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complexity theory and assessment:
Considerations for creating effective
intercultural and foreign language development
programs

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Intercultural Communicative Competence, Complexity Theory and Assessment: Considerations for Creating Effective Intercultural and Foreign Language Development Programs

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Abstract

The recent interest to prepare Japanese university students to study abroad or work in intercultural contexts, has caused a demand for foreign language educators to create effective intercultural and foreign language development programs. This paper will give an overview of how intercultural communicative competence (ICC) can help educators meet these demands. ICC has made a relatively small impact within the Japanese educational system, thus the main purpose of this paper is to bring a greater awareness and understanding of the potential benefits that ICC can give to educators. ICC theory, pedagogical approaches and the key principles for designing an intercultural development themed course will be introduced. Also, the authors will suggest how complexity theory can help educators and learners understand and appreciate the process of intercultural development.

Key words: intercultural education, intercultural communicative competence, ICC, intercultural pedagogy, complexity theory

Introduction

Since 2009, The Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) has created a series of funded initiatives with overlapping objectives related to fostering global human resources, promoting the internationalization of Japanese university education and creating internationally minded students (i.e., MEXT, 2012, 2014). Essentially, all of these projects require individuals to know how to successfully navigate and make meaning within intercultural situations. However, linguistic mastery of languages is not enough for intercultural interlocutors to understand or be understood. Fundamentally, an individual needs a certain amount of self-awareness and understanding of their own cultural positioning, beliefs, discourses and values, and have the ability to shift their internal frame of references to interpret, understand and appreciate self and other's cultural, social and personal

perspectives (i.e., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). These factors are the basis of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and the authors of this paper will put forward how ICC can aid the creation of syllabi or curricula to help towards achieving the big objectives set by MEXT. Also, there will be a brief overview on the various factors to take in account for assessing ICC. In addition, there will be a discussion on how complexity theory can be useful for educators and learners to understand and appreciate intercultural development.

In Japan, ICC has received a relative amount of recognition across European contexts. For example, the Council of Europe, the continent's leading human rights organisation, has developed a large amount of ICC materials dedicated to classroom approaches and teacher training guides (i.e., Byram, Barrett, Ipgrave, Jackson & Méndez-Garcia, 2009; Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002). Also, various studies in different European settings have focused on developing ICC, understanding the process of ICC development and educators' opinions towards teaching ICC (i.e., Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Lázár, 2014; Sercu, 2005). In Japan, previous ICC related studies have demonstrated how ICC can be monitored in a classroom setting in the form of journals (Ottoson, 2013), and also the effects of international volunteer work experience on young peoples' ICC (Yashima, 2010). However, ICC has had limited recognition in Japanese education. Therefore, this paper will give a general overview of vital points for foreign language educators at Japanese educational institutions to consider when trying to create meaningful intercultural and foreign language development programmes. The literature review section will introduce key theory and principles, this will be followed by a discussion section that will suggest how complexity theory can be applied to the process of development, which then leads to a better understanding of assessment methods.

Literature Review

The literature review section will be presented by addressing the main questions involved in developing an intercultural and foreign language development program.

When considering intercultural communicative competence, what are the essential factors to consider?

The concept of communicative competence has allowed researchers and language educators to understand, from a communicative perspective, first language acquisition. The concept has been widely accepted to consist of; linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency (i.e., Canale & Swain, 1980; Hedge, 2000). Skills, abilities, experience and knowledge of communicative competence allows interlocutors, or native speakers, of the same socio-cultural background to successfully communicate. However, asking foreign language learners to develop native speaker communicative competence implies a learner should become linguistically schizophrenic as

they have to abandon their own communicative competence in order to be accepted as a native speaker by other native speakers (Byram, 1997). Nevertheless, Byram acknowledges the importance of communicative competence within ICC, due to the explicit mention of “communicative”, but his theories argue that intercultural interlocutors need an awareness and understanding of a much more extensive and complex version of communicative competence. Furthermore, this paper considers the terms intercultural competence of intercultural communicative competence as being synonymous, due to both concepts presenting individuals as complex systems with a number of interdependent factors that affect intercultural communication ability.

As a way to introduce the meaning of ICC, Bennet (2015) describes it as “...a set of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts (xxiii).” This description points out how cognition (e.g. knowledge, flexibility, critical thinking and autonomy), affective factors (e.g. empathy, emotions, motivation) and behavioural (e.g. experiences and communicative acts) dimensions are significant within ICC. Also, ICC literature has described all of these factors to be fundamental and interdependent on one another (i.e., Bhawuk & Sakuda, 2009; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Furthermore, Bennet’s mention of “effective” and “appropriate” interaction in a “variety of contexts” infers a necessity to understand intercultural encounters as exclusive events due to the uniqueness of the situation and the individuality of those who are interacting. The notion of individuality is an important viewpoint in this paper, and educators and learners are encouraged to become aware, understand and value their unique development and unique outlook that has been derived from their socialization. This is the first vital step to appreciating Bennet’s ICC description and to understanding the dynamic, complex and personal nature of intercultural encounters.

