

# BEYOND LANGUAGE

## Intercultural Communication for English as a Second Language

DEENA R. LEVINE

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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION  
FOR ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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*I do not want my house to be walled in  
on all sides and my windows to be stuffed.  
I want the cultures of all lands to be blown  
about my house as freely as possible. But I  
refuse to be blown off my feet by any.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

# Preface

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*"... to know another's language and not his culture is a very good way to make a fluent fool of one's self."*<sup>1</sup>

English as a Second Language programs that are solely language-oriented cannot fully assist foreign and immigrant students to understand and adapt to important cultural differences of the host country. The purpose of this text, which is directed to intermediate and advanced students, is to introduce a substantial cultural component into the ESL classroom while emphasizing three of the basic language skills: reading, vocabulary building, and conversation. The specific goals of the text are:

- (1) to present aspects of American culture using reading passages;
- (2) to provide a context for reading and vocabulary development;
- (3) to stimulate discussions about culture based on the readings and conversational activities;
- (4) to assist students' adjustment to life in the United States;
- (5) to encourage an appreciation of cultural diversity and the process of intercultural communication.

Although the ESL classroom lends itself to the integration of language instruction and intercultural learning, there often is only a random exposure to culture in the classroom. This text has been designed to permit a systematic and graded presentation of language and culture. Each chapter has two parts: (1) readings and discussion about selected areas of American culture, and (2) intercultural communication activities. The chapters in the text include: Verbal Patterns, Nonverbal Communication, Personal Relationships, Family Values, Educational Attitudes, Work Values, Time and Space Patterns, Cultural Conflict, and Cultural Adjustment. We hope that the knowledge the students gain will help them avoid culturally-based misunderstandings.

The readings are designed to develop an awareness of subtle areas of culture and to encourage students to discuss aspects of American society. By necessity, certain generalizations have been made about the

"dominant" culture in the United States. We are aware of the tremendous heterogeneity of our society and have been cautious in our interpretations of cultural behavior. Thus, when students read, "Americans prefer that . . ." or "Americans may react in this way when . . .," they should realize that this does not mean all Americans and may not, in some cases, even mean most Americans. The purpose of such generalizations is to provide students with descriptions of broad tendencies or norms in "American" behavior. When we refer to the American culture, we are referring to, in sociological terms, the dominant culture. We hope that ESL teachers and students will augment our descriptions with examples of cultural diversity. It is beyond the scope of this book to delve into variations of thought, behavior, and values of the numerous ethnic and racial groups in the United States.

The focus on American values and behavior in the first half of each of the text's chapters is designed to serve as a background for the cross-cultural activities in the second half of each chapter. These activities can help students become aware of the role that their cultures play in influencing their personal observations, judgments, and actions. Just as learning a second language often leads to a deeper understanding of one's native language, understanding the values of a second culture can lead to the discovery of values in one's own culture. Ideally, this discovery enhances communication between people from different cultures.

Intercultural communication is the process whereby one's culture affects interaction with a person from another culture. Despite its apparent simplicity, this definition does not immediately suggest the difficulties that are sometimes encountered in the process. When interacting with people from different cultures, one's tendency is to judge them according to one's own values, a tendency which often interferes with successful cultural adjustment and intercultural communication. With intercultural understanding, students can learn to identify the ways that culture influences an individual's values, assumptions, and beliefs about the world.

It is our hope that this text will enable ESL students to explore components of culture as well as intercultural similarities and differences. While assisting the students to achieve fluency in English, this text attempts to aid successful communication by providing an integrated curriculum of language and culture.

Deena R. Levine  
Mara B. Adelman

# Acknowledgments

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*To our parents  
and to our foreign students  
for having enriched our cultural understanding*

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# To the Teacher

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The following guidelines outlining the text's chapters include explanations and suggestions intended to aid the instructor's presentation of the material.

Each chapter in this text is divided into two major sections: (1) a reading passage, comprehension questions, and vocabulary exercises; and (2) conversational activities related to the topic of the reading. The appendices include a vocabulary list from the readings and a short bibliography of books on intercultural communication for teachers and advanced students. The text provides one to two semesters' worth of material depending on the frequency of class meetings and the language level of the students.

