of the experience of this unit, we must therefore do the following (disciplines 1–4 appear on page 10, 5–6 on page 15 and 7–9 on pages 19–20).

10. Avoid falling into the culturist trap of reducing people to less than they are – in the same way as we must avoid racist and sexist traps.

Task A2.1.1 Thinking about the Smiths

- Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Smiths example and describe it in similar detail.
- Pinpoint where the elements of otherization depicted in Figure 4 show themselves in the situation, and list the perpetrators and victims.
- What can you learn from this about intercultural communication? How might you go about conforming to the discipline described?

CULTURAL DEALING
What we project onto each other

Experience

This unit looks at the problem of otherization on a macro scale when two communities of people come together and behave according to their images of each other. Consider this example (first used in Holliday 2002):

Example A2.2.1 Tourists and business

Agnes has joined a tour group which is travelling through North Africa visiting archaeological sites. The group is made up of German, Italian, French, Swedish and
British tourists. They stay in a small hotel near one particular site for three days. It is 30 kilometres from the nearest town, but there is a village nearby. The villagers work in the hotel and have also set up a string of small shops in which they sell local handicrafts and souvenirs.

Agnes forms a brief relationship with François. She is really amazed at herself for succumbing to his charms. She thinks it is, after all, such a cliché. She has of course seen the film *Shirley Valentine*, in which a middle-aged Englishwoman falls in love with a local restaurant owner while on holiday on a Greek island. She has never had such a casual relationship before; but her marriage is struggling and she has come away to escape. She is also sure that François, who seems a real gigolo, does this sort of thing with every European woman who comes along.

François is amazed at himself for getting involved like this. He is unmarried and has never had an affair with a woman before. He is engaged to be married, and has a high sense of personal morality. Indeed, he will not have had sex with his fiancée, and his relationship with her will have been carefully chaperoned. He has actually fallen in love with Agnes, but is at the same time wracked by remorse because he is being unfaithful to his fiancée, whom he also loves deeply. After a very short time he becomes horrified at Agnes’s behaviour. She suddenly ‘throws herself at him’ and is readily prepared to have sex. It must after all be true what everyone says about European women — that they are loose, have no morals and will have sex with anyone.

They part in anger. She goes back to her fellow travellers and indulges more than ever in the stories of how North African men swindle tourists and mistreat their women. He goes back to his village and indulges more than ever in the stories of the corrupt West.

**Deconstruction**

Here we can see François and Agnes getting into a very difficult relationship made more so by a complexity of personal and cultural complications. Basic concepts here are as follows.

- When people from different backgrounds meet, a middle culture of dealing is set up within which they interact, which in turn is influenced by respective complexes of cultural baggage.
- What people see of each other is influenced by the middle culture of dealing, which may be very different to what they think they see which is a product of otherization.

**Middle cultures of dealing**

Figure 5 can be interpreted not in the essentialist terms of ‘European culture’ and ‘North African culture’ (Table 1 cell iii), but in terms of a far more complicated mélange of interacting and overlapping cultural entities (Table 1 cell vi). This is demonstrated in Figure 5. Bubbles B and D represent the small cultures of the tourists and of the villagers while they are trading with the tourists. These are the cultures which initially come into
contact with each other and which act as the primary source of information for each group. The broader cultural influences of being European or villagers and so on are in the background in bubbles A and E. What exactly these influences, as cultural resources, might be will also depend on the specific circumstances (Unit A1.2 Figure 2). In this case, village and family might have a stronger impact on François because of their proximity, and being European on Agnes because of the group of people she is with as a tourist. The tourist culture and the trading-with-tourists culture (bubbles B and D) are more temporary and yet specific to the activities in hand. Anyone who has seen a group of tourists, among whom are their own compatriots, will recognize that they are behaving very differently (in bubble B) to when they are at home (bubble A), forming a new type cohesiveness among themselves with perhaps new artefacts such as cameras, water bottles, sun hats, backpacks and so on. At the same time, the village trading culture (in bubble D) will have different characteristics to the culture of the village itself (bubble E), with perhaps use of languages, currencies, codes of politeness and so on which are tuned to the foreign customer. This trading-with-tourists culture (in bubble D) may be seen as an extension or outcrop from the village culture (in circle E); and it will not be the only one. Similar cultures (bubble D) will grow when people go to school or university, travel to cities or deal with other people who come to the village – thus exemplifying that the village culture (bubble E) is always far from the confined exclusivity in the essentialist sense.
Introduction: Defining concepts

Bubble C. in the centre of the figure, represents a further extension of all the other cultures where the actual interaction between François and Agnes takes place. This is a culture of dealing because it is set up between the two interactants who enter into a relationship of culture-making.