The complexity of ICC can be appreciated by considering Byram’s (1997, 2012) extensive research of ICC. Byram, like Bennet, also recognises the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions involved in ICC. However, Byram explicitly recognises that ICC can be acquired from life experiences outside of the classroom, and education plays a vital role to allow learners to reflect and value those experiences. Also, ICC development courses need to offer the chance for learners to gain critical awareness of self and other. Byram (1997) maintains that the “...relativisation of one’s own and valuing of other’s meanings, beliefs and behaviours does not happen without a reflective and analytical challenge to the ways which they have been formed (p. 35).” His interpretation of ICC is given in Figure 1.

“Knowledge of self and others” is described as understanding the “...social groups and their products and practices in one’s own country and in the interlocutor’s country, and of general processes of societal and individual interaction” (Byram, 1997, p. 51). This shows that a person negotiating spoken or written discourse in an intercultural encounter, needs a sense of critical cultural awareness to avoid ethnocentricity or prejudice. This is also related

	Skills interpret and relate	
Knowledge of self and other; of interaction.	Education Critical cultural awareness	Attitudes relativising self valuing other
	Skills discovery and/interact	

Figure 1 Byram's Model of ICC

Adapted from Byram (1997, p. 34)

to “Skills of interpreting and relating”, as Byram (1997) points out one needs “...the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one’s own (p. 52).” Furthermore, “Attitudes” are concerned with the “... curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own (p. 53).” Finally, “Skills of discovery and interaction” are about “... [the] ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate, knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (p. 53).” This last point is significant as again it highlights the dynamic nature of intercultural encounters, as intercultural interlocutors need the ability to adjust to others’ outlooks, communication styles, values or beliefs.

Another important point to consider is where ICC is acquired. Byram (1997) and Hua (2014) point out that learners develop ICC in three specific ways “classroom, fieldwork and independent learning.” In the classroom, the teacher has a direct role on a learner’s ICC development. In fieldwork, the teacher sets the educational objectives and their role becomes that of a supervisor, mediator or guide. This allows learners to assume greater responsibility for their own learning. Finally, independent learning is when learners continue to analyse and reflect upon their daily (inter)cultural experiences, in order to refine their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Also, independent learning may come from implicitly or explicitly learning and gaining skills from (inter)cultural experiences. Moreover, many researchers are in agreement about the influence of independent learning on the classroom, which educators need to take into account when planning meaningful intercultural programmes (Byram 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Hua, 2014; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Pedagogical approaches will be explained in more detail in the following sections.

What are the steps to take in creating a meaningful intercultural and foreign language development program?

This section will introduce two main factors for language educators to consider. First, to view learners as individuals. Second, to understand key framing principles for an effective program.

Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009) in their extensive review of ICC models and theories show that the individual is a central concept in many models. The main advantage of viewing learners as individuals in intercultural development, is that learners have a chance to uncover their own linguistic, cultural positions and identities and use this as a catalyst to understand self in relation to other and vice versa. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) definition of ICC (Figure 2) explicitly takes into account the view of individuality.

- Accepting that one's practices are influenced by the cultures in which one participates and so are those of one's interlocutors;
 - Accepting that there is no right way to do things;
 - Valuing one's own culture and other culture;
 - Using language to explore culture;
 - Finding personal ways of engaging in intercultural interaction;
 - Finding a personal intercultural style and identity

Figure 2 A Complex and Dynamic View of ICC (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 23)

The inclusion of the word “personal” highlights the individual nature of intercultural communication. This also provides a case for intercultural interlocutors experiencing a variety of emotions that they will continue to remember and associate with their unique experience. “Personal intercultural style” also infers that intercultural interlocutors have their own way to communicate, thus further showing the need for flexibility and openness, and to expect both differences and similarities (i.e., Byram 2012). All of this implies that learners need to gain an awareness and understanding of individuality from an effective intercultural development program.

Regarding key principles to implement when designing a program, Gregersen-Hermans and Pusch (2012) give five areas to consider. These are:

1. Meet the participants where they are.
2. Clarify specific outcomes of the program.
3. Create an appropriate learning environment.
4. Evaluate and assess the program and the learning outcomes.
5. Create a flawlessly organized experience.

First of all, at the beginning of the program, or if possible before the intake of prospective participants, educators have to identify and understand the students perceived learning needs, and their current level of ICC in order to design the syllabus. For example, educators should find out why their students are taking the course and why developing ICC is valuable to them (i.e., study or work abroad, aiming to work in a multinational company

Table 1 Intercultural Competence: Self-Reflection Tool

No.	Categories	Scale*				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	Respect (valuing other cultures)	5	4	3	2	1
2	Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures)	5	4	3	2	1
3	Tolerance for ambiguity	5	4	3	2	1
4	Flexibility (in using appropriate communication styles and behaviours, in intercultural situations)	5	4	3	2	1
5	Curiosity and discovery	5	4	3	2	1
6	Withholding judgement	5	4	3	2	1
7	Cultural self-awareness/understanding	5	4	3	2	1
8	Understanding others' worldviews	5	4	3	2	1
9	Culture-specific knowledge	5	4	3	2	1
10	Sociolinguistic awareness (awareness of using other languages in social contexts)	5	4	3	2	1
11	Skills to listen, observe, and interpret	5	4	3	2	1
12	Skills to analyse, evaluate and relate	5	4	3	2	1
13	Empathy (do unto others as you would have others do unto to you)	5	4	3	2	1
14	Adaptability (to different communication styles/behaviors, to new cultural environments)	5	4	3	2	1
15	Communication Skills (appropriate and effective communication in intercultural settings)	5	4	3	2	1

*5=very high 4=high 3=average 2=below average 1=poor

Adapted from Deardorff (2012)

in Japan). To find out about learners' existing ICC development a self-reflection questionnaire (Table 1) can be taken to inform syllabus design.

As a further activity, Deardorff (2012) recommends learners to further reflect on situations that require ICC, how they think they acquired ICC and how they can continue to develop ICC, especially the areas that need improvement. This kind of reflection can also aid learners to understand and explain their needs.

The next stage is to clarify specific outcomes of the program. Gregersen-Hermans and Pusch (2012) maintain that "...clear and specific learning outcomes attuned to the needs of the participants are key in guiding an effective learning process (p.30)." Learners need the opportunity to contemplate on what they expect to develop during the course, by the end of the course or even after the course has finished. Also, at regular intervals, they need to review their goals and gradually understand which are realistic or not. With regards to creating an appropriate learning environment, Gregersen-Hermans and Pusch (2012) suggest that creating trust and rapport among participants and the facilitator is critical for an effective learning environment. As participants are asked to critically reflect on their own values, norms, and

behaviour and then share their experiences and anxieties with others, a high level of trust is needed in the classroom. Therefore, the course needs to include learning activities that allow all participants to get to know each other, a joint exploration of the courses themes and outcomes and a chance for educators to have sufficient one-to-one feedback. Many of these strategies are rooted in learner-based teaching methods and communicative language teaching and can be adapted for the intercultural and foreign language development programs (i.e., Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Hedge, 2000).

Creating an appropriate learning environment and a flawless organized experience, are both interrelated and will be combined for discussion. Gregersen-Hermans and Pusch (2012) suggest that the physical environment and facilities are paramount to the learning process and that classroom setup with a flexible approach towards teaching methods is needed. Also, a learner-centred approach is deemed to be more effective than lecturing as ICC development in factors related to attitudes, behaviour and cognition require active participation in the learning process (Huber & Reynolds, 2014). Furthermore, a dynamic approach towards pedagogy and syllabus design is needed, as an effective course will acknowledge Byram's (1997) view that ICC is acquired from three different, but interrelated contexts; classroom, fieldwork tasks and independent learning.

In the classroom, experiential learning allows learners to experience, compare, analyze, reflect and take co-operative action with other class members (Huber & Reynolds, 2014). Primarily, this approach develops learner self-awareness and typical classroom methods include simulations, role-plays, critical incidents and case studies (i.e., Byram et al., 2002; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Recent studies have also discussed the benefits of structured online experiences towards ICC development. Furstenberg's (2010) study showed how online exchanges between American and French students allowed them to not only obtain vital information about foreign culture, but more significantly a chance to present their perspectives to each other, thus becoming more aware of their own culture in the process.

Ethnographic tasks let educators form meaningful fieldwork tasks that can allow learners to explore life in the real world, in order to bring back their experiences and knowledge to the classroom for further analyzing, reflection and discussion (i.e., Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Ethnographic tasks can be set up in the learners' local community or in study abroad contexts, and the purpose can be to uncover and understand the learner's own socio-culture or those whose language they are learning. Tasks can include observing and compiling data on the way people greet each other, verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and gender communication style differences (i.e., Corbett, 2010), this can lead to learners becoming more aware of the attitudes, behaviours, norms and practice that influence communication. Also, Holmes and O'Neill (2012) demonstrated in their study that an ethnographical approach allowed a group of participants to develop and evaluate their ICC by analysing intercultural encounters.

The development of ICC from informal learning is a life-long process (i.e., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Hua, 2014). It starts with every individual acquiring cognitive, affective and behavioral factors from daily experiences in their social environments (family, media, peer groups, libraries, etc.). These experiences and the knowledge gained influence the individuals' attitudes of respect, curiosity, openness and flexibility