INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

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INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ANNUAL

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Preface

This is the seventeenth volume of the **International and Intercultural Communication Annual,** a series sponsored by the Speech Communication Association's International and Intercultural Communication Division. The series of theme-based publications aims at promoting better understanding of communication processes in international and intercultural contexts. In preparing for this volume, the guiding principle was to bring together current theoretical and research studies focusing on intercultural communication competence. More specifically, *Intercultural Communication Competence* presents state-of-the-art theoretical orientations, methodologies, and research on the nature of communication competence in intercultural and cross-cultural contexts. Theoretical orientations encompass uncertainty reduction, face management, and face negotiation. Recommendations for both quantitative and qualitative research are provided. Exemplary conceptual and empirical studies are also included as models for scholars and students.

The book is developed in three parts. Part I analyzes the conceptual decisions made in intercultural communication competence research. Decisions regarding conceptualization, operationalization, research design, and sampling are examined. Part II presents four different theoretical orientations. Each of these chapters articulates how one's theoretical orientation dictates research foci. Part III examines quantitative and qualitative research in studying intercultural communication competence.

Many people were involved in the completion of this volume. First, I would like to extend my appreciation to all the authors who donated their time and energy. Without their creative thinking, articulate expression, and long hours of work, this book would not exist. Second, I would like to thank Jolene Koester, the coeditor, for her continued support, hard work, and positive attitude throughout the editing process; Judith Sanders, the editorial assistant, for her keen eye for composition and

logic; and all the editorial board members for generously offering their time and expertise in reviewing manuscripts. Third, I would like to express my gratitude to Bill Gudykunst and Stella Ting-Toomey, my colleagues and friends, for their constant encouragement and professionalism throughout every phase of the book's preparation. Last, but not least, I extend my appreciation to my special children—Mikey, Michele, and Nicole—for continually reminding me of the joys of life and for the "semi-uninterrupted" time they gave me to work on this book.

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Multiple Perspectives of Intercultural Communication Competence

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The imperative for the scholarly investigation of intercultural communication competence is ubiquitous. Because of the greatest migration of human populations across national boundaries in humankind's history, interactions of people the world over are increasingly intercultural. The traditional goals of the scholar—to describe, to understand, to explain, and to predict—have become critically important to the political, economic, and social vitality of the world's multicultural societies.

Despite widespread agreement about the importance of intercultural communication competence in today's world, there is relatively little consensus among those studying the subject about how best to approach, conceptualize, study, or measure it. Each scholar begins his or her research with different assumptions about how to conceptualize intercultural competence, with different goals about the desired outcomes of research endeavors, and with different methodologies to observe and reach conclusions. Rarely are those starting points clearly explicated, which makes it difficult to coalesce the research findings into a coherent body of knowledge about intercultural communication competence. Just as intercultural communication scholars explicitly recognize that people from different cultures use varying beliefs, values, and norms as the starting points for the construction of "alternative realities" (Stewart & Bennett, 1991), so too must researchers of intercultural communication competence recognize that varying starting points produce alternative realities and multiple truths about competence in intercultural communication.

Our goal in this introductory chapter is to describe the various perspectives from which intercultural communication competence scholars can choose to begin their investigations. In explicating the vantage points, or presuppositions, from which scholars operate, we make explicit the biases and blinders that shape the research literature. In addition, we offer a framework within which the remaining chapters in this volume, and previous and subsequent inquiries about intercultural communication competence, can be placed.

OVERVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF RATIONALE

Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970) has become a classic work in understanding the consequences of the implicit but pervasive assumptions that serve as the foundation for scientific and social scientific research. Kuhn's argument, which holds that scholarship takes place within accepted paradigms that carry with them accepted truths about the nature of reality and that these are replaced with new truths as new paradigms are accepted, shatters any illusion of total objectivity in the conduct of research. Kuhn argues that an obligation of the scholarly community, or at least of some of its members, is to explicate the assumptions of the prevailing research paradigm.

Every researcher begins the inquiry process with presuppositions or biases about the appropriate motivations for research, the correct methodologies to use, and the relationship between scholarship and everyday human experiences. These presuppositions form blinders, which are worn as the researcher begins a particular study. Most researchers acquire these assumptions gradually, from personal experiences and academic training, and they create their own definitions of reality from them. Such blinders are not evil; rather, they are a necessary and inevitable attribute of all research. Critiques of other scholars' works are often implicitly grounded in a disagreement about the initial presuppositions of the researchers. An understanding, evaluation, and synthesis of intercultural communication competence research requires an explication of the metatheories underlying the epistemology of the research. The researchers' assumptions include issues about basic nomenclature, the domain of inquiry, and the interrelationships among theory, methods, goals, and cultural perspective. In the next section, we explicate the presuppositions commonly underlying research on intercultural communication competence.

