

## Cultural Awareness

**We take our culture for granted:** we normally do not think of, nor reflect on, our values, attitudes, worldviews, beliefs, and behaviors we exercise within cultural context that is familiar to use.

**We need to become aware of our own culture:** to be able to reflect on our identities, cultural values, beliefs, and so on.

Cultural awareness is from where we need to start **before we come to analyzing cultures of others.**

Cultural perceptions and meanings

**There are symbols and life phenomena we share across cultures but express in different ways, based on the meaning we assign to them.**

**Examples:**

- *love* - meant and expressed in various ways across cultural groups, and even from an individual to individual;
- *death* - definitely shared by all humans but also the most individual and 'lonely' experience; members of a cultural group share their perception of death and express it accordingly; death is one of the most essential part of cultural expressions that differ from culture to culture;
- *eating* - no doubt every human being must eat: 'You are what you eat'- eating habits are a fundamental part of one's own identity (cf. vegetarians and their identifying with not eating meat); eating habits are also different across cultures as well as individuals.
- *the meaning of Sunday*: 'going to church, being with the family'...

Members from different cultures bear different images of an object in mind and more or less systematically associate it with some culturally pre-set objects, feelings, beliefs and processes. This indicates how unconsciously one may live one's own culture. (Sercu: 267)

Literature:

Sercu, Lies. "In-service training and the acquisition of intercultural competence." In. Byram, Michael and Fleming, Michael (eds.). *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 255 - 289