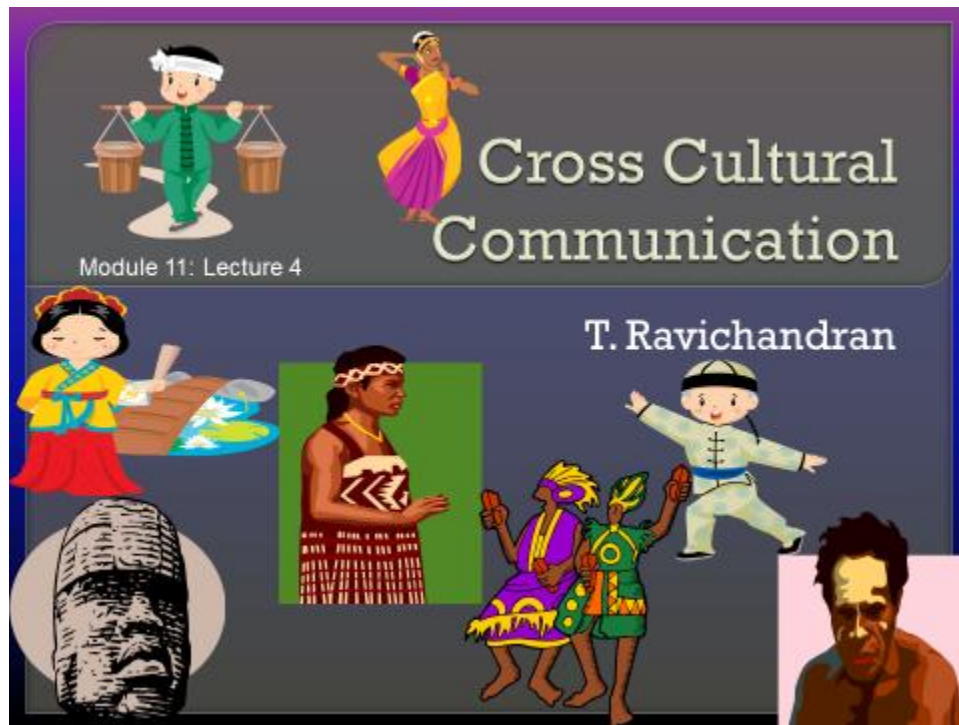


Communication Skills: Lecture No. 37

Module 11

Lecture 4

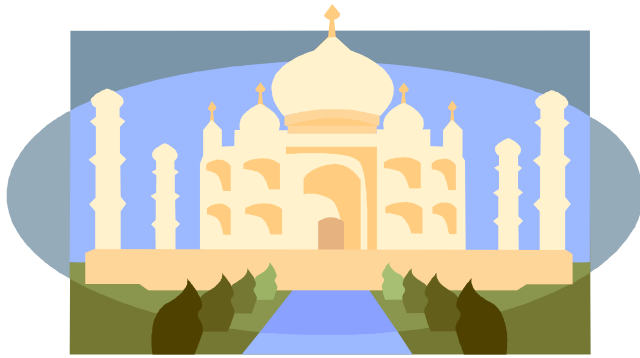
CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION



In this concluding part of this module on Cross Cultural Communication you will learn about the environmental and perceptual contexts and how they can affect cross cultural communication.

Environmental Context

The environmental context includes the physical geography, architecture, landscape design, housing, perceptions of privacy, time orientation, and even the climate of a particular culture. All human communication occurs within a physical and perceptual environment. These



environments have a pervasive influence on the nature of communication. You can quickly understand the environmental influence when you interact with somebody in a quiet room contrasted with a noisy railway station. Similarly, you can see the following in juxtaposition and grasp how the environment can influence one's mood and thinking: classroom/bedroom; desert/beach;

and snow mountain/polluted, crowded road. Compared with a humid environment in which a person sweats profusely, a cool and breezy environment in a garden will be congenial for a personal intimate talk.

How we see our physical world around us is very much influenced by our individual psychological perceptions, which in turn, are shaped by culture. People project their culturally bound mental perceptions onto the physical environment. Physical environment has a considerable impact on our communication. Take for instance, environmental cultures which tolerates smoking in public and those ones that strictly prohibit it.



Aspects of Environment

Let us see how environment itself will determine and decide the degree and intensity of communication. Take a look at the picture of a mall space shown below. You can understand how such huge mall space will deeply impact an interaction compared to having it in a cozy coffee shop.

The information load in such crowded spaces contains high levels of uncertainty and is too heavy.



