

# Cross-Cultural Understanding

## MANAGING LANGUAGE & INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

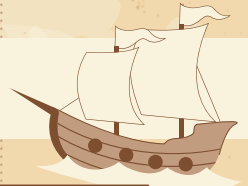
### Chapter 11

Andrias Yulianto  
Jakarta International University





# LEARNING OBJECTIVES



01

Identify and describe the nature and characteristics of conflict

02

Define intercultural conflict and describe its characteristics

03

Describe the role of language in intercultural conflicts

04

Identify five types of conflict

05

Explain the potential impact of culture in conflict situations

06

Explain why it is important to consider the impact of social, political, and historical elements in intercultural conflicts

07

Explain the role of face and face-saving in conflict situations

08

Identify preventative strategies that you can use to avoid threatening the other person's face in a conflict situation

09

Offer suggestions and strategies for dealing effectively and appropriately with intercultural conflicts.



# INTRODUCTION

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‘Conflict breeds conflict, unless it is managed successfully’ (Gudykunst 2004: 276, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

This chapter begins by describing the nature and characteristics of conflict. Next, we explore the domains and types of conflict, and the role(s) of language and culture in conflict situations, especially intercultural interactions. We then turn our attention to intercultural conflict communication styles and the impact of face and facework in conflict situations. Finally, we discuss intercultural conflict competence and constructive ways to resolve language and intercultural misunderstandings and conflict situations.

# THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT

## → The Definition of Conflict

Mortensen (1974: 93)

‘An expressed struggle over incompatible interests in the distribution of limited resources.’



Adler et al. (2013: 351)

‘An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals.’

Folger et al. (2013: 4)

‘The interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatibility and the possibility of interference from others as a result of this incompatibility.’



(Putnam 2006: 5)

‘Incompatibilities, an expressed struggle, and interdependence among two or more parties.’

# THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

## Incompatibilities

In a conflict situation, it appears as if an individual or group's gain means another's loss. The parties involved may have incompatible goals or aspirations or they may favor incompatible means to the same ends (e.g. differing decision-making techniques, conflicting communication styles).

## An expressed struggle

For conflict to develop, the parties involved must recognize that they disagree about something.

(Jackson, 2014)



# THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

## Scarc resources

Interpersonal conflicts arise when people believe that there are insufficient resources (e.g. materials, food, time, wealth, quality education) for everyone. Scarc resources can also lead to conflicts on a larger scale.

## Interdependence

Individuals or groups that are involved in a conflict are interdependent in some ways, even if they are not willing to acknowledge this. In interpersonal relationships, for example, parties depend on each other for psychological, emotional, and material resources (Folger et al. 2013; Roloff 1981).

**(Jackson, 2014)**



# THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

## Inevitability

As conflict is an inevitable fact of life, people routinely find themselves in conflict situations, whether in their personal life, social life, or at work. Siblings may routinely come into conflict with each other and their parents about daily activities. At universities, students who work on projects together may differ about how they should proceed. Romantic partners may find themselves in conflict about whether they should have sex or live together before marriage. When intercultural couples have children, they may find themselves in a conflict situation when they discover they have very different views about child-rearing practices and the role of religion and extended family members in their daily life. In the workplace, conflict about tasks and responsibilities may develop within work teams



**(Jackson, 2014)**

# DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT

Conflict can take many forms and cross one or more socially- and historically-constructed boundaries (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, race, language, religion, etc.). As well as perceiving incompatibility with individuals who share similar roots (e.g. the same first language and cultural histories), people may come into conflict with individuals or groups with different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, racial, political, and religious backgrounds.

