Intercultural misunderstanding?
Some definitions and a case study

Mikhail Kharakoz
Adviser

Tatjana Radanović Felberg
Associate professor

Department of International Studies and Interpreting
Oslo and Akershus University College
Intercultural communication

• 1950s-1970s – research into the experiences of westerners working abroad
• After 1970s - expanded focus – in educational settings, professional settings etc.

• Conceptual clarity needed!
  transcultural/cross-cultural/international/communication;
  cross-cultural awareness/ adaptation;
  intercultural interaction/sensitivity/cooperation;
  cultural sensitivity/competence etc.
• Anthropology, psychology, linguistics, discourse analysis, communication studies, sociology, marketing, management studies, foreign languages, pragmatics etc.
• Intercultural communication – between cultures
  – What is culture?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture is a <strong>fuzzy</strong> set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence <em>(but do not determine)</em> each member’s behavior and his/her interpretations of the ’meaning’ of other people’s behavior.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(Spencer-Oatey 2008)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Tylor (1871)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Stereotypes

• Dialogue
• «Most people’s difficulties with each other can be traced to distortions in communication.”

Hall, E.T, (1959:182)
• How do we identify “cultural behavior”?

• “How much culture is there in intercultural communication?” Blommaert 1991

• “When can we use culture as an explanatory tool?”
A case study

Norwegian Child welfare services vs. Parents

- Mistet barna fordi de ble matet med hendene

- Lost their children because children were fed by hand
• The actual event between NCWS and the family (participants, actions, context etc.)
• The event lifted to the level of a diplomatic incident
  – India vs. Norway => East vs. West?
• Media’s framing of the event
  – Norwegian media
    • Pro and contra Norwegian Child Welfare Services
  – Indian media
    • Contra NCWS
  – World media
  – (Global) social media
Almost all media sources quote cultural differences as a reason for misunderstanding
  – What are the cultural differences?

“...because there were no separate beds for the children in the parents' home; no table for diaper change; the mother had slapped the three-year-old son at one point; insufficient room to play; and toys that were not suited to the age of the children. It was also said that when the mother breast-fed the infant, she put her on her lap without holding her, holding the head against the breast, but not close to her body.”

(The Hindu Business Line, 2.2.2012)
• Individual vs. State
• Asymmetry in relations
  – Power relations: both parties have power in certain contexts (parents when talking to media, and NCWS when talking to parents)
• Politics
• Multicultural child welfare services? How to promote dialogue between NCWS and ethnic minorities
Recommendations from the report

– “...involve experts with multicultural competence;
– strengthen NCWS’s competence through an action plan and give training in multicultural perspectives both in basic and continued education to all NCWS employees;
– employ more people with various types of ethnic background;
– use reference groups with multicultural competence...”
• What is *multicultural competence*?
• How do we assess *multicultural competence*?
• Need for formal education?