



**London
South Bank
University**



UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES AND DEALING WITH AMBIGUITY IN COMMUNICATION

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Narrated case study can be accessed [here](#).



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UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES AND DEALING WITH AMBIGUITY IN COMMUNICATION – TEACHING GUIDE

1. Synopsis

David is a recruitment officer at EducationCo, an educational company operating in the private sector in the UK with approximately 150 employees. Staff at EducationCo must be familiar with how language differences can cause ambiguity in communication with international partners. EducationCo works with international private bodies that help introduce the company to international agents and consultants; therefore, cultural and language awareness is essential in communication. For example, David was recently in a meeting with Chinese partners to go over a contract, and he had to carefully explain all the contract terms to ensure that the Chinese partners understood the contents. To avoid uncertainty in communication with international partners, David now needs to train a new recruitment officer on the importance of understanding language differences.

2. Teaching Strategy and Teaching Objectives

Students/learners will be able to:

- Understand the importance of coping with ambiguity in communication, such as due to language difference, is key to effective intercultural communication.
- Explore how managers may overcome language barriers in intercultural communication.

3. Target Audience

- ✓ Undergraduate students in all business-related disciplines
- ✓ Postgraduate students in all business-related disciplines
- ✓ Employers

4. Questions for Case Analysis and Teaching

1. Why are intercultural skills in communication important for EducationCo?
2. What are the key issues in intercultural communication EducationCo is facing with respect to its international partners?
3. What does David's experience with intercultural communication teach us about the extra effort managers need to put into resolving communication issues arising from language differences?
4. How can coping with ambiguity in intercultural communication improve intercultural collaboration?



5. How do you suggest that David trains the new recruitment officer in dealing with ambiguity in intercultural communication?

5. References and Recommended Reading

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UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES AND DEALING WITH AMBIGUITY IN COMMUNICATION – TEACHING NOTES

1. Summary of case study

David is a recruitment officer for an educational company, EducationCo, operating in the private sector in the UK and which employs approximately 150 employees. In EducationCo, staff need to be experienced in how language differences may be creating ambiguity in communication with their international partners. EducationCo works with international private bodies who help introduce the company to international agents and consultants, therefore, being aware of cultural and language issues in communication is imperative. For example, David was recently in a meeting with Chinese partners going over a contract and he had to carefully explain all the terms to ensure that the Chinese partners fully understood the contents of the contract. He now needs to train a new recruitment officer on the importance of understanding language differences to reduce ambiguity in communication with international partners.

2. Suggested methodology for ‘solving’ case study

The first step is to understand the importance of ‘coping with ambiguity’ in communication, such as that due to language differences, for effective intercultural communication. The theory slides on ‘coping with ambiguity’ accompanying this material should be reviewed. The second step is to reflect on this understanding to think of ways in which David (case study) can train the new recruitment officer on the importance of understanding language differences to reduce ambiguity in communication with international partners.

3. Possible answers

Q1) Why are intercultural skills in communication important for EducationCo?

Intercultural skills in communication are important for EducationCo because employees in the organisation need to frequently communicate with international partners. The organisation works with a range of international private bodies, international agents, and consultants. Language differences often create ambiguity in communication with these international partners and it is for this reason employees at EducationCo need to be aware of cultural and language issues in communication. Resolving ambiguity in communication can help EducationCo to improve collaboration between all parties.

Q2) What are the key issues in intercultural communication EducationCo is facing with respect to its international partners?

The case study provides an example of an issue in intercultural communication. David recently attended a meeting with Chinese partners to go over a contract that was to be signed. He had to assume that the Chinese partners might not understand all terms of the contract and for this reason he ensured that he carefully explained these terms to the Chinese partners. The key issue, therefore, relates to language differences and how different cultures understand written language.



Q3) What does David's experience with intercultural communication teaches us about the extra effort managers need to put in resolving communication issues arising from language differences?

David's experience with intercultural communication teaches us that culture plays an important role in communication, particularly in how verbal and written language might be interpreted. Managers should not assume that words have similar meanings in different cultures. They need to consider language subtleties prior to communicating with international partners.

Q4) How can coping with ambiguity in intercultural communication improve intercultural collaboration?

Being able to cope with ambiguity in intercultural communication is an important skill to have when collaborating with international teams. Being aware of such ambiguities can help clarify language in communication, therefore enabling more effective teamwork and collaboration. Coping with ambiguity is important in both face-to-face and virtual communication. Particularly with respect to virtual intercultural communication, the misunderstanding of non-verbal cues can cause additional ambiguity in communication.

Q5) How do you suggest that David trains the new recruitment officer in dealing with ambiguity in intercultural communication?

David can pinpoint the specific groups of international partners where he has identified that there is ambiguity in intercultural communication and think of ways to clarify the recurring issues that he has observed. For example, he has noticed that the Chinese partners might not be fully understanding legal contractual terms. Therefore, the new recruitment officer should be made aware of this, and a plan should be drawn to ensure that meetings with Chinese partners over contracts diligently go over the terminology used. This will enhance communication between the parties and lead to improved collaboration. David can include in a training programme knowledge on intercultural communication theories, such as on high and low context cultures, to improve the knowledge the new recruitment officer has over issues surrounding intercultural communication.