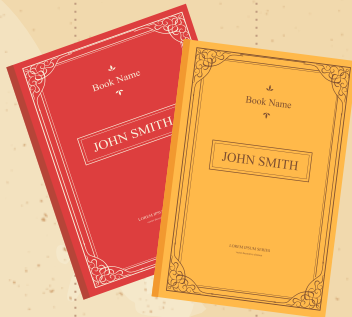
**(Chen & Starosta 1998; Folger et al. 2013; Orbe & Harris 2008, as cited in Jackson, 2014).**



# DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

## 01 Intracultural Conflict

Refers to a struggle between individuals with a similar linguistic and cultural background. For example, two Australian EFL teachers in Seoul may become embroiled in a conflict situation when they vehemently disagree about the pedagogy that should be used in their language program.



**(Jackson, 2014)**

# DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

## 02 Interpersonal Conflict

Refers to conflict or a struggle between two or more people who may or may not have a similar linguistic and cultural background (**Jackson, 2014**).

Describing interpersonal conflict as 'a problematic situation', **Abigail and Cahn, 2011, as cited in Jackson, 2014** associate it with the following characteristics:

1. The conflicting parties are interdependent
2. They have the perception that they seek incompatible goals or outcomes or they favor incompatible means to the same ends
3. The perceived incompatibility has the potential to adversely affect the relationship leaving emotional residues if not addressed
4. There is a sense of urgency about the need to resolve the difference.



## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

03

### Intergroup Conflict

Refers to disputes that arise between two or more groups of people (e.g. different ethnic groups, workgroups, study groups, sports teams, debate teams, choirs, etc.) Disparate objectives, values, communication styles, and a wide range of cultural differences may cause friction between groups. For example, business majors may come into conflict with English majors about the use of the same meeting space or other resources (e.g. funds, computers).



**(Jackson, 2014)**

## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

### 04 Organizational Conflict

Refers to disputes that can arise within an organization (e.g. a business, educational institution, a department, political party, social club, etc.) as a result of competing needs, values, beliefs, and interests.

Within organizations, as well as in other contexts, conflicts may be either:

**Affective conflict** refers to a type of conflict that centers on an emotional conflict between parties. Affective conflicts can be very destructive to companies (and interpersonal relationships) if unresolved.

**A cognitive conflict** refers to a type of conflict that centers on the completion of a task.

(Jackson, 2014)

## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

06

### Intercultural Conflict

Refers to 'the experience of emotional frustration in conjunction with perceived incompatibility of values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and/or outcomes between a minimum of two parties from two different cultural communities in an interactive situation' (**Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2001: 17, as cited in Jackson, 2014**).

Intercultural conflict may materialize as '[o]ur cultural ignorance or ineptness oftentimes clutters our ability to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively across cultural and linguistic lines' (**Ting-Toomey 2012: 279, as cited in Jackson, 2014**).

## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

07

### Interracial Conflict

Refers to a conflict situation whereby race or racial difference is an issue (**Orbe & Harris 2008, as cited in Jackson, 2014**). For example, a dispute between an African American customer and an Asian American shopkeeper may escalate when claims of overcharging and racism are voiced (**Jackson, 2014**).

## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

08

### Interethnic Conflict

Refers to a conflict situation between individuals or groups affiliated with different ethnic groups, whereby ethnicity is salient. A strong ethnic identity accompanied by ethnic hatred/distrust and inequalities (e.g. unequal financial resources) can lead to conflict situations that may escalate into violence.

An extreme form of ethnic conflict may result in ethnic cleansing (the systematic and violent removal of an ethnic or religious group from a particular territory) and genocide (the widespread killing of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group).

(Jackson, 2014)

## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

09

### International Conflict

Has traditionally referred to disputes between different countries (e.g. the Iran–Iraq war) as well as conflict between people and organizations from different nation-states (e.g. trade disputes between Mexico and the United States, disagreements between the governments of different nations).

Private-sector international conflict is similar to private domestic interpersonal or business conflicts in that it is apt to be more complicated by factors such as linguistic and cultural differences (e.g. variations in communication practices, socio-pragmatic norms), distance, and ambiguity about which laws prevail.

