

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