

COMMUNICATIVE PECULIARITIES IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

Kateryna Sherstiuk

Kharkiv Institute of Trade and Economics of

Kyiv National University of Trade and Economics

Scientific Advisor – Cand. Law. Sc., Assoc. Prof. **M. M. Toporkova**

For thousands of years, humans have conducted business across geographic, political and cultural boundaries. (For example, during the first century BC, the complex trade routes of the Silk Road linked China to India and the Western world.)

It would be even easier now – in today’s “socialized” world – to communicate with colleagues and clients in other countries. But too often, we are careful about what we say and are far less attuned to how our words can be misunderstood because of cultural biases.

International business culture compromises the coming together of business people of different backgrounds and cultures to work towards a particular business goal. If you are the one travelling to a different country to negotiate with businessmen based in that country, you should exert some effort to respect the cultural differences and the countries’ traditions. The most important thing to remember is to never let their culture get in the way of your business. This can be as simple as observing their religious holidays, and acknowledging the fact that these days are non-working days.

There are some hints on Business Card Usage around the World. For example, in some parts of Asia (notably Japan), presenting a card with two hands conveys respect. When using both hands, hold your card by the two upper corners. When you receive a business card, immediately take time to read it. This is a good time to repeat the person’s name, especially if it is in a language you're not familiar with.

Five North American gestures which foreigners might find confusing.

Sociolinguists divide cultures into high-context and low-context countries. In a high-context culture, important information is transmitted in nonverbal or indirect ways. Japan is a very high-context country, as are France and most Arab countries. On the other hand, in low-context cultures such as the U.S.A., the U.K. and Germany, you say what you mean. Virtually all the information is communicated within a direct statement.

Gestures help to emphasize a point, or to communicate something that should not be articulated out loud.

Here are some gestures common in the U.S.A, and the English-speaking portions of Canada which may confuse newcomers to North America.

- The “come here” gesture: with the palm up, the forefinger wiggled at the person summoned. This gesture is rarely made to a superior, but is commonly used among peers, or in summoning service personnel (such as a waiter or porter). It is also sometimes used in sexual situations, when it is archaically referred to as a “come hither” gesture. It is confusing to some foreigners, since most of the world uses a full-hand scooping motion to summon a person.

- The peace sign (also known as “V for victory”): with the palm out, forefinger and index fingers are pointed upwards and split into the shape of a “V”.

The meaning of this sign does not change in the U.S.A, if it is accidentally done backwards (with the palm in rather than out). However, it becomes an obscene gesture in the U.K. when reversed in this manner. English-speaking Canadians may also recognize this meaning. In a contemporary business setting, it is more likely to be used for its “V for victory” meaning.

- The “A-OK” sign: with the palm out, the thumb and forefinger are curled into a circle, while the other fingers are extended upwards. While this means “all’s well” in North America, in France it signifies “zero” or “nothing”, and in Denmark or Italy it can be taken as an insult. In Brazil, Guatemala and Paraguay, it is considered very obscene.

Everyone likes to get gifts, and business associates are no exception – but what gifts are appropriate?

For example gifts are given frequently and are important in the chain of favor-and-obligation which is part of all Japanese relationships. Politeness may require that the recipient first decline the gift; the giver may have to offer it three times. Since gifts are never opened in the presence of the giver, the presentation is of equal importance. Proper gift wrapping is vital. Gadgets are popular gifts.

But in the U.S. businesspeople give out many promotional items, which are not gift-wrapped. Formal gift-giving among U.S. executives is usually limited to Christmas / Hannukah and commemorative events. Some U.S. executives who deal with foreigners have learned to give gifts on other occasions. Gadgets are popular, and gifts may display a corporate logo. Gifts are opened immediately.

The wear you have is also very important. For better or worse, men have a relatively limited range of choices in business wear. Red is considered a lucky color by the Chinese, so a red tie is a good choice. However, the color white is the color of mourning. A businessman wearing a white tie will make a distinctly funereal impression. Many countries in Latin America have two main political parties: the Colorados (Reds) and Blancos (Whites). In such countries, the right color to wear simply depends on whom you are going to meet.

It is true how largely different one country’s customs are with another. However, in international business, you should go past these differences and move on to your common goals and aspirations. Going past the differences does not mean you ignore the countries traditions or their customs. It means you respect their culture, not because you need to deal with them at the end of the day. It should be because they deserve the respect for their own set of tradition as everybody else in the world does.

So you have to work to understand how your own way of giving feedback is viewed in other cultures.

References

1. Bovee, C. L., & Thill, J. V. (2010). Business communication today (10th ed.). Boston: Prentice Hall.
2. Brett, J. E. (2001). Negotiating globally: How to negotiate deals, resolve disputes, and make decisions across cultural boundaries. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
3. Chaney, L.H. & Martin, J.S. (2007). Intercultural business communication (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.