(Jackson, 2014)

## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

10

### Intergenerational Conflict

Refers to disputes between individuals or groups from different generations, whereby age and divergent life experiences are salient issues. For example, conflict between middle-aged immigrant parents and their children may arise due to differences in language practices, values, beliefs, and behaviors.

In extreme cases, conflict can escalate and lead to an honor killing, whereby the young woman is murdered by relatives who believe that her actions (e.g. premarital sex, refusal to accept an arranged marriage) have brought dishonor to the family.

(Jackson, 2014)

## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

11

### Gender Conflict

Refers to conflict situations in which gender is a key factor. In a work situation, for example, interpersonal conflict may arise between male and female co-workers due to differences in communication styles and role expectations, as well as a power imbalance. Globally, more women are entering the workforce and joining professions once reserved for males.

**(Jackson, 2014)**

## DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT (Cont'd)

12

### Multiplex Conflict

Refers to disputes between individuals or groups that cross multiple social and historical boundaries (e.g. ethnic, linguistic, international, racial, social, gender, religious, political) (**Jackson, 2014**)

Intrapersonal conflict or self-conflict refers to the internal struggle that can occur within one's own mind (**Jackson, 2014**). This conflicted state can develop 'when we find ourselves having to choose between two or more mutually exclusive options' (**Gamble & Gamble 2013: 218, as cited in Jackson, 2014**).

# CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Culture plays a role in all conflict situations, whether intracultural or intercultural in nature. It can be a dominant factor or it may influence the conflict in more subtle ways (**Jackson, 2014**).

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS (Cont'd)

01

### Mismatched Expectations

Expectations in conflict situations are influenced by the underlying values and norms (e.g. socio-pragmatic rules of discourse) that are prevalent in a particular culture. Ideas about what is appropriate verbal and nonverbal behavior in conflicts are learned during the process of socialization and vary among cultures. (Jackson, 2014)

During enculturation, the socialization process, we develop ideas about what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior by observing those around us. Cultural norms or rules serve as a guide for what we should or should not do in a conflict situation. A conflict script refers to 'the interaction placement and appropriate sequence of verbal and nonverbal message exchanges'. (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2001: 11, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS (Cont'd)

02

Ambiguity and  
Uncertainty

When people interact with individuals who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, there is bound to be more ambiguity and uncertainty than in intracultural interactions. (Jackson, 2014)

- **The uncertainty reduction theory (URT) (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**  
People are uncomfortable with ambiguity and strive to reduce uncertainty in communicative events (e.g. intercultural conflict situations).
- **Cognitive uncertainty (Jackson, 2014)**  
Refers to uncertainty about the ways in which an individual's culturally-influenced attitudes and beliefs impact his or her way of thinking.
- **Behavioral uncertainty (Jackson, 2014)**  
It has to do with one's uncertainty about how the other person will behave in an intercultural conflict situation.
- **The uncertainty/anxiety management theory (AUM) (Jackson, 2014)**  
As we gain more knowledge and understanding of our communication partner, our level of stress or anxiety subsides.

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS (Cont'd)

03

Language and  
nonverbal barriers

Language is a key factor in all conflict situations, whether the parties involved share the same cultural background or not. As well as word choice and verbal communication style (e.g. direct or indirect, emotionally expressive or restrained, formal or informal), our nonverbal behaviors (e.g. tone of voice, body language, gestures, posture, facial expressions, use of space) impact on the outcomes of both intracultural and intercultural interactions.

In intercultural interactions, it is common for one or more interactants to use a second language and if not fluent, the possibility of miscommunication and misunderstandings is greater. Even if the intercultural communicators speak the same first language, there may be differences in their preferred communication styles, which can complicate the conflict situation.

**(Jackson, 2014)**

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS (Cont'd)

04

### Language and Nonverbal Barriers

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**(Jackson, 2014)**

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS (Cont'd)

05

### Face and Identity Needs

Drawing on **Goffman's (1969)** notion of face as a social phenomenon that is created through communication, **Brown and Levinson (1978: 66)** define face as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction'.

