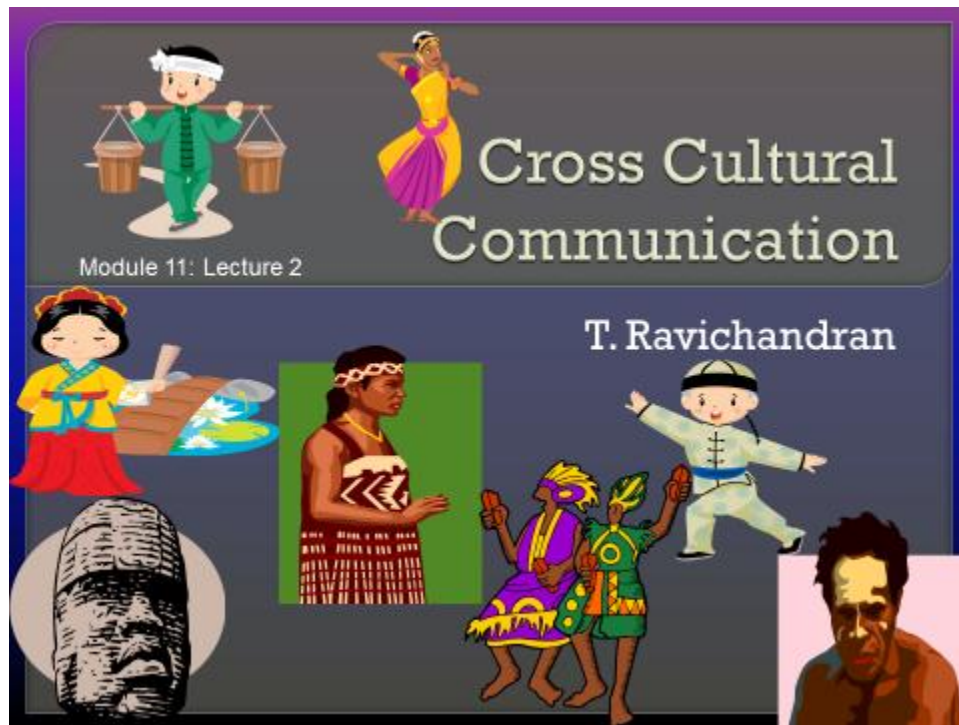


## *Communication Skills: Lecture No. 35*

### **Module 11**

#### **Lecture 2**

## **CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**



In the previous lecture I discussed with you the necessity of cross cultural communication and emphasized on its benefits at personal, communal, and global levels.

In this lecture, I will explain in detail the various barriers to cross cultural communication and suggest suitable ways of overcoming them.

## Human Migration and Communication

In the previous lecture, I explained to you why people migrate from their familiar surroundings to unfamiliar ones and the compelling reasons for their migration. Apart from globalization that has shrunk the world and opened up unknown avenues for education and profession, human beings also migrate owing to their inherent nomadic nature. Man is a social animal and is gregarious by nature. It is human tendency to be nomadic and leave one's country in quest of something that's not there in their own land. Besides, human beings travel long distances for fun and entertainment. Thanks to fast planes, they plan vacations to every part of the world.

As people keep moving today for various reasons, they invariably face challenges to adapt to new cultures and different practices. They are forced to develop the ability to understand people in new surroundings combined with the ability to express oneself appropriately and fully. However not all succeed in developing these abilities. Their language, religion, locality, food habits, etc., act as barriers to cross cultural communication. Let us look at the major barriers and see how we can overcome them. Look at the picture below; you can understand how one's cultural and linguistic encodings can impede one's appreciation and understanding of a performance from an alien culture.