We do not wish to give the impression in this model of behaviour that the cultures in bubbles B to D are ‘subcultures’ which are hierarchically subordinate or deviant to the respective ‘parent’ cultures (bubbles A and E). A more open-ended picture seems more appropriate, in which the ‘small cultures’ of the tourists, the village, the tourist–tourism business and so on have a multiplicity of relationships both within and transcending larger entities (Table 1 cells iii–iv). Furthermore, Figure 5 presents only one way of seeing what happens between the villagers and the tourists. Another way of seeing this might be in terms of discourses, rather than small cultures, as discussed in Unit A3.2 and by Gee in Unit B1.3. Whether these can be called discourses or cultures might depend on the degree to which they are represented by ways of talking or behaviour and artefacts.

This model of multiple cultures means that what François and Agnes actually see of each other is very much defined by the specific situation in which they meet. The cultural influences of Europe, from where Agnes comes, are only part of the picture. The culture of tourism is closer, and its influence is evidenced in Example A2.2.1 by the reference to the Shirley Valentine film in which the behaviour of a middle-aged English woman is changed by being away from home in an ‘exotic’ place. For François, it is the culture of trading with tourists which brings him into contact with Agnes, leaving the social influences of the village and his engagement relatively distant. When François and Agnes actually meet, it is within the very new culture of their dealing with each other that they see each other’s behaviour directly. It could be argued that in this new culture their behaviour becomes incompetent (Holliday 2002:152) — anomalous, sometimes mixed up, still approaching the competence people achieve in longer-standing cultures, as they learn how to behave in this very new culture. Put more simply, they see each other very much out of character in this clumsy new culture.

Nevertheless, the basis upon which they perceive or think they see each other is very different. Inaccurate otherization and culturism become rampant. Although Agnes, as a tourist, is behaving differently because she is on holiday, François explains her behaviour — as a ‘loose immoral’ woman — according to the common stereotype of Europeans he brings from his village. Agnes similarly explains his behaviour — as a ‘swindler, gigolo and misogynist’ — according to the common stereotype of people who work in the bazaars of North Africa she brings from home. They both thus miss totally the fact that each of them is involved in an intense moral struggle precipitated by the strangeness of the situation in which they find themselves.

What needs to be realized here is that in a non-essentialist paradigm, we are not looking at the foreign Other as though it is locked in a separate foreign place. In all the examples so far used there are people who are operating at cultural borders. Moreover, their struggle for identity is very much connected with this border activity — how they are being seen by people who do not know them. We showed in Unit A1.3 and in Unit A2.1 that this is to do with people moving not just between different societies but also between small cultures within a particular society. Figure 6 shows that what we actually see in a person’s behaviour and what they say about themselves interacts both with the
Cultural dealing

Cultural resources they bring with them and the new culture they encounter. Hence, Zhang's talk about Confucianism in Unit A1.2 is his projection onto the circumstances in which he finds himself in the foreign society of the master's programme.

What is particularly unfortunate here is that very often the resources we bring with us from our familiar cultural experience (right-hand bubble of the figure), and which we then project onto the unfamiliar culture which we confront (left-hand bubble) are very often stereotypes that arise from our own discourses about the Other. Then, after subsequently unsuccessful interaction with the Other, we return, like François and Agnes, to the same comfortable discourses – hence the two-way arrows in Figure 6.

![Diagram of cultural dealing process](image)

**Figure 6** Identity on the cusp

**Communication**

As a result of this unit it is possible to build on the disciplines from Unit A1.3, which dealt with communication as cultural negotiation. From our understanding of the complex cultures surrounding communication, we need to do the following (see other disciplines listed previously).