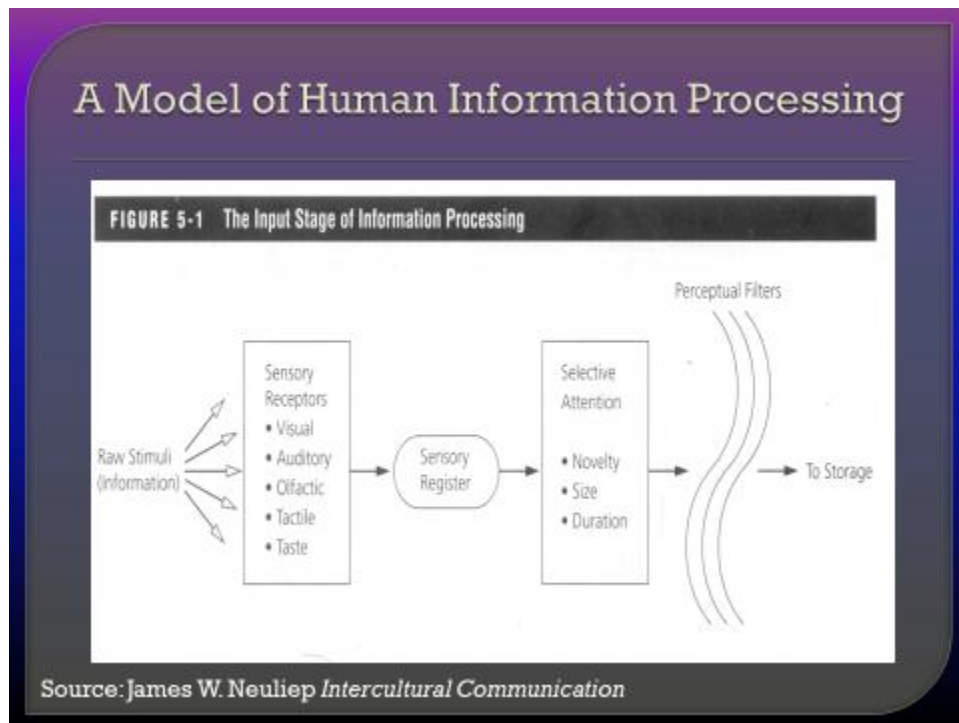
A very calm room such as the private chamber or study room, has low information load. Cultures and their natural environment are intricately related. Culture influences how much people value nature and the symbols they use to communicate about it. As the physical environment of the culture varies, so will the vocabulary of the culture. What is perceived as ‘snow’ in a tropical country like India has only one word to indicate it. Whereas, as noted in an article from *The Washington Post*, there really are 50 Eskimo words for ‘snow.’ Even the pace of daily activities reflect the natural climate. That’s why in a cold environment the working hours are different from those in warm ones. In tropical countries, due to extreme hot weather, people are used to take a siesta (nap). While in the cold countries people finish their dinner by late evening and sleep early.

Besides, the world view of the natural environment varies. People, depending on their cultural orientations, see themselves as *subjugated to nature*, or as *inherent part of nature* or as *dominant*

over nature. Knowing and understanding a particular culture's orientation toward nature is a step in becoming competent intercultural communicator.

The Perceptual Context

The perceptual context comprises the individual characteristics, such as cognitions, attitudes, dispositions and motivations. How an individual gathers, stores, retrieves information is uniquely human, but also culturally influenced. The way they receive information is uniquely human; but the way they are going to store it and retrieve it is culturally programmed or influenced. Thus, attitudes about others including stereotypes are culturally influenced. All of our opinions, assumptions, and types of information stored in our memory are not free from cultural traces. The following model of human information processing suggested by Neuliep clearly demonstrates how perceptual filters play crucial filters in storage.



I would like to further illustrate this model by showing you pictures in the next few slides which will tell us how we are all prone to perceptual errors. I am particularly showing you those pictures which cause optical illusions—which means the picture you perceive at the first sight may be different from the one you receive at a second careful glance. The worst part is you may

not see something that is so perceptible to others! Now take a quick look at the following pictures:

Optical Illusions

Optical Illusions

- This is definitely one of the best-known **optical illusions** of all times! What do you see at first glance - an old woman or a young miss? They are both there!