## Language Barrier

A person may be highly proficient in one's own language but that does not guarantee complete understanding of a conversation in another unknown language. In multicultural countries, people speak different languages, where the absence of a translator can lead to conflicts. Moreover, the



translator has to be a bilingual expert. Suppose the translator is also not able to translate certain things from one culture to another, he can cause miscommunication. Another difficulty with regard to language is that even the same language can have dialectical variations. English, for instance, varies in pronunciation, and in certain cases, meanings, though it is spoken in the UK, the USA, and Australia as mother tongue. Interestingly, in the US, there are regional variations with regard to pronunciation and use of idioms that even people from one part will find it difficult to comprehend the way the same language gets spoken in other different parts. Culturally too, the subcultural groups like the bikers and surfers use their own jargons. Owing to this linguistic diversity, what sounds good and parliamentary in one language might sound

abusive and unacceptable in another. So, one should be extremely careful in the way one speaks a language especially in a multi-cultural context. It is advisable to use a local dictionary and acquaint one with variations in pronunciation and associated meanings.

## Conflict in Personal Space

Barrier to cross cultural communication can appear owing to conflict in personal space. People develop their sense of personal space according to the geographical location they are born and brought up. People from higher population and people from lower population have different perceptions of space. The people of higher population like those in China and India have lesser personal space as compared to people who live at lower population density regions like America and Canada. Indians will not mind close proximity since they are used to sitting too close in crowded buses/trains, whereas, Americans will not like close proximity with strangers as their sense of personal space is more. So, one should be wary of these perceptual differences of personal space to avoid conflicts in cross cultural communication.

## Food

Apart from language and space, food can be a major barrier to cross cultural communication because food is an integral part of culture. Even if we look at the food habits within India, we can understand differences in food habits. Eating habit in India is broadly polarized between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The vegetarians have a lot of prejudices against the non-vegetarians and vice-versa. So what happens in India especially in a place where the majority of the people happen to be vegetarians, there is a tendency to develop hatred, ill will, and animosity for the non-vegetarians. They resent the non-vegetarians and find it difficult to work with them in the work place. There are people who are averse to even looking at non-vegetarian food items or share the dining table with a person who eats non-vegetarian food. It can even go to the extent of not even making friends with people who are non-vegetarians. However, due to this food barrier, what one fails to realize is that the nature of the people is not determined by the eating habits. Although there are theories concurring with the view that people who eat non vegetarian food tend to be aggressive and are violent in nature, there are no empirical evidences to prove it. Besides history tells us that there were vegetarian dictators and non-vegetarian peace-makers! In order to remove this barrier from one's mind set, it's worthwhile to remember that the nature of the people is not determined by eating habits, and one should not develop aversion towards someone because of the food one prefers to eat.

## Religion

The next important global barrier to cross cultural communication is religion. Thousands of differences act as barriers to communication at all levels. In every part of India, for instance, there is a new way of worshipping, new beliefs, new customs, and traditions. There are different shapes and forms of gods and demigods. Then a majority of people believe in god men, who control and govern certain religious sects and enjoy huge following. According to the religion one belong, clothing and use of personal accessories vary. In some places, people are allowed to see god fully dressed, in some other, men have to remove their shirts. In some other places, women are not allowed to see the god.

Religion is a very complex subject. Religion is a very private practice and every small ritual gets transferred through families. It becomes very difficult for a person from other religion to understand the subtle differences in the ways people follow these rituals. There are chances that one will end up disrespecting the other if he or she is not fully aware of the customs of that particular religion. One should avoid such disrespecting because an inadvertent error can be blown up as a sensitive issue and that can lead to a communal violence.



### Overcoming religious barrier

Such violence between religious groups can be avoided if people learn to give up their prejudices and respect each other's religious customs. Doing something offensive to the other religious group can be avoided by gaining advance knowledge from books and documentaries. Awareness in advance of the ways of unintentional offending, will help in building good cross cultural communications. In addition, advanced knowledge gives confidence and adds to comfort in communication. Although, it may look funny, one should learn to accept new people and their religious beliefs.



To build up strong nations all these barriers should be removed. Ultimately, the objective of all communication is to facilitate harmony between different groups of people and foster healthier and happier societies.



In the next lecture, I will discuss the five dimensions of cultural variability and show how they can affect cross cultural communication.

### For Further Reference