STARTING POINTS FOR STUDY

The study of intercultural communication competence has been nurtured in several disciplines over some 40 to 50 years and it is not our intention to provide a summary of the historical record of the study of intercultural communication competence (Hammer, 1989). Rather, our goal is to identify the inevitable choices scholars make, usually implicitly, when they do their research.

In the following discussion of presuppositions, we identify seven common issues researchers typically decide before they begin their research. For each of the *topoi*, we describe the nature of the premise—the range of positions taken by intercultural communication scholars, cite examples of extant work illustrating those choices, and refer the reader to the metatheoretical choices revealed in this volume's contributions.

Nomenclature

All researchers make choices about the nomenclature used to identify their concepts. Succinctly, is the topic of study best conceptualized as intercultural communication competence, intercultural effectiveness, or intercultural success?

Researchers first studying intercultural communication competence used a wide array of labels. Early scholars, using a variety of disciplinary perspectives, studied the problems of individuals working and living in other cultures, labeling what they studied as cross-cultural adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural success, cross-cultural effectiveness, cross-cultural failure, personal adjustment, personal success, or personal failure (see e.g., Guthrie & Zektick, 1967; Harris, 1975; Lysgaard, 1955; Mischel, 1965).

Within the field of communication, the growth of specialization in intercultural communication produced a similarly heterogeneous list of labels (e.g., substituting *intercultural* for *cross-cultural*). A commonly accepted distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural research is that cross-cultural research involves the comparative study in multiple cultures, whereas intercultural research involves the study of people from differing cultures who are interacting together (Asante & Gudykunst, 1989). Because of this distinction, the adjective *intercultural* has come to be the prevailing modifier, rather than *cross-cultural*.

The two terms most widely used by scholars studying the outcomes of intercultural interaction were *competence* (Hammer, 1984) and *effectiveness* (Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978; Koester & Olebe,

1988). Within the last decade, the majority of intercultural communication scholars chose to use the term *competence* to identify their subject of study (Bostrum, 1984; McCroskey, 1982; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977). Not coincidentally, this development paralleled a growing consensus among communication scholars, who studied the valence and outcomes of interpersonal interactions, to use the nomenclature *competence* to identify what they were studying. The term *competence* has roots in sociolinguistic traditions, as well, giving it increased credibility. By 1989, when the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations (IJIR)* published a special issue on this subject (Martin, 1989), there was obviously a growing consensus on the use of *competence* as the preferred term for the outcome under study (see also, Lustig & Koester, 1993). We, in turn, in selecting the title for this volume acknowledged formally the judgments of our colleagues that both *intercultural* and *competence* were the appropriate terms to refer to the phenomenon under study.

While most intercultural communication scholars now consistently use both *intercultural* and *competence*, rarely are explanations offered that explain the coalescing of forces around the choice of *competence* rather than *effectiveness, success, understanding,* or *adjustment*. Perhaps because communication scholars had previously engaged in the debate about the nomenclature, intercultural scholars have simply accepted the term.

The relative consensus on the use of *competence* was stimulated by methodological innovations in the conceptualization and measurement of the concept (Spitzberg, 1987; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Also, there is general agreement that the two most critical dimensions of competence are effectiveness and appropriateness. Effectiveness is described as a judgment about the ability of the interactants in the intercultural exchange to achieve their goals. Appropriateness refers to what is regarded as proper and suitable in a given situation within a particular culture. Other dimensions of competence that have been considered include ability (knowledge), skill (performance), and clarity (understanding).

Not everyone grappling with the study of intercultural communication competence is willing to settle on the nomenclature represented by either stem of the phrase. The distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural is widely, but not universally, accepted. Even in the special edition of *IJIR* on intercultural communication competence, Ruben (1989) consistently used the term *cross-cultural* to refer to interactions among people from different cultures. A similar choice is made by Kim in this book. Gudykunst, in Chapter 3 of this book, presents a theory for effective interpersonal and intergroup communication. He chooses to

define *effectiveness* as "minimizing misunderstandings" (p. 34) and views this as *competence*.

The Domain of Inquiry

Issues about the domain of inquiry require judgments about whether intercultural communication competence resides within an individual, the social context, the culture, or the relationship among individuals, or some combination of these possibilities. Early writing on intercultural communication competence focused on the assessment of the characteristics of individuals and their relationship to the outcomes of intercultural interaction. Attitudes, beliefs, and values, with psychometric measures of how these predispositions were configured in any one person, were employed to predict intercultural success, failure, or adjustment of individuals (e.g., Smith, 1965). Another significant phase of research located intercultural competence in the behaviors of individuals, not in their attitudes, or other self-identified characteristics (Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Hammer, 1987; Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978; Koester & Olebe, 1988; Ruben, 1976).