11. Be aware that what happens between yourself and others is influenced very much by the environment within which you are communicating and your own preoccupations.

Because of this, we need to do the following.

12. Become aware of our own preoccupations in order to understand what it is that people from other backgrounds are responding to.

This in effect means that we need to research ourselves just as much as we research those who are strange to us. This links with the disciplines in Unit A1.1 about building a thick description of the whole communication scenario.
Task A2.2.1  Thinking about cultural dealing

- Think of a situation you have been in where there is an element of cultural dealing and describe it, using Figure 5 to help you.
- Evaluate Figure 5 and try to improve on it so that it fits the situation you have described better.
- Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of Figure 6 and the disciplines listed.
- What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

UNIT A2.3  POWER AND DISCOURSE
We must be careful what we say

Experience

This unit considers how careful we must all be when talking about and to people who we consider to be Other, because we may be unaware of the power our words may carry. Indirectly, the unit will consider the issue of political correctness, a much-contested concept. Consider Example A2.3.2.

Example A2.3.1  Understanding supervisor

Jeremy is a lecturer in an Australian university. He was very pleased when he heard he was going to supervise a black student from South Africa. Several years ago he had been involved in a three-year science education project in secondary schools in South Africa, and he felt he knew the place more than his colleagues. He felt he would clearly be the best person to help Jabu to get through her research project. He had also read quite a few things on cultural differences, which interested him a great deal.

Jabu first met Jeremy during a class he was teaching on introducing science research. She was the only overseas student there and felt quite angry when, during introductions, he announced to all the other student that he knew her ‘context’ very well. She was not sure whether it was something about his tone of voice – as though he was speaking about someone who had a handicap of some sort – or his speed of voice – as though she might not understand normal English – or that she was being separated out from all the other students as needing some sort of special attention – which annoyed her. Or perhaps it was that Jeremy was making out that he understood her and was on her side. What could he possibly know about her and her background which would give him this right? Even her closest friends at home did not presume they knew her so well that they could speak for her like this – except perhaps her mother, and every daughter knows that story.
She could see, at their first tutorial, that he really was trying his best; but he still maintained his slow tone of voice. At least he wasn’t shouting as some people did when they thought you might not understand. Then he began to explain to her that he understood something about what he called ‘black culture in South Africa’ and would therefore be able to help her to meet deadlines and to ‘understand concepts’ that might be ‘alien’ to her. He even said that he knew what it was like, with ‘the history of black people’ that she ‘suddenly had to compete in every sphere’. It took her a moment to understand what he was getting at. Then she realized that he was having the ignorant audacity to be thinking that she might have difficulty keeping up with ‘white people’.

This sort of thing became the norm for Jeremy and Jabu’s meetings. When she showed him work he always made a big thing about saying how well she had done – as though he was surprised that she could do it at all. Then there were lots of informal ‘friendly’ bits of conversation, in which he always put on a very ‘kind’ face, about ‘food’, ‘rituals’, ‘marriage practices’ and ‘ceremonies’ in black culture; and once he even asked her if she was ‘still in contact with her tribe’. He was also supervising a German student; and she was sure he never asked him about ‘food’, ‘rituals’, ‘marriage practices’, ‘ceremonies’ and ‘tribes’.

One day Jabu really felt like giving up the whole thing and going home. She was walking down the corridor towards Jeremy’s office. He was standing in the corridor talking to a colleague. He hadn’t seen her, and he was saying, ‘Well she does have some difficulty meeting deadlines; but of course that’s something deep in black African culture, isn’t it?’ She knew as a matter of fact that she was having no more difficulty than any of the other students; and anyway, even if she was, why should it have anything to do with being black African? There was a Welsh student who always missed deadlines, and no one would dare suggest this was anything to do with ‘Welsh culture’.

Deconstruction

This example clearly shows two very different perceptions of what is going on. Jeremy believes he is being supportive, inclusive and understanding, whereas Jabu feels she is being treated badly and indeed the victim of racism. Jeremy is, we are sure, trying his best to do what he can for Jabu; but in our view he is making a basic mistake which derives from his essentialist notion of her culture, which prevents him from dealing with her as she sees herself. Her predicament is similar to that of Parisa in Unit A1.1, though it remains unresolved in this example. Jeremy falls into the same trap as John does in Unit A2.2; but in his naivety he does not realize it; and this lack of realization goes deep into his language. We shall discuss the details of this problem in terms of the following concepts.