Dimensions of face include positive and negative elements.

- **Positive face**  
Refers to a person's desire to gain the approval of other people.
- **Negative face**  
The desire to have autonomy and not be controlled by others.

(Jackson, 2014)

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS (Cont'd)

The way conflict is viewed and approached is influenced by our gender and cultural background (Jackson, 2014).

06

Differing  
Perceptions and  
Understandings of  
Conflict.

In cultural contexts where collectivism is prevalent, the needs and wants of groups are given priority over individuals and conflict tends to be viewed as destructive and harmful to relationships (e.g. China, Japan) (Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006; van Meurs & Spencer-Oatey, 2010, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

To preserve relational harmony and one's public face, pacifism is generally favored, that is, individuals strive to avoid conflict situations (Jackson, 2014).

In contexts that are more individualistic (self-reliance and personal independence are stressed) (e.g. Germany, the United States), people tend to perceive conflict (e.g. the open discussion of conflicting views) as potentially positive (Jackson, 2014).

# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLES

Conflict interaction style refers to 'patterned responses to conflict in a variety of dissenting conflict situations'.

(Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001: 45, as cited in Jackson, 2014)



# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLES (Cont'd)

Five types of conflict behavior:

**01 Competing style**

Strategies are used to reach one's own goals at the cost of the other party's goals or feelings.

**02 Accommodating style**

One's own goals are sacrificed for the sake of the other person/the relationship.

**03 Avoiding style**

Behaviors that either ignore or refuse to engage in the conflict.

**04 Collaborating style**

Parties work together cooperatively until a mutually agreeable solution is found.

**05 Compromising style**

There is a give and take of resources with no one achieving his or her original goal.

(Blake and Mouton, 1964 & Hall, 1969, as cited in Jackson 2014)

# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLES (Cont'd)

Conflict styles based on the individual's concern for self or others:

- 01 Dominating style (high self/low other concern)
- 02 Obliging style (low self/high other concern)
- 03 Avoiding style (low self/other concern)
- 04 Integrating style (high self/other concern)
- 05 Compromising style (moderate self/other concern).

(Rahim, 1983, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

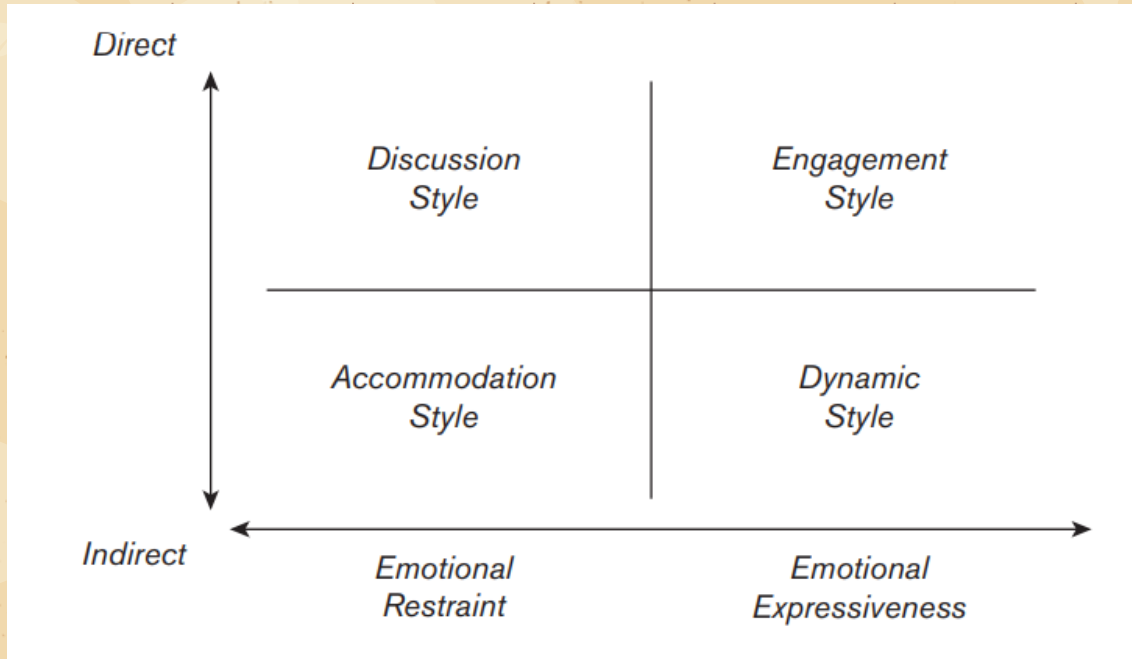
# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLES (Cont'd)