Emerging within the study of intercultural communication competence is agreement that competence is a social judgment, which requires an evaluation by one's relational partners of one's communication performance. These judgments are based on perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness. This view of competence as a social impression also requires recognition that competence is not determined by the knowledge, motivation, or skills of only one of the parties in the interaction, but rather that judgments of competence are relational outcomes. Koester and Olebe (1988) argued that judgments of competence were made by partners in an interaction and could be measured by the description of particular behaviors. Imahori and Lanigan (1989) developed a relational model of intercultural communication competence in which each participant's judgments of the other's intercultural communication competence were measured.

Permeating the chapters in this volume are the authors' judgments about the location of competence. Ting-Toomey, for example, is explicit in placing judgments of intercultural competence as the negotiation of identity "between two or more interactants in a novel communication episode" (p. 73). Likewise, Gudykunst, Cupach and Imahori, and Milhouse (Chapters 3, 5, and 9, respectively) view competence as occurring within a relationship. Alternatively, Nakanishi and Johnson and Kim view competence as primarily based on individual characteristics. In Chapter 8, Carbaugh relies heavily on social context in

viewing competence as dependent on what is possible, feasible, appropriate, and actually performed in an interaction.

The Relationship of Theory to Observation

Should the study of intercultural communication competence begin with a well-developed theory that allows for specific predictions, or should researchers begin by documenting observations and then developing theory through carefully presented cases? Tension surrounding the answer to this question ripples through the literature on intercultural communication competence and there are strong advocates on both sides of the debate.

The ethnographer studying competence unequivocally argues for building descriptive cases of competent and incompetent communication to reveal the appropriate and effective patterns of communication within a particular social and cultural situation. Carbaugh, for example, described the manner in which collected ethnographic works "inquire about loci and sources of intercultural asynchrony by examining instances of intercultural contacts" (1990, p. 152). The ethnographer uses this focus on the performance of intercultural communication to highlight "what needs attention theoretically and practically in situations of intercultural contact" (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 153). Collier (1988; 1991) and Collier, Ribeau, and Hecht (1986) provide other examples of researchers who presented detailed and carefully described observations of competence. In these studies, the researchers asked student representatives of diverse U.S. domestic cultural groups to describe the characteristics of competent communicators within their cultural group and about their expectations for competent intercultural communication from other U.S. domestic cultural members. Martin and Hammer (1989) based their work on behavioral categories of intercultural communication competence on perceptions of individuals "grounded in perceptions of everyday communication" (p. 305).

In his critique of the intercultural communication competence research, Spitzberg (1989) offered the other end of the continuum in the debate concerning the proper relationship of theory to observation. He was strident in his plea for the development of a systematic theory from which to make predictions about judgments of competence by intercultural interactants. In this book, both Ting-Toomey and Gudykunst frame their contributions in the form of well-developed theories with theorems and derived axioms, which are testable through specific observations with predicted effects. In contrast, Kim, Nakanishi and Johnson, and

Carbaugh (Chapters 6, 10, and 8, respectively) focus on observations to generate elements of theory.

Goals: Conceptual vs. Practical

Presuppositions about the goals of scholarship can be used also to differentiate among researchers. Some researchers of intercultural communication competence direct their efforts toward the practical application of knowledge in order to improve intercultural interactions. Others argue that the development of conceptual and theoretical excellence must be the primary goal. Much of the original scholarship on intercultural communication competence came directly from individuals engaged in very practical, day-to-day intercultural activities. As Ruben (1989) described this set of circumstances: "Much of the impetus for the study of cross-cultural communication competence arose out of efforts to cope with practical problems encountered by individuals living and working overseas, and by their institutional sponsors" (p. 229).

International education professionals regularly selected students for international exchange programs. In addition, they oriented and counseled those who attended universities and colleges in countries other than their own. Governmental agencies and businesses invested significant resources in selecting and training individuals for international assignments (Ruben & Kealey, 1979). The stimulus for much research was an immediate need to make decisions and choices about whom to send on an overseas assignment and how to train them. Much of this research, when evaluated by the scholar interested in the development of a cogent conceptual framework, has been dismissed for a variety of reasons including lack of methodological rigor and lack of theoretical grounding, and sometimes just because it had a practical goal (Spitzberg, 1989).

Nevertheless, the powerful force of practical need still serves to motivate a significant number of researchers. Koester and Olebe (1988) offered as support for the Behavior Assessment Scale of Intercultural Communication the potential ease with which the scale could be used in practice settings. Dinges and Lieberman (1989) sought to understand the problem of displaying competence in intercultural employment situations. Kealey's (1989) research was directed at the practical goal of improving the selection of personnel who would be involved in international development projects. Hammer and Martin (1992) reported on a training program for Japanese and U.S. managers in one corporation.