- Thinking you are being understanding when in fact you are patronizing.
- False sharing.
- Culturist language.
Introduction: Defining concepts

Being patronizing

This is detailed in Table 3. Basically, in row 1, Jeremy does not base his understanding of Jabu on what he observes of her, but on pictures he himself has constructed from his own experience in South Africa. Here, he makes the usual essentialist mistake of imagining that everyone in South Africa is the same; and the basis of his construction in the first place is likely to have been stereotypical (Table 1 cell ix). His reading into 'cultural difference' also implies an essentialist fascination with comparable, collectible cultures as objects (Table 1 cell i). All of this drives his behaviour – talking not really to her but to an image of who she is. Moreover, his treating her as a cultural category sets her apart from the other students (Table 5 row ii). Making her 'special' inhibits her ability to integrate and makes her feel labelled less capable than the other students (Table 5 row iii). This notion of 'special needs' is also strengthened by the essentialist idea that arriving in a 'new' culture, like learning a new language, puts Jabu in a deficit position. See for example (Table 1 cells vii–viii and x); ('Special needs' is an issue which also affects the inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds and abilities within state education.)

Table 3: Difficult communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jeremy thinks he is being understanding and inclusive because:</th>
<th>Jabu feels patronized, otherized and the victim of racism because:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I He shows he understands her cultural circumstances and special needs.</td>
<td>She does not want to be made 'special' by someone who could not possibly understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He has no right to presume she has special needs. He is treating her as inferior to others because of a limited understanding of who she is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She feels invaded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II He rationalizes her shortcomings in terms of her culture.</td>
<td>He makes her a special cultural case. He implies the inferiority of her culture. He fails to imagine she could be like others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III He speaks slowly and carefully.</td>
<td>Before he even meets her, he assumes she will have difficulty understanding. He treats her as though she is handicapped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV He shows interest in her culture.</td>
<td>He over-emphasizes 'exotic' aspects, which imply backwardness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V He makes reference to cultural concepts she will understand.</td>
<td>He uses language which implies her inferiority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final straw for Jabu is when she overhears Jeremy in the corridor making what can be no less than a culturist comment – that her lateness in meeting deadlines is caused by her being a 'black African'. The blatant error in this judgement is revealed by Jabu's observation that she certainly is not being treated equally with other students. Indeed, it is Jeremy's over-generalization that her lateness is a product of her national culture which prevents him from seeing a far more common explanation – that she is really more like other students than different to them.
False sharing

This category of otherization is complex. It corresponds with row iv in Table 5. Again, Jeremy is probably right and sincere in wanting to share; but he is sharing with an image of Jabu which he has constructed, while the real Jabu exists in a very different world. What reveals Jeremy's mistake is Jabu's observation that if she were German, he would not be making references to 'marriage practices', 'ceremonies' and 'tribes'; and as German society must be complex just like hers, he must have selected these topics when he talks to her because they have some sort of exotic value, which in turn implies, for her, some sort of backwardness. This type of otherization is often difficult to pin down. Jeremy could equally have cultural imaginations about German society, which would indeed be reflected in his choice of topics when talking to his German student—perhaps connected with being organized or militaristic. In Jabu's case, coming from a part of the world where there is a colonial history, there is indeed an expectation of another type of cultural imagination, akin to Orientalism in the Middle and Far East, where certain aspects of societies have been sensationalized by the West to feed a deep view that they are indeed 'backward' and 'lascivious'. (See the discussion of Orientalism in Unit B2.1.) The key word in Jeremy's choice of topics is 'tribe'. Although this term might be in common usage to refer to certain types of social grouping, perhaps even by Jabu herself, when used by Jeremy it rings of 'primitive', lacking in state organization and 'pre-literate', and colours his reference to the other things on his list. Therefore, 'marriage practices', 'ceremonies' and 'rituals' become 'primitive'. Jabu is thus being 'tribalized' by Jeremy (see, e.g., Nzimiro (1979), Wagner (1981:29), and Baumann (Text B0.1.2) in Unit B0.1). This is therefore similar to the situation seen in Unit A1.3, where we see a group of school girls using terms of abuse to create social cohesion which would be considered misogynistic if used by outsider men.