Conflict styles that are identified recently:

- 01 Avoidance (lose-lose)
- 02 Accommodation (lose-win)
- 03 Competition (win-lose)
- 04 Passive aggression (indirect aggression or opposition)
- 05 Direct aggression (confrontation)
- 06 Compromise (negotiated lose-lose) and collaboration (win-win)

(Wilmot & Hocker, 2010, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

# THE MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLE



(Jackson, 2014)

# THE MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLE



## The discussion style

A verbally direct approach to conflict situations that is tempered by an emotionally restrained response. People who adopt this style generally follow the maxim, 'say what you mean and mean what you say'. They pay careful attention to their word choice so that their views are clearly conveyed. Intense expressions of emotion are avoided; instead, people prefer to calmly discuss disagreements in a conversational, informal style, drawing on facts whenever possible rather than personal feelings.

(Jackson, 2014)

# THE MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLE



## The engagement style

Characterized by a more verbally direct and confrontational or direct approach to dealing with conflict. The display of intense verbal and nonverbal expressions of emotion is considered an acceptable way to demonstrate one's sincerity, concern, and willingness to work hard to resolve conflict.

(Jackson, 2014)

# THE MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLE



## The accommodation style

A more indirect and emotionally restrained approach to dealing with conflict. To prevent a dispute from escalating, people who use this style employ ambiguous language, silence, and avoidance. **Emotional restraint** (controlling the expression of one's emotions) is regarded as essential to maintaining interpersonal harmony among the parties. Intermediaries (e.g. mutual friends, colleagues) or mediators may also be used to manage conflict. **Mediation** refers to the settlement or negotiation of a conflict or dispute by an independent person. **Negotiation** is a process by which the parties or group resolve a dispute by holding discussions and coming to an agreement that is mutually acceptable. **Mediators** or **intermediaries** are third parties that may facilitate negotiations and dialogue between the disputants.

(Jackson, 2014)

# THE MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLE



## The dynamic style

Involves the use of indirect strategies and emotionally intense expression to deal with substantive disagreements. The emotional expression refers to observable verbal and nonverbal actions that convey emotions. People who adopt the dynamic style may use linguistic devices such as hyperbole and metaphors. They may also repeat their message, use ambiguous language, tell stories or use third-party intermediaries to try to resolve conflicts. Thus, this style is characterized by emotionally confrontational discourse and expression.

(Jackson, 2014)

# FACEWORK AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict face negotiation theory, which addresses the ways face-losing and face-saving behaviors influence intercultural conflict situations. In particular, her theory helps explain why individuals from high-context cultures (e.g. collectivist, Asian settings) tend to manage conflict differently from people who have been socialized in low-context cultures (e.g. individualistic, Western contexts).

**(Ting-Toomey, 2005, 2012, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**

# FACEWORK AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION



Ting-Toomey's theory identifies several types of faces:

Self-face refers to the 'protective concern for one's own image when one's own face is threatened in the conflict situation' (Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006: 701, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

1

Other-face is 'the concern or consideration for the other conflict party's image in the conflict situation' (ibid, p. 701, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

2

Mutual face refers to 'the concern for both parties' images and/or the "image" of the relationship (ibid, p. 701, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

3

# FACEWORK AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION (Cont'd)



Ting-Toomey's theory identifies several types of faces:

Mutual facework is the process of constructing a shared sense of identity (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

4

Communicating respect and positive regard for self and others is referred to as face management, while facework refers to 'the specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors that we engage in to maintain or restore face loss and to uphold and honor face gain' (Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006: 701, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

5

## FACEWORK AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION (Cont'd)



The conflict face negotiation theory is based on the following assumptions:

**A** People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in communicative events  
(Jackson, 2014)

**B** The concept of face is especially problematic in emotionally threatening or identity-vulnerable situations when the situated identities of the communicators are challenged  
(Jackson, 2014).

**C** The cultural value scales of individualism-collectivism (Ting-Toomey 2010a; Triandis 2002, as cited in Jackson, 2014) and small-large power distance (Hofstede 2001; House et al. 2004, as cited in Jackson, 2014) shape facework concerns and styles.

**D** The value patterns inherent in individualism and collectivism shape members' preferences for self-oriented facework or other-oriented facework (Jackson, 2014).

## FACEWORK AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION (Cont'd)



The conflict face negotiation theory is based on the following assumptions:

**E** Small and large power distance value patterns shape members' preferences for horizontal-based facework (informal-symmetrical strategies/equal treatment) versus vertical-based facework (formal-asymmetrical strategies/deferential treatment) (Jackson, 2014)

**F** The value dimensions coupled with individual, relational and situational factors, influence the use of specific facework behaviors in particular cultural scenes (Jackson, 2014)

**G** Intercultural facework competence is 'the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively' (Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006: 702, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT COMPETENCE

‘The mindful management of emotional frustrations and conflict interaction struggles due primarily to cultural, linguistic, or ethnic group membership differences’.

(Ting-Toomey 2012: 279–80, as cited in Jackson, 2014)



# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT COMPETENCE

Core elements in intercultural conflict competence:

## Culture-sensitive knowledge

Culturally based knowledge is the most vital ingredient in intercultural conflict competence. Without it, individuals may adhere to an ethnocentric stance and judge all unfamiliar conflict behaviors as weird or unsophisticated in comparison with their own (or their ingroup's) ways of dealing with disputes. With more knowledge of diverse ways of handling conflicts (e.g. awareness of the conflict scripts and styles that are prevalent in other cultural settings), individuals can suspend negative valuations and reflect on what may lie behind unfamiliar or unexpected behaviors in misunderstandings and conflict episodes.

(LeBaron 2003, LeBaron & Pillay 2006, Ting-Toomey 2004, 2009, 2012, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT COMPETENCE

## Core elements in intercultural conflict competence:

### Mindfulness

To effectively manage intercultural conflicts, one must recognize the potential impact of one's personal and cultural communication expectations, conflict communication style, cognitions and emotional display on the conflict situation.

**Mindful awareness** requires us to 'reflect on our own cultural ways of knowing and being, noticing how they are continually shaped by memories, experiences, and interpretations'

**Mindful fluency** requires us to 'tune into our own cultural, linguistic, and personal habitual assumptions in scanning a problematic interaction scene'

The **mindful communicator** may consider his/her emotional and cognitive reaction and reflect on why the individual may be responding in this way.

(LeBaron 2003, LeBaron & Pillay 2006, Ting-Toomey 2004, 2009, 2012, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT COMPETENCE

Core elements in intercultural conflict competence:

## Constructive conflict communication skills

Refer to 'our operational abilities to manage a conflict situation appropriately and effectively via skillful language, verbal, and nonverbal behaviors, whether in a first or second language'. In particular, skills such as deep listening, de-centering, face-sensitive respectful dialogue skills, mindful reframing, comprehension checks, and collaborative conflict negotiation skills are essential for intercultural mediators, especially when a second language is involved.

(LeBaron 2003, LeBaron & Pillay 2006, Ting-Toomey 2004, 2009, 2012, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

# INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT COMPETENCE

Core elements in intercultural conflict competence:

## Communication adaptability

Finally, in intercultural conflict episodes, we must be flexible and willing to modify our interaction behaviors and goals to meet the specific needs of the situation.

For example, **dynamic conflict code-switching** (e.g. adapting our conflict style to meet the other conflict party's communication approach, using their first language) can signal our respect and desire to preserve the relationship and resolve the conflict in an amicable way.

(LeBaron 2003, LeBaron & Pillay 2006, Ting-Toomey 2004, 2009, 2012, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

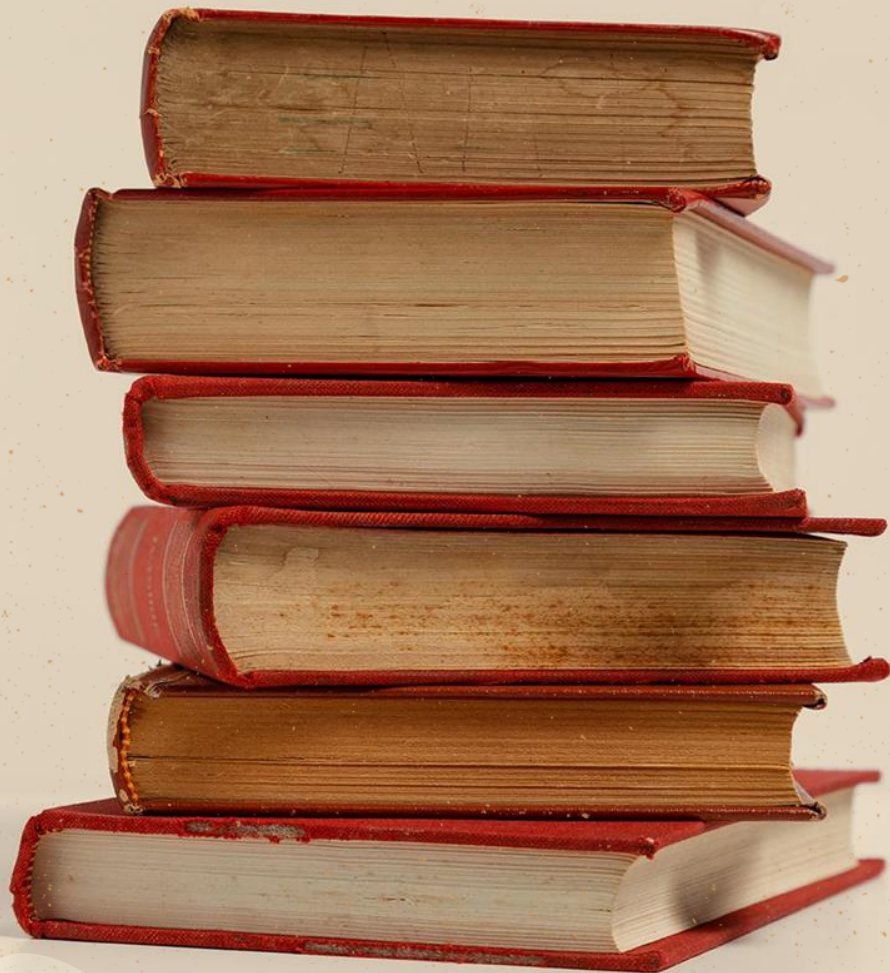
# MANAGING LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT SITUATIONS

‘The ability to thrive in a multicultural world is now central to our survival; it is a basic life skill on our shrinking planet. In every land, people from around the world pass through, communicating, coupling, trading, and sometimes fighting. They make things together, share strategies and resources, draw on commonalities to build bridges, and come into conflict over differences . . . The need to summon creativity and exercise the choice to cooperate has never been more urgent.’



(LeBaron & Pillay 2006: 12, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

THANK  
YOU!



# REFERENCES

Jackson, J. (2014). *Introducing language and intercultural communication*. Routledge.