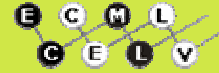




# ICOPROMO

Intercultural competence for professional mobility  
*Compétence interculturelle pour le développement  
de la mobilité professionnelle*



## Rich points

### Communicating across cultures

Language awareness

#### Rationale

The problematic nature of translation is explored in this activity through the use of 'keywords' or 'rich points'.

#### Learning Outcome

The learner is expected to realize the difficulty involved in understanding, interpreting and translating keywords or rich points, that is to say, words with a heavy cultural load.

To explore the concepts of "keywords" or "rich points."

#### Competences:

Awareness-raising of the difficulty involved in understanding, interpreting and translating keywords.

#### Time

55-70 minutes:

- Introduction and reading of the text by Agar: 10-15 minutes.
- First table completion: 15-20 minutes.
- Second table completion: 10-15 minutes.
- Discussion of outcomes of both tables in groups of four: 10-15 minutes.
- Whole group discussion: 5-10 minutes

#### Participants

Up to 25

#### Materials required

Handout with the two tables included in the worksheet.



## Procedure

1. Begin this activity by defining the concepts of 'keyword' or 'rich point' and by highlighting the difference between 'denotation' and 'connotation'. Illustrate the theoretical presentation with examples.
2. Invite learners to read the text by Michael Agar. It will be useful in order to understand the concept of 'rich points'.
3. Get participants to fill in the first table.
4. Get participants to fill in the second table. Monitor the activity, be prepared to answer possible questions.
5. Get the learners to form groups of four – preferably, comprising different nationalities– and to discuss their outcomes. Monitor performance.
6. Discuss the different insights on cultures that can be gleaned from the keywords discussed by the different groups.

## Reference

Agar, M. 1994, The intercultural frame. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 18, 2, pp. 221-237.



**Handout:**

## **RICH POINTS**

‘Keywords’ (Williams and Wierzbicka) or ‘Rich points’ (Agar, 1994) are considered to be terms with a heavy cultural load and, therefore, terms which can be the cause of intercultural misunderstanding.

Agar (1994: 227), an American anthropologist sent to Mexico to work for an American company, illustrates his definition of ‘rich points’ in the following example:

Consider a *lexical* example first. The product the company offered was *rebuilt* diesel engine parts. *Rebuilt* means you take the old casing, the *core*, check it for cracks and machine it, and then clean it up and add brand new working parts. The rebuilt part is as good as new, with the same guarantee but less expensive than a new part would be. Rebuilt parts constitute 80% of the U.S. market, but they are virtually unknown in Mexico, because that country lacks the technology.

The term *rebuilt* turned into a problem. We first translated it as *reconstruido*, but when people heard that, they assimilated it to *usado* (*used*), and expected lower quality and lower prices. We could not really call the parts *nuevo*, because they were not new, either. We still have not solved the problem. We were toying with the term *marca libre*, which means a new part in the style of some known brand, but not really the same. The point is that, even at the level of the basic lexical item to label the product, we stumbled across a problem.<sup>1</sup> (Agar, 1994: 227),

In the example above, the success of a company in a foreign country depended upon the choice of the appropriate lexical item. ‘Keywords’ or ‘rich points’, hence, become paramount in intercultural communication and multicultural teamwork.

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<sup>1</sup> Italics in the original.

Consider the following 'keywords' and write down all the denotations you associate with them (definition or objective meaning). Then, reflect upon the connotations (additional shades of meaning) these words have in your country/community and, if possible, in any other countries/communities you are familiar with.

| <b>KEYWORD</b>     | <b>DEFINITION /<br/>DENOTATION</b> | <b>CONNOTATION</b>      |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Second-hand items  | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>            | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Leisure - holidays | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>            | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Working hours      | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>            | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Charities          | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>            | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Pet                | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>            | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Antlers            | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>            | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

|               |       |       |
|---------------|-------|-------|
| Summer-Winter | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |
| Friendship    | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |
| Liberty       | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |
|               | _____ | _____ |

Think of 3 further keywords, if possible in your mother tongue (if it is not English, try to provide a translation or definition of the term) and complete the following table.

| KEYWORD  | DEFINITION /<br>DENOTATION | CONNOTATION |
|----------|----------------------------|-------------|
| 1. _____ | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |
| 2. _____ | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |
| 3. _____ | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |
|          | _____                      | _____       |

Discuss your answers to the two parts of the activities in groups of four. Out of the ideas you have associated with these keywords: Which ones are personal? Which ones have a much more social or cultural origin?

This part of the activity will only be of interest if the participants have access to a Spanish native speaker:

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER ACTIVITIES**

Some Spanish words may be included as examples, as well as some words from other languages.

| KEYWORD                            | DEFINITION /<br>DENOTATION | CONNOTATION |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Uvas (ask a Spaniard for help)     |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
| Jantar (ask a Portuguese for help) |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
| Música                             |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
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|                                    |                            |             |
|                                    |                            |             |
| Café                               |                            |             |
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| Lar                                |                            |             |
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| Negocio                            |                            |             |
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|                                    |                            |             |