Culturist language

The significance of Jeremy's use of 'tribe' and 'practices' draws attention to the role of language in otherization (Table 5 row v). A major point here is that he does not seem to be aware of the effect of the language he is using, and investigating this hidden area takes us into critical discourse analysis and the uncovering of the way everyday talk hides our ideologies (e.g. Fairclough 1995 and Holliday 2000). Although we do not have the full text of what Jeremy says to Jabu, from what we do have in Example A2.3.1, it is possible to see the traces of Jeremy's essentialist culturist ideology in some of his phraseology. Talking of helping Jabu to 'understand concepts' that might be 'alien' to her is not in itself particularly significant in a tutorial supervision context. However, when this is put alongside 'the history of black people' and that she would 'suddenly have to compete in every sphere', understanding concepts seems to become dependent on racial factors. This is certainly the connection which Jabu makes—'keeping up with white people'.

This attention to language raises the issue of political correctness. What has become known as 'PC' in some circles has been attacked quite a lot for (a) preventing people from speaking their minds and stating the obvious, and (b) being over-sensitive to
Introduction: Defining concepts

apparently innocent language which carries hidden racist or sexist references – for example, 'clearing the decks' being a non-PC gender-related phrase because it refers to the navy, which is a male-dominated institution. (It refers to removing unnecessary objects from a warship's deck in preparation for battle, and it used to mean tidying up in preparation for a new activity.) While we would tend to agree with (b), where the sanitization of language might indeed be being taken too far, we do not agree with (a). We really do feel that Jeremy needs to be extremely careful with his language. We certainly regard his statement that Jabu is inability to meet deadlines is connected with 'something deep in black African culture' as something that needs to be 'politically corrected'. This is not just Jeremy speaking casually in an unguarded moment when he thinks Jabu is not listening. The question tag, 'isn't it?' is there to involve a colleague in a discourse which is essentially racist and culturist. This type of unguarded language is thus in danger of normalizing a potentially very destructive way of speaking and thinking about others. Responding again to objection (a) above, Jeremy may indeed be stating what seems to him to be obvious. The point is that, as Jabu rightly rationalizes, what he says is not based on immediate empirical evidence, but on inaccurate stereotyping leading to prejudice (Figure 4 bubbles A and B).

We would therefore state that political correctness is very necessary in the sense that everyone needs to:

- take great care of connections they make between people, their behaviour and generalizations about the categories in which we place people – culture, gender and race being but examples;
- be disciplined in considering evidence which is not connected to these categories.

The discipline in the second point is a form of bracketing – a device used in qualitative research for avoiding the easy answers which most readily spring to mind because of their presence in dominant discourse (e.g. Holliday 2002:22, 185). Jeremy thus needs to be aware that he is already conditioned by an essentialist dominant discourse which will always tend to explain the behaviour of people from certain parts of the world in terms of their national or ethnic culture. If he really wants to help Jabu, he should attend to this rather than indulging unguardedly in his prior experience of her exoticness.

We think it is important to spend a moment to comment about the relationship between culturism and racism in this example. Basically Jeremy is otherizing and reducing Jabu to less than what she is by means of a prescribed image of what he thinks she is. Whether this is racist, culturist or even sexist depends on which aspect of her persona, in his eyes, is the driving force behind his image of her. If it is her blackness, which implies for him, and subsequently her, race, then this is racism. If it is her gender, then this is sexism. If it is her culture, then this is culturism. Although Jabu reads Jeremy's attitude as racism, his primary interest is in her culture. Therefore, we see his reducing of her as culturism.
Power and discourse

Communication

This unit is very much about restraint. Learning from Jeremy's mistakes, we need to do the following (see other disciplines listed previously).
1. Avoid being seduced by previous experience of the exotic.
2. Monitor our own language and be aware of the destructive, culturist discourses we might be conforming to or perpetuating.

Task A2.3.1 Thinking about Jabu

- Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Jabu example and describe it in similar detail.
- Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of Table 3 and the disciplines listed.
- What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?