## *Readings*

The sequence of the readings is based primarily on: (1) the complexity of vocabulary and language structure in the passage; (2) the conceptual difficulty of the topic; and (3) the progression of topics dealing with interactional behavior to those which broaden intercultural understanding. Each passage is divided into subheadings which may be discussed separately if one class period does not permit the reading of an entire passage. It is recommended that the instructor assign the readings as homework or, particularly for intermediate students, have the class read the passages silently before discussing them. Students should be encouraged to survey the passage first by reading the title, the subheadings, the introduction, the first line of each paragraph, and the conclusion. After this is completed, the instructor can either initiate a general brief discussion on the topic or define key phrases and concepts from the passage. More advanced students may be asked to complete the "Comprehension Questions" before beginning the reading as a test of their pre-existing knowledge of the topic. Once the reading is completed, the instructor may wish to divide the class into small groups and have each



group responsible for summarizing the content of particular subheadings. Alternatively, the teacher may ask students to summarize or paraphrase sections of the readings for writing assignments. The paragraphs are numbered and lettered so that instructors may refer easily to sections of the readings.

### *Comprehension Questions*

The comprehension questions are intended to help students assess whether they have grasped main ideas and understood details from the readings. Although the reading comprehension questions precede the vocabulary exercises, the teacher may present either activity first. Intermediate-level students may need to review the vocabulary before doing the comprehension questions. For variety, the instructor may wish to alternate the order of presentation of the exercises. Answers to the comprehension questions are in the teacher's manual.

### *Vocabulary Exercises*

The exercises which follow the vocabulary list incorporate all the italicized words from the passage. The letter of the paragraph is noted beside the word or sentence so that the student can easily refer back to the passage. The exercises vary from chapter to chapter and include: Synonyms, Multiple Choice, Word Forms, Matching, Definitions, Words in Sentences, Fill-In, and Definitions in Context.

### *Conversational Activities*

The conversational activities provide a format for discussions on a wide variety of topics related to the readings. The language level and the design of the activities vary in each chapter. Therefore, instructors are encouraged to adapt or omit any exercise according to the needs of the class. Role-playing, for example, may be appropriate for some classes and not for others. The dialogue fill-in exercises may be more suitable for an intermediate class than an advanced one. There are enough conversational activities in each chapter so that the teacher may choose freely according to the learning style of the class. Some of the activities include short explanations and follow-up questions which can be used to assist the instructor in introducing and concluding the exercises. The conver-

sational activities, which are well-suited to small, culturally-mixed groups of students, include the following.

**Multiple  
Choice  
Questions**

Students are first given the opportunity to respond to a given situation or question and are then asked to choose the 'American' response(s). Generally one answer is correct; however two or even three answers may be correct. The ambiguity is intentional because it stimulates discussions and encourages students to discuss a variety of cultural and personal contexts where different responses would be possible. For example:

1. When someone compliments the watch you are wearing, what would you say or do?

*In your country:* \_\_\_\_\_

*In the United States:*

- a. Say "Oh this cheap thing? It's not worth much."
- b. Give it to him or her.
- c. Say "Thanks," and smile.
- d. Say "Would you like to have it?"

In this example, the instructor would indicate that "c" is the best answer but that "a" is possible. However, the instructor should point out that "c" is a more typical response than "a." (Answers to multiple choice questions are found in the teacher's manual.)

**Role-Playing**

Students act out situations in pairs or in small groups. Grouping the students according to nationality is an effective strategy for role-playing. Alternatively, mixed groups can illustrate cultural variations.

**Problem-  
Solving/  
Case Studies**

Students read and discuss short paragraphs in which there is a problem or conflict that needs identification and resolution. This activity is best accomplished when done first in small groups and then discussed with the entire class.

**Surveys,  
Question-  
naires, Rating  
Exercises**

Students work on exercises which include specific questions related to the readings. The instructor may wish to assign these exercises as homework or have the students complete them individually before discussing them with the entire class. Some students may be unfamiliar with the design of the activities (e.g., rating scales) and the teacher should explain the procedures for completing these exercises.

**Cross-Cultural Questions** Students discuss questions which elicit responses about intercultural similarities and differences. They should be encouraged to choose the questions of greatest interest to them. Answers to cross-cultural questions may also be used as subjects in written reports.

**Cultural Notes** Most of the chapters end with supplementary information on customs, rules, language usage, and common practices in the United States. The cultural notes may be presented immediately after the readings or as a final activity. Also included at the end of the cultural notes is a vocabulary list which can be used to supplement the vocabulary from the readings.

**Excerpts From Students' Writings** The text ends with adapted excerpts from international students' compositions answering the question, "What are the problems and pleasures of living in the United States?" These excerpts can be used in conjunction with sections of any chapter in order to stimulate discussion on students' personal experiences living in the United States.