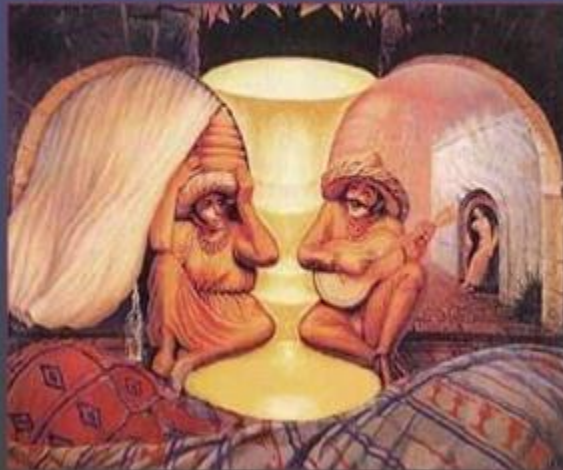


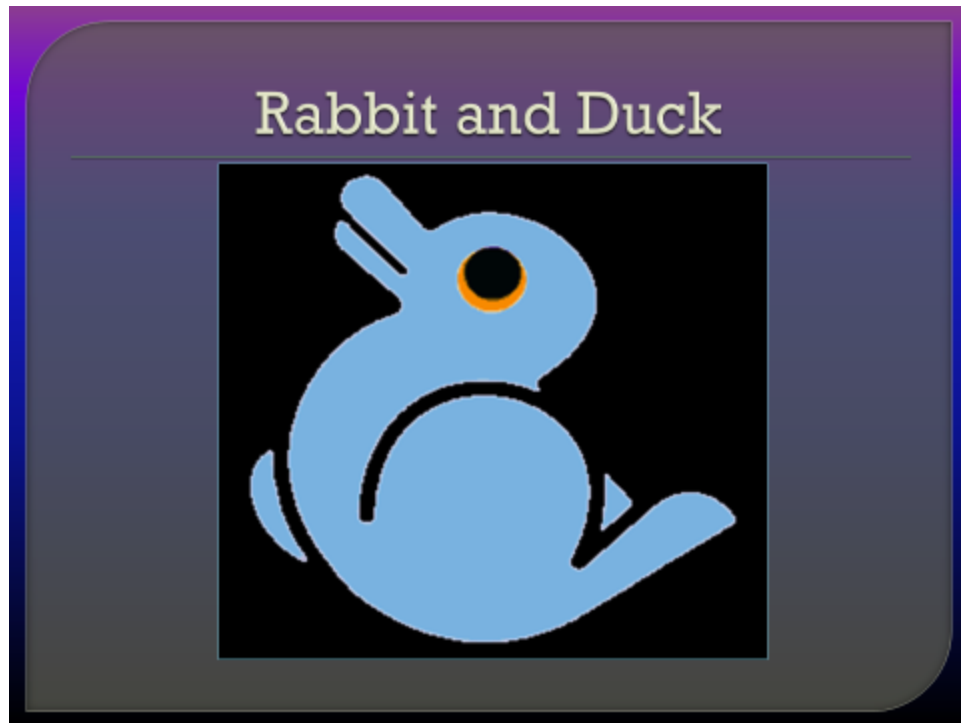
What did you see as at the first glance? Was it an old woman, who is very ragged, and perhaps shivering in cold and covered in black woolen coat? Or, was it the beautiful young woman?

Whole family mind teaser –
father with mother and daughter



An old couple –
see profiles of faces –
is remembering the times when they were young
and full of life - see the sitting characters





Perceptual Filters

Perceptual filters are very crucial in determining clarity of information processing and thus decide the efficacy of communication. They alter and change how humans interpret incoming information. There are *physiological filters* which impose natural and genetic difference in sense perception. That's why, a nearsighted person senses visual stimuli differently from a farsighted person. The light waves received by the nearsighted person and the farsighted person are different, and hence, they interpret different meanings.

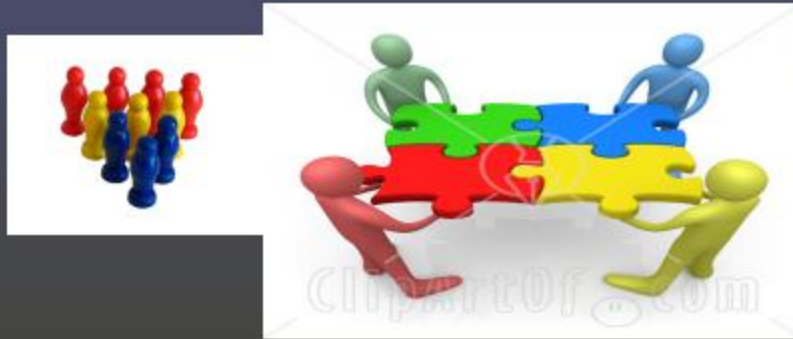
There are *sociological filters* which distort the receiving of information according to one's group membership. Then there are also *psychological filters*. This is much more dangerous and crucial than the other two because this has to do with attitude, beliefs, and dispositions of the individual. For instance, negative attitude towards a class teacher makes a child perceive the subject as boring and useless. Stereotyping and ethnocentrism arise out of the attitudinal dimensions of information processing, though it could also be affected by sociological filters.

Tips to Adapt in the New Culture

I conclude this lecture by giving the following tips to adapt in the new culture.

Some helpful tips to better adapt in the new culture

- Do not assume sameness
- What you think of as normal may only be cultural
- Familiar behaviors may have different meanings
- Do not assume that what you meant is what was understood
- Do not assume that what you understood is what was meant



- You don't have to like to accept different behavior, just try to understand where it comes from
- Find people to interact with.
- Try to learn local language. Do not be afraid to try.
- Keep communication simple; speak slowly, thoughtfully, and deliberately
- Manage your tone of voice; watch volume; don't be defensive



- Be an empathetic listener
- Be patient; take time to truly understand the intended message or question
- Understand the challenge of communicating in a non-native language
- Watch facial expression and body language as both the speaker and the listener
- Understand our own assumptions!



For Further Reference

