



# EMAIL NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2022

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Dear Sietar India members and supporters,

We are delighted to share our latest newsletter.

We believe that it is reflective of our commitment to featuring new voices from professionals who do not necessarily think of themselves as interculturalists and yet do this work brilliantly. Not only do we end up learning from them but also introducing the SIETAR world to those who did not know of its existence.

In the column **“An interculturalist by any other name”**, our Board Member Ishita Ray interviews Hemant Gadgil, a seasoned Organisational Change professional from Tata Consultancy Services, on the topic of navigating cultural differences in his line of work.

In the column **“Lost in Translation”**, Ritika Mahajan, a professor in Management Studies, shares her musings on whether language is needed or is superfluous when it comes to transcending cultural barriers.

In **“Trainer’s Toolkit”**, Anita Mitra from the Institut Goethe, talks about the need to use reflective journaling when learning a foreign language.

Have fun reading **“Intercultural perspectives”** which is a quick poll across a particular demographic in India on a specific theme. Speaking of Gen Z, we would also like to thank SIETAR India's newest intern, Juveriya for her support in creating this latest edition.

We hope that you in turn feel inspired to contribute to our newsletter at [sietarindia@gmail.com](mailto:sietarindia@gmail.com).

For the Sietar India Board  
Sunita Nichani



# An interculturalist by any other name:

*Hemant Gadgil, in his international corporate career spanning more than 30 years, has lived and worked in 10 countries across continents. He is currently based in Singapore working as an Organisation Change Management Consultant at Tata Consultancy Services.*

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**Ishita Ray:** When and how did you become aware that navigating cultural differences is a critical part of your work?

**Hemant Gadgil:** When I started working outside India, I was exposed to different cultures. After being uncomfortable for some time, I realised, to be successful at work, I need to navigate the differences in cultures, rather than seeing obstacles. For example, in the Middle East, when I heard the answer ‘Insha Allah’ (God willing), I considered it as a failure to commit to time. But it was simply a cultural expression. Likewise, a lengthy answer from a Nigerian to a simple question irritated me, whereas a sharp answer from a German colleague made me look for more information. Arriving at a conference room in Japan at 10, for a meeting scheduled at 10, is still late, as the discussion should start at 10 and not at 10:05!

**Ishita Ray:** What are some of the challenges that you faced as an Indian professional in foreign settings?

**Hemant Gadgil :** The main challenge was facing stereotypes of being a typical Indian. For example, they assumed that I would be casual about time commitments, or I would hesitate to say No directly, or that I will be excellent in

Maths. Often, we do not have the opportunity to clear those in people’s minds. This was true with me too about others in early days, but as my awareness increased, I started looking at people beyond stereotypes.

**Ishita Ray:** As an Organisation Change Management (OCM) professional, do you think culture plays any role while managing change in organisations? If yes, how?

**Hemant Gadgil :** People are at the core of any organisation. Managing change is primarily empathising with people impacted by change (in organisations), holding their hand during transition to the future state. As an OCM Consultant, when I engage in Global Transformation programs spanning across countries, understanding of the business culture in change impacted countries is helpful to understand people. Knowing whether the culture is authoritative or egalitarian, how time is perceived and whether an individual is considered important or a group, becomes valuable information while planning change management interventions.

**Ishita Ray:** What is the one key insight from your intercultural experiences that helped make sense of cultural differences in your professional and personal life?

**Hemant Gadgil :** When I started reflecting upon how I look at other cultures, I understood how my mind is ‘conditioned’. We consider our own beliefs, values, our way of living - to be the ‘correct’ way. Our default reaction is to assume the person to be against us, whereas in practise, they would simply be behaving as per their own culture. I realised we should not start with the assumption that a person from another culture is our adversary. There is NO ‘right or wrong’ about any culture. If we become aware and adapt to the differences in cultures, it is an opportunity to create meaningful professional and personal experiences.



# LOST IN TRANSLATION

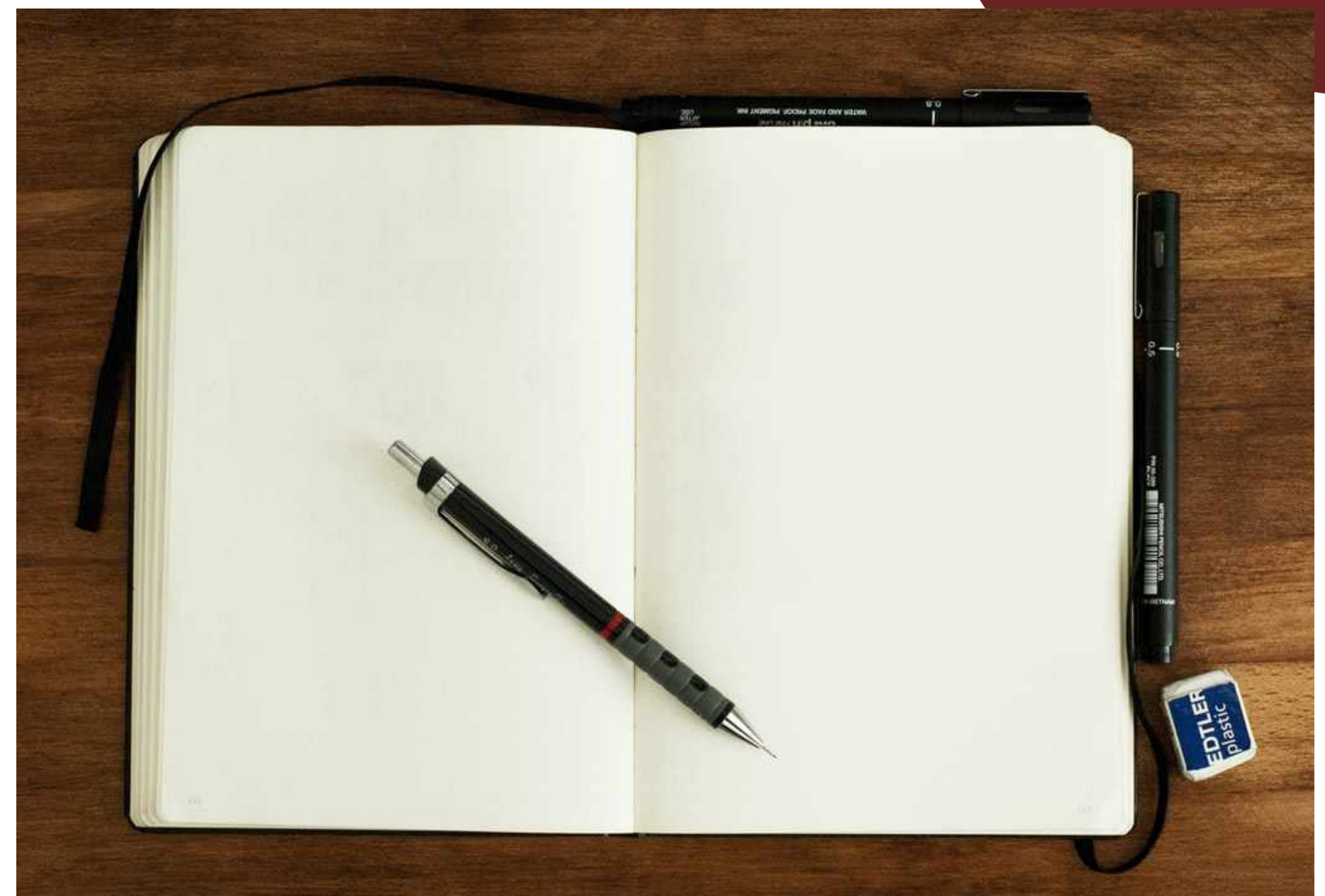
## Language as the Medium: Necessary or Unnecessary

*Ritika Mahajan is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Management Studies, Malaviya National Institute of Technology Jaipur. She has a PhD from IIT Roorkee. She loves teaching and writing. In this article she shares thoughts on how language can sometimes seem superfluous and yet in other contexts trigger strong emotions transcending cultures.*

More than 19,500 languages and dialects in India are spoken as the mother tongue. The country's New Education Policy emphasizes educating in vernacular languages. But English is the dominant language of business in India; more often than not, a person's competence is equated with her proficiency in English. So, the indigenous languages are fading, as are the stories in these languages. These stories are not only about the words but the culture of the communities in them and the authors who wrote them.

One such author is Faiz Ahmad Faiz, born in pre-independent Punjab. He wrote in Urdu and Punjabi; was nominated for the Nobel, and won the Lenin Peace Prize.

In an encounter between Faiz and Pablo Neruda, recollected and documented by the former's daughter, the legendary poets spent a night narrating their creations to each other. Faiz spoke Urdu, and Neruda spoke Spanish. Initially, there were translators. As the night progressed, the poets narrated in their languages, and everyone seemed to understand perfectly.



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In another instance, Faiz's *nazm* (poem) - *Hum dekhenge* (We Will See), written in 1979, sparked a revolution. Iqbal Bano, a Pakistani singer, sang it amid a gathering of political activists while wearing a black sari, banned by the then regime. The poem became a symbol of freedom from oppression for generations, not only in Pakistan but also in other countries.

These anecdotes relating to the same legend demonstrate a contrast. Is language necessary or unnecessary? On the one hand, it can inspire a revolution; on the other, it may hardly matter if the feelings are communicated. Shakespeare, for that matter, created his own language - Shakespearean English. With our colonial past and the current pace of globalization, we oscillate between British and American English in India, mixing the two versions quite often. What is the point, then?

Amid the contrast, there is a commonality. In one interview, famous Indian poet, writer, and filmmaker Gulzar Sahab referred to *dawakhana* (Urdu word for a dispensary). He mentioned if the *kha* doesn't come from the epiglottis, language and meaning change. With a slightly different pronunciation, *dawa khana* in Hindi means eating medicine. In one of the reminder emails for an official meeting, a "gentle" reminder became a "genital reminder" courtesy of the auto-correct feature.

So, either we create our own language or handle the ones we know passionately. The legendary poets did not need translators because their passion spoke rather than words.

Here is a toast to the power of language as the medium – subtle but intense!



## Reflection as a learning tool

*Anita Mitra is a German language expert working at the Goethe-Institut Kolkata as a teacher and teacher trainer. She is responsible for the outreach programs for eastern India that provide support to educational institutions, children and youth.*

Culture is part of who we are and what we do. In a country as multicultural, multilingual and diverse as India, we often cross cultures without even realising it. In our neighbourhoods, organisations, businesses or religious communities, multiple cultures co-exist. Perhaps one of the most important places where cultures intersect is in schools.

With increasing mobility within the country, cultural diversity in Indian classrooms is definitely on the rise. It is more important now than ever before for teachers to create and leverage classroom practises to promote acceptance and create a culturally sensitive society.

But how exactly can cultural awareness be promoted in foreign language classrooms?

One of the most important methods I personally like to use in my classroom is self-reflection. Reflective Learning helps to examine attitudes, assumptions and beliefs. As a ritual at the end of a lesson, students work both individually and collectively (small group or class) to reflect on the learning activities in order to draw insights from them. From these insights flow concrete action steps.

In my foreign language teaching, I prefer to work with a journal that becomes the space for

children's feelings and insights. To trigger reflection, I use questions. Students write the answers in a notebook or journal.

### "Eating habits in Germany": a Sample Lesson

The following questions start off self-reflection:

- What was the most important thought in this lesson? The least important?
- When did you feel the best?
- What would you like to know more about?

The following questions delve deeper into the cultural aspects of learning:

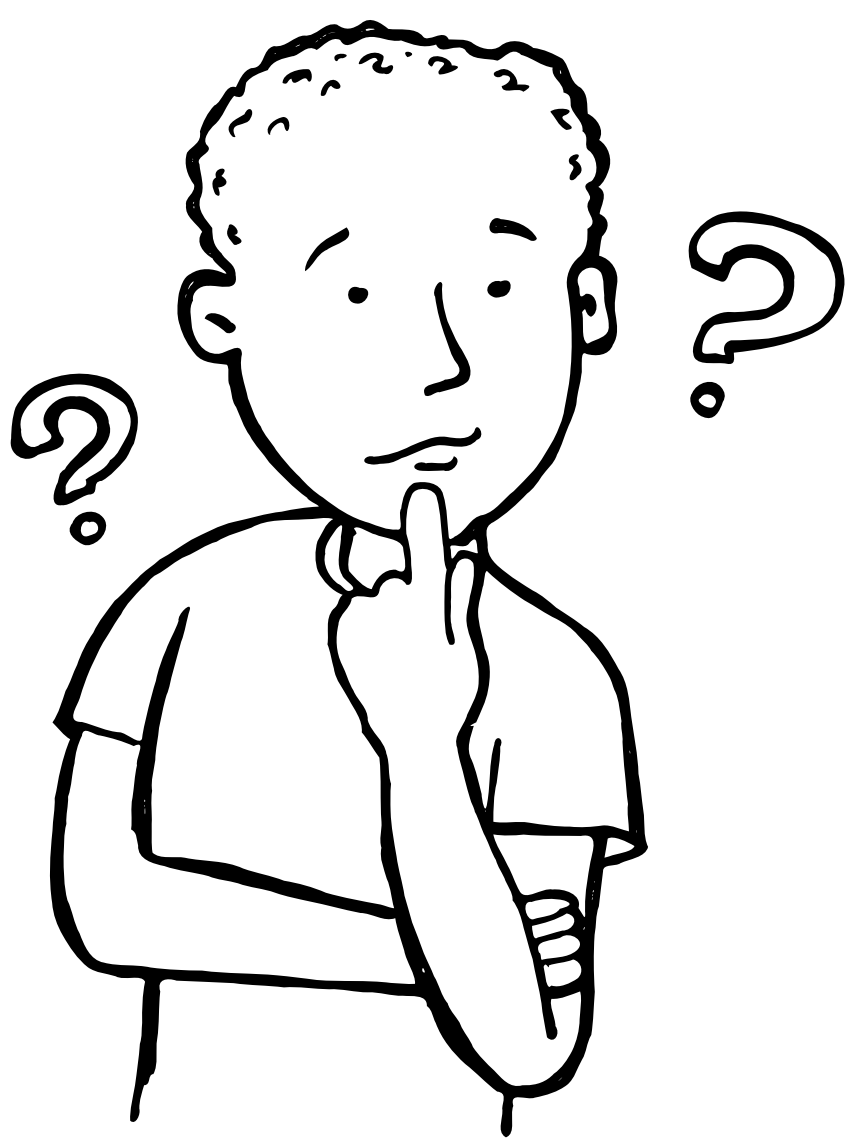
- What had you assumed about today's lesson? Did you have any stereotypical ideas about German eating habits?
- Did your opinion change after today's lesson?

The following questions challenge thought processes:

- What did you assume about your classmate's contribution before they presented it?
- Was your assumption correct?
- What did you learn about the eating habits of one of your classmates?
- Have you ever been disgusted by something your classmate ate? If so, why?

The questions and responses are usually followed by a short debrief in the classroom. I might ask the same question, several times, over the course of a lesson so that students can see how their own answers change as they receive new information and gain new perspectives based on what they have learned. The advantage of this format is that students can track the progress of their own thinking, over time.


As students assume, reflect, share, challenge and change, the classroom becomes an increasingly safe and open space.





## Gen Z Answers

*Who are you? Define your identity - what makes you, you, by answering: I am.... I am...*

An illustration of a diverse group of Gen Z individuals holding up signs that express their identity. The background is a solid dark red. The characters are drawn in a simple, stylized manner with flat colors and no facial features. One person at the top left holds a large sign, another in the center holds a sign, a person on the right holds a sign, a person on the bottom left holds a sign, a person in the center holds a sign, and a person at the bottom holds a sign. The signs are white with black text.

*I am free...  
I am someone  
who is  
determined when  
I try  
I am someone  
who likes to try  
new things but at  
the same time is  
scared to leave  
their comfort  
zone.*

*I am a human  
being.*

*I am someone  
who's not trying  
to fixate on a  
definite idea of  
identity. I want  
to explore more. I  
am an explorer.*

*I am a basic  
free vibe  
person.  
I am spiritual.  
I am highly  
emotional and  
rational. I am  
an optimist. I  
am kinaesthetic  
and musical. I  
am extroverted.  
I am intuitive .*

*I am  
nerdy  
and  
awkward.*

*I am everything and  
nothing all at once.*





## SOCIETY FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION, TRAINING & RESEARCH

The Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research (SIETAR) - India is a non-profit association of educators, researchers and trainers from a wide range of practical and academic disciplines who share a common concern for intercultural relations. SIETAR-India provides an opportunity to learn from and share with colleagues in the intercultural arena and advance the body of knowledge and practice in the field.

Established in 1974, SIETAR has over 3500 members world-wide with affiliates in many countries. SIETAR holds Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) status with the United Nations and the Council of Europe. SIETAR - India is part of the global network of SIETAR organizations.

### Contact Us

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**Website:** [www.sietar-india.org](http://www.sietar-india.org)

For more information or to submit a guest article please send us an email.

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## UPCOMING SIETAR EVENTS AROUND THE GLOBE

### SIETAR USA 2022 CONFERENCE

**Date:** November 03 to November 05

**Place:** Omaha, Nebraska

### SIETAR JAPAN 37TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**Date:** November 26- November 27th

**Place:** 2022 Online