### *Final Note*

In discussions on culture, instructors may need to emphasize and reinforce several notions. Culture, unlike language, does not always contain set rules and patterns. Two students from one country may disagree about what is done in their culture. In addition, some students may want to discuss "rights" and "wrongs" about a particular culture. It is sometimes necessary to point out that what is considered right in one culture may be considered wrong in another. Also, there may be a tendency to assign culture as an explanation for everything. The student may have to be reminded that an individual's personality can have greater influence than culture on the individual's perceptions and behavior. Finally, some students may tend to emphasize intercultural similarities while others may want to stress the differences. It is our hope that students will conclude that universal human characteristics can contribute to successful communications between any two people.

# To the Student

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This text is designed so that you can improve your reading, vocabulary, and conversational skills while learning about culture in the United States and in other parts of the world. This text is divided into ten chapters, each of which has two main sections:

- (1) readings, comprehension questions, and vocabulary development;
- (2) conversational activities and cultural notes.

The readings at the beginning of each chapter present information primarily about American culture. After each reading are comprehension questions which will test your ability to understand main ideas and important details. Following the comprehension questions are vocabulary exercises which will enable you to practice using new words from the readings. The conversational activities section will provide you with opportunities to discuss important aspects of culture.

It is our hope that this book will help you to:

- (1) learn about life in the United States;
- (2) develop your vocabulary and reading skills;
- (3) improve your conversational ability;
- (4) recognize the relationship between language and culture.

Terms and definitions used in this book include:

*Intercultural Communication*—communication between people from different cultures; communication which is influenced by cultural values, attitudes, and behavior.

*Culture*—shared background (e.g., national, ethnic, religious) reflecting a common language and communication style, and shared customs, beliefs, attitudes, and values. (Note: "Culture" in this text does not

refer to art, music, literature, food, dress, and so on, but is used in a much broader sense.)

*Communication*—the process of shared meaning through verbal and nonverbal behavior.

*Americans*—people born and raised in the United States; citizens of the United States. (Note: There is, unfortunately, no adequate adjective to label people from the United States. "American" also refers to Canadians, Mexicans, and people from countries in Central and South America. For lack of a better word and because "United Statesian" is awkward, the authors have decided to use "American.")

# Contents

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Preface ix

To the Teacher xii

To the Student xvi

## 1 Introductions 3

*Reading* 3  
*Comprehension Questions* 8  
*Vocabulary Exercises* 10  
*Conversational Activities* 12  
*Cultural Notes* 16

## 2 Verbal Patterns 19

*Reading* 19  
*Comprehension Questions* 24  
*Vocabulary Exercises* 26  
*Conversational Activities* 29  
*Cultural Notes* 39

## 3 Nonverbal Communication 43

*Reading* 43  
*Comprehension Questions* 48  
*Vocabulary Exercises* 50

<i>Conversational Activities</i>	53
<i>Cultural Notes</i>	64

#### **4 Personal Relationships 67**

<i>Reading</i>	67
<i>Comprehension Questions</i>	72
<i>Vocabulary Exercises</i>	74
<i>Conversational Activities</i>	79
<i>Cultural Notes</i>	86

#### **5 Family Values 89**

<i>Reading</i>	89
<i>Comprehension Questions</i>	95
<i>Vocabulary Exercises</i>	97
<i>Conversational Activities</i>	102
<i>Cultural Notes</i>	106

#### **6 Educational Attitudes 109**

<i>Reading</i>	109
<i>Comprehension Questions</i>	115
<i>Vocabulary Exercises</i>	117
<i>Conversational Activities</i>	120
<i>Cultural Notes</i>	127

#### **7 Work Values 131**

<i>Reading</i>	131
<i>Comprehension Questions</i>	136
<i>Vocabulary Exercises</i>	138
<i>Conversational Activities</i>	143
<i>Cultural Notes</i>	149

#### **8 Time and Space Patterns 153**

<i>Reading</i>	153
<i>Comprehension Questions</i>	160

<i>Vocabulary Exercises</i>	162
<i>Conversational Activities</i>	165
<i>Cultural Notes</i>	174

**9 Cultural Conflict 177**

<i>Reading</i>	177
<i>Comprehension Questions</i>	183
<i>Vocabulary Exercises</i>	185
<i>Conversational Activities</i>	188

**10 Cultural Adjustment 195**

<i>Reading</i>	195
<i>Comprehension Questions</i>	201
<i>Vocabulary Exercises</i>	203
<i>Conversational Activities</i>	207

**Excerpts: Students' Writings 211**

**Vocabulary from Reading 214**

**Endnotes 219**

**Bibliography 223**



