

**Communication Techniques and Possible Misinterpretations**  
*Adapted from Figuring Foreigners Out, Craig Storti, Intercultural Press, 1999, pp. 101 - 106*

**Technique used by the speaker**

**1. Understatement: such as: "I have one small suggestion"**

A person from a **DIRECT** culture will think the speaker does not have a strong opinion on the matter.

A person from an **INDIRECT** culture will think the speaker is very interested or concerned.

**2. Changing the Subject:**

A person from a **DIRECT** culture will think the speaker has nothing more to say on the present topic or has lost his/her train of thought and might bring the conversation back to this topic if s/he hasn't finished talking about it, thus upsetting the **[INDIRECT]** speaker, who is uncomfortable talking about the subject.

The person from the **INDIRECT** culture does not want to talk further about the subject now under discussion.

**3. Saying Yes:**

**DIRECT** communicators will assume the speaker has understood, agreed, approved, accepted whatever is being discussed

**INDIRECT** communicators will assume that "yes" is simply a polite acknowledgment and look or probe for the real response from the other person.

**4. Saying nothing in response to a proposal or suggestion:**

**DIRECT** communicators assume the speaker will say something if s/he has a problem with or does not agree with or like the proposal; hence, silence means approval.

**INDIRECT** communicators assume silence means the speaker has some objection to the proposal and will pursue the matter with that person in the appropriate setting.

**5. Telling a story that seems to be off the subject:**

**DIRECT** communicators will assume the speaker has gone off on a tangent or lost his/her train of thought, and will wait for the speaker to finish and get back to the subject, not paying much attention to the story and perhaps missing an important point that is being made indirectly.

**INDIRECT** communicators are trying to make a point indirectly, normally a "difficult" point, such as a criticism, refusal, or something disappointing.

**6. Asking a question about a point previously agreed upon:**

**DIRECT** communicators will think the speaker has forgotten what was said and will simply repeat the gist of the original discussion.

**INDIRECT** communicators did not like the previous decision and want to change it.

**7. Asking what YOU think in response to your asking for an opinion or making a proposal**

**DIRECT** communicators will assume the speaker wants to know your own opinion on the matter.

**INDIRECT** communicators will assume that this usually means "no."

**8. Qualified answers: probably, I think so, I'm almost sure, there's a good possibility:**

**DIRECT** communicators interpret these literally as affirmations - they suggest the likelihood that the thing will happen.

**INDIRECT** communicators are not in agreement with or positive about the matter and don't want to say so.

**9. Not mentioning something in a conversation:**

**DIRECT** communicators think this means you have nothing to say about the topic.

**INDIRECT** communicators may not mention something because of discomfort or a problem with the topic.