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Intercultural communication competence revisited: Linking the intercultural and multicultural fields

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ABSTRACT

The present article identifies three significant trends in intercultural communication competence (ICC). These trends include: intercultural competence, measurement of ICC, and linkages between multicultural competence/social justice initiatives and ICC. Implications for future research and practice were discussed.

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1. Introduction

We have been asked by the Special Editors of the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations (IJIR)* to reflect on the state of intercultural communication competence (ICC) research over the past 25 years since the publication of the special ICC issue of the *IJIR* (see for example, [Dinges & Lieberman, 1989](#)), and it is our pleasure to do so.

As we scanned the empirical research on ICC over the last couple of decades, we were struck by the voluminous growth in depth, breadth and interdisciplinarity of research in this field (e.g., [Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005](#); [Deardorff, 2009, 2011](#); [Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2012](#); [Yamazaki, 2007](#)). Due to the constraints imposed upon this “summary and reflection,” we limited ourselves to three significant trends in ICC that merit continued scrutiny: intercultural context, the measurement of intercultural communication competence, and linkages between multicultural competence/social justice initiatives and intercultural communication competence.

2. Intercultural context

All communication is situated in some context. People come together across cultures for personal and/or professional purposes. These cultural and acculturative contexts include and affect multiple variables, including, but not limited to: ethnic/racial minorities, religions, immigrants, refugees, migrant laborers, business travelers ([Gamst, Liang, & Der-Karabetian, 2011](#)). Contextualizing these variables are volitional intent (e.g., travel/study abroad), fluidity (e.g., immigrate to a new country), perpetuity (e.g., duration), pecuniary aspects (e.g., financial resources), oppression (e.g., perceived racism/discrimination), socio-demographics (e.g., occupation/education), and similarity (e.g., linguistic or cultural). Within

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this context, intercultural communication competence influences effectiveness (i.e., goal accomplishment) and appropriateness (i.e., exhibiting appropriate behavior) (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2011; Yamazaki, 2007), with the goal of producing the desirable cross-cultural communication outcomes of adaptation (i.e., altering one's behavior due to the environment) and adjustment (i.e., mood states like self-esteem, stress, and self-confidence, that accompanies adjustment) (Lieberman & Gordon, 2011; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013).

3. ICC measurement

A second essential ingredient to ICC is the continued development of intercultural communication measurement instruments that assess the psychological constructs underlying the previous intercultural contextual factors we noted. All instrumentation (either culture-specific or culture-general) must reflect standard practices for scale development established in the behavioral and health sciences (Bennett & Salonen, 2007; Gamst, Meyers, McClain Burke, Guarino, & Namey, 2014). This includes providing evidence of construct validity including structural validity (confirming item latent structure), convergent validity (demonstrating appropriate intercorrelation between ICC scales and related measures), divergent validity (demonstrating a lack of correlation between an ICC scale and an unrelated measure), and reliability, or degree of measurement error, as indexed by Cronbach's alpha (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education; Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2013).

A recent review of ICC instrumentation (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013, p. 867) found that three instruments (CQ, Cultural Intelligence Scale; Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006; MPQ, Multicultural Personality Inventory; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000; ICAPS, Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale; Matsumoto et al., 2001) have the "... most promising evidence ..." for the assessment of the ICC construct. According to Matsumoto and Hwang (2013), the following latent dimensions appear to underlie these ICC constructs: (CQ) motivation, behavior, metacognition; (MPQ) open mindedness-social initiative, open mindedness-flexibility, cultural empathy, emotional stability; and (ICAPS) openness, flexibility, critical thinking, and emotion regulation. These latent structures should be the starting point for future empirical research that explores the ecological validity or real world meaningfulness of the ICC construct.

4. Linkages between multicultural competence/social justice initiatives and ICC

The development and portrayal of ICC (e.g., Collier, 1989; Kim, 1991; Lee & Chen, 2000; Ruben, 1989; Wiseman, 2002) and multicultural competence (MCC) (e.g., APA, 2003; Arrendondo et al., 1996; Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Sue et al., 1998; Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992; see also Gamst et al., 2011 for an overview) has progressed with little cross-fertilization of cultural competence issues that are germane to both fields of inquiry, as evidenced by the paucity of cross-referenced publications from the two domains. While communication researchers interested in culture have focused on pragmatic issues such as intercultural adaptation and adjustment (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Lieberman & Gordon, 2011; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013), psychologists interested in cultural competence have begun to focus on issues related to social justice advocacy (i.e., anti-racism, discrimination, oppression, and economic deprivation) (see Gamst & Liang, 2013, for an introduction). Bringing a social justice orientation to research on ICC followed by application in appropriate contexts (e.g., advancing egalitarian, nondiscriminatory, and class conscious outlooks among sojourners, immigrants, students, business persons,) should stimulate a greater understanding of the competencies involved in both intercultural and multicultural competencies. This cross-fertilization of the theory/research and application results will be of significant use in areas such as: recreation and travel, enhancing higher education campus cultures and increasing the effectiveness of the globalization of business.

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