

# ENG Master's programme orientation

*Intercultural misunderstanding & miscommunication*

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# Today's Talk

- Why “intercultural communication” is relevant to your Master's studies?
- What are the common origins of “intercultural misunderstanding/miscommunication”? And how to possibly resolve them?

# Intercultural Communication...



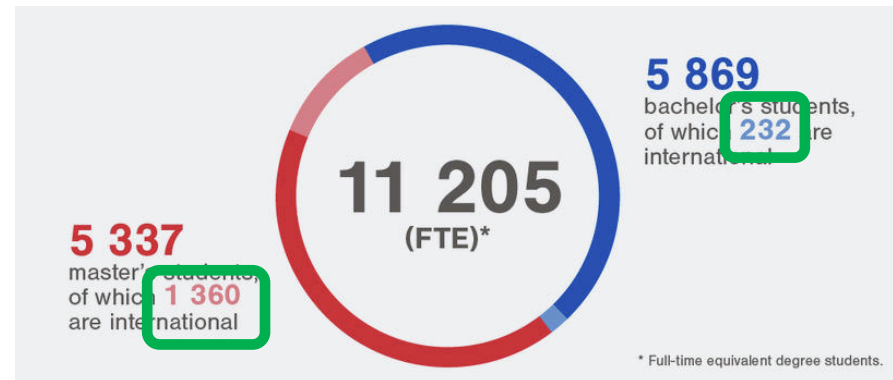
# A!

Aalto University

**A plethora of domestic diversity!**

# MA courses are more diverse...

- Postgraduate courses tend to have more diverse student groups than your Bachelor's
- Key figures of 2019 and reports (Aalto University)



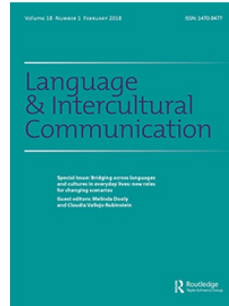
<https://www.aalto.fi/en/aalto-university/key-figures-of-2019-and-reports>

# Working with a diverse cohort

**We want it to be a valuable experience**

**But it might not always be positive?!**

# Teamwork experience...



Language and Intercultural Communication



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## 'Intercultural competence' as an intersubjective process: a reply to 'essentialism'

Vivien Xiaowei Zhou & Nick Pilcher

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To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2017.1400510>

# Teamwork experience...

“I noticed...it was a little bit hard to make different approaches coexist and not clash...**I think we realised how difficult writing a report all together is going to be, since everyone wants to work in his/her way...I tried my hardest to find a way to convey my ideas without being too rude or ‘dictatorial’, because I know I might sound a little bit arrogant when I get overexcited and passionate about something,** but I’ve learnt from previous experiences of teamwork that that does not help the work atmosphere at all, in particular if someone get offended.”

# Teamwork experience...

“[Group member] A...presented us a draft structure of how to write the report without sent it to us before, just say we can have a look in this meeting...**I was surprise and appreciate that A has already done so much because someone has to do it, but...I feel a little uncomfortable...**I observed the others['] reaction, they were a little surprised too and saying how appreciate what A has done as well...Although I can understand A did this because A really wants us have a good mark but who does not?”



# Teamwork experience...

“The two students [from Country X] hold their opinions towards some details of our writings such as the punctuation and the format...This is definitely a challenge to my patience as a person [from Country Z] who possesses less concerns about the details of our job, what we concerns more is the relationship between your partners...**As a result, this situation increased my stereotype of [Country X] are really rigid to details. Thus, I started confusing that whether the group work has increase my intercultural competence or strengthen my stereotype of a specific culture.**”

# Misunderstanding Miscommunication

**What are the main sources?**

# Misunderstanding vs Miscommunication

- **Misunderstanding**
  - 'Language' related
- **Miscommunication**
  - Misunderstanding of another's norms, values and practices

# What are the main sources?

## Main sources of misunderstanding/miscommunication

- Inadequate linguistic choices
- Pragmatic mismatch
- Clash of style
- Mismatch in schemas and cultural stereotypes
- Mismatch in contextualization cues and framing

# **Inadequate linguistic choices (Misunderstanding)**

# Inadequate linguistic choices

- Lexical comprehension problem
- ‘Mishearing’ a lexical element
- Syntactic complexity

They are related to “**word choice**” & “**structures of utterance**”

They are relatively easy to solve as we can directly point out **the trouble source** and **ask a clarification**

*What does that mean?*

**We might use different Englishes**

“You used the term, ‘xxx’ and I am not sure whether I’ve understood it correctly, so can you explain a bit more?”

“You’ve tried to explain several things at once and I am just wondering whether you could explain one by one?”

# How to solve it?

- **Clarification & negotiation strategies**

- **Confirmation checks**

- e.g. 'Have you understood my explanation?', 'Did I understand it right?', 'Yeah?', etc.

- **Clarification request**

- e.g. 'Can you explain a bit further?', 'Can you make it more simple?', 'Can you repeat?', 'When you said xxx, what did you mean?'

**Identify a trouble source +  
Ask open/non-judgemental Qs!**

# What are the main sources?

## Main sources of misunderstanding/miscommunication

- Inadequate linguistic proficiency
- Pragmatic mismatch
- Clash of style
- Mismatch in schemas and cultural stereotypes
- Mismatch in contextualization cues and framing

- ❖ Major issues
- ❖ It is rather tricky to point out a trouble source
- ❖ The problem often runs across longer stretch or beyond conversation/interaction
- ❖ Related to different ways of doing things



# **Clash of Style (Miscommunication)**

# Clash of style

- **Directness or indirectness (Politeness)**
  - What is considered 'polite' and 'impolite' is a contextual matter
  - When norms of politeness is different between/amongst people, miscommunication is likely to happen

# Directness/Indirectness

“A classmate of yours asked you whether you would like to go to a cinema with her and a couple of other classmates during the weekend. **You do not particularly want to go, because you need time to prepare for an assignment.** How are you going to say ‘no’ to her? Which of the following reply sounds most like you?”

# Directness/Indirectness

*A: Would you like to go to cinema with me?*

- B1: No, I can't.
- B2: Sorry, I can't. I need to write an assignment.
- B3: Thanks for the invitation but I am not sure that I would be free, but I will let you know if I can go!
- B4: Thanks, but I have visitors this weekend. I need to show them around.

# Directness/Indirectness

- Understanding “directness” and “indirectness” as a **spectrum**
- Being **polite** (Indirectness) ←-----→ Being **clear** (Directness)

**Time is not enough...But! 😊**

# ICC courses available at LC!

- LC-0610 Intercultural Communication (**Period 1, 2, 5**)
- LC-0611 Teamwork & Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (**Period 2, 4**)
- LC-0613 Developing Intercultural Competence (**Period 3**)

**Any questions?**

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**Thanks for listening! 😊**