

# Portfolio of Students' Projects

Collaborative Online International Learning  
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# Culture Shock

## Ukraine – Bulgaria – Cyprus

Final presentation focused only on Task 01: definition, verbal/non-verbal communication specificities, and intercultural misunderstanding mitigation strategies.

Definition of culture shock

Verbal communication

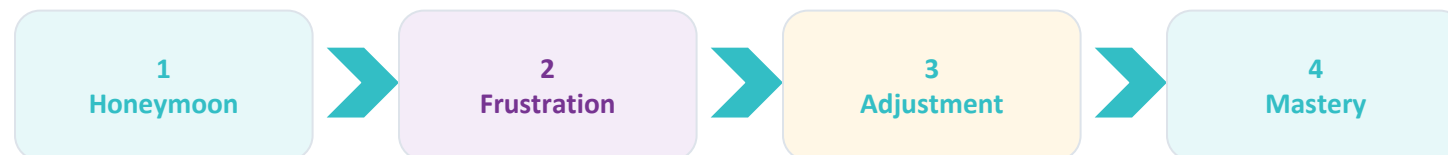
Non-verbal communication

Avoidance strategies



Culture shock is a psychological, emotional and social reaction that appears when people enter a new cultural environment with unfamiliar norms, values, behaviours and communication styles. It can cause confusion, stress, anxiety and misunderstanding because everyday verbal and non-verbal signals no longer feel predictable. In this project, culture shock is treated as an intercultural communication challenge: people may misread directness, humour, gestures, eye contact, personal space, tone of voice or interruptions. Adaptation requires reflection, openness and adjustment of communication behaviour.

## Typical adaptation pathway



### Verbal communication

Verbal communication

- directness vs hedging
- interruptions and overlapping speech
- humour

### Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication

- emotional expressiveness, gestures, smiles and voice pitch
- conversational distance, physical touch and eye contact

### Final goal

Final goal

- reduce culture shock through interpretation, explanation and mutual adaptation

*National team focus: verbal and non-verbal specificity*

## UA UKRAINE

### Verbal communication

Verbal communication

- Relatively direct, sincere and emotionally involved communication.
- Honesty and clarity are appreciated, especially among friends, relatives and colleagues.
- In formal contexts, Ukrainians usually become more reserved and polite.

### Interaction & humour

Interaction & humour

- Overlapping speech may show enthusiasm, interest and emotional connection.
- Humour often includes irony, self-deprecation and "laughter through tears".
- Political satire and dark humour can function as resilience and solidarity.

### Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication

- Moderate personal distance in formal settings; closer contact among trusted people.
- Handshakes are common in introductions; hugs or cheek kisses appear in close relationships.
- Natural eye contact signals respect, honesty and attention.

### Possible culture shock

Possible culture shock

- Foreigners may perceive directness as too serious or blunt.
- Interruptions may look chaotic or impolite if strict turn-taking is expected.
- Dark humour may seem pessimistic without cultural context.

Mitigation: use softer wording when needed; explain humour and context; allow clearer turn-taking in intercultural settings; maintain balanced eye contact and respect personal space.



## BG BULGARIA

### Verbal communication

Verbal communication

- Direct and straightforward speech is often valued as honesty and trust.
- Hedging may be less frequent when strong opinions or criticism are expressed.
- Feedback can be direct, which foreigners may read as rude or aggressive.

### Talk flow & humour

Talk flow & humour

- Interruptions and overlapping speech may show interest and active listening.
- Conversations can be fast, lively and emotionally involved.
- Humour often uses irony, dark humour and self-deprecation connected with social experience.

### Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication

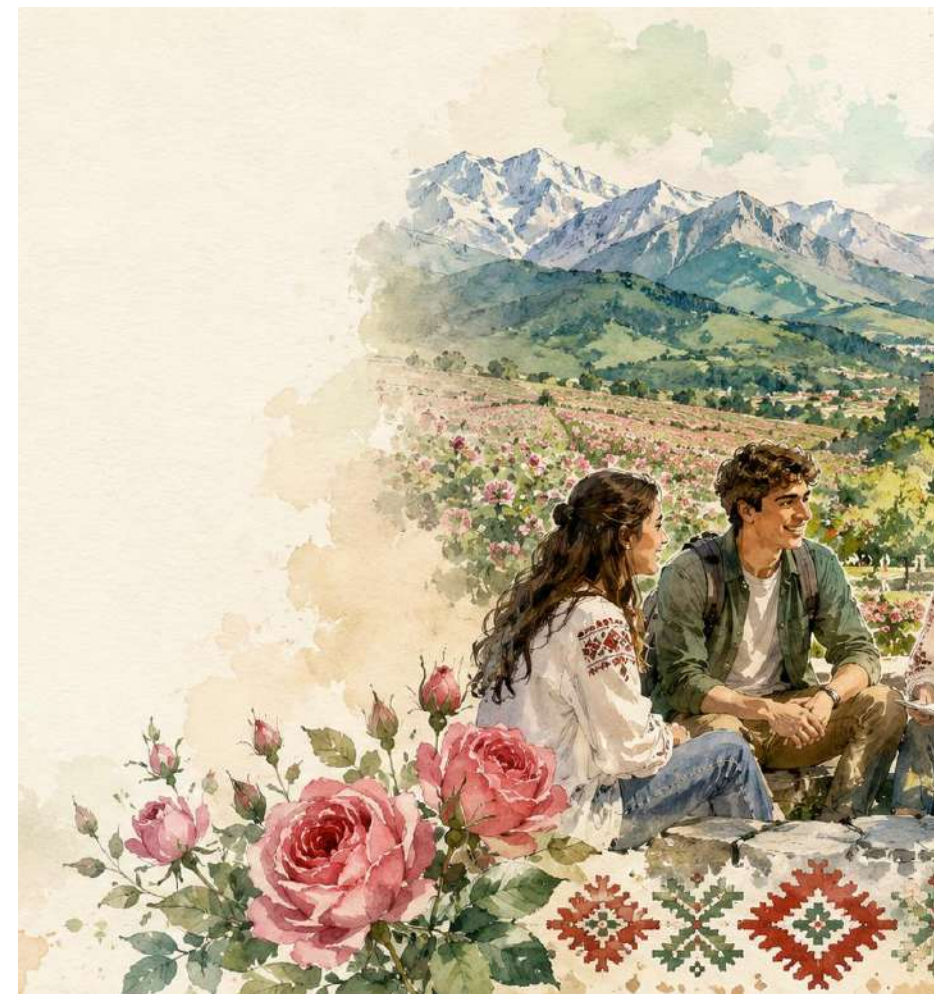
- Expressive gestures, louder voices and strong facial expressions may appear in debates.
- Traditional head gestures can be reversed: shaking can mean “yes”, nodding can mean “no”.
- Close distance, friendly touch and direct eye contact are common signs of warmth.

### Possible culture shock

Possible culture shock

- Direct speech may be interpreted as anger.
- Overlapping speech may seem disrespectful or competitive.
- Close distance, touch or eye contact may feel too intense for low-contact cultures.

Mitigation: clarify “yes/no” verbally; interpret volume and gestures as involvement rather than conflict; foreigners should not take interruptions personally; Bulgarians can soften wording and pause more.



## CY CYPRUS

### Verbal communication

Verbal communication

- Often warm, relational and context-sensitive, with politeness valued in everyday contact.
- Disagreement may be softened through explanations, smiles or indirect wording.
- In academic or professional settings, communication becomes clearer and more structured.

### Talk flow & humour

Talk flow & humour

- Informal conversation can be lively, extended and socially oriented.
- Friendly teasing or local humour may rely on shared cultural knowledge.
- Interruptions may occur as signs of enthusiasm, but turn-taking is expected in formal contexts.

### Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication

- Expressive tone, gestures and smiling can signal warmth and involvement.
- Moderate-to-close distance may occur in friendly interaction.
- Eye contact and open body language are commonly read as interest and sincerity.

### Possible culture shock

Possible culture shock

- Reserved visitors may perceive expressiveness as too intense.
- Close distance or long social exchanges may feel intrusive or time-consuming.
- Indirectness may be misread as lack of clarity by direct communicators.

Mitigation: focus on verbal meaning, not only delivery; ask clarifying questions politely; give newcomers personal space; explain local humour and social routines; balance warmth with explicit instructions.



## Communication type

## Possible interpretation by foreigners

## Avoidance strategy

**Directness / hedging**

May sound rude, too serious, vague or indirect depending on the listener's culture.

Use polite framing, explain intentions, and check whether the message has been understood correctly.

**Interruptions / overlap**

May be seen as disrespect, impatience or competition.

Allow clearer turns in international settings; interpret overlap as interest before judging negatively.

**Humour**

Dark humour, teasing or local jokes may seem pessimistic, inappropriate or confusing.

Explain context; avoid highly culture-specific jokes until trust is established.

**Expressiveness**

Loud voice, gestures or animated tone may be misread as anger or conflict.

Focus on meaning, not only delivery; adjust voice volume and gesture intensity when needed.

**Distance / touch / eye contact**

Close distance or strong eye contact may feel intrusive; limited touch may seem cold.

Observe comfort levels, keep respectful space, and adapt gradually to the interaction context.

Overall: culture shock decreases when participants interpret communication in context and adjust both verbal and non-verbal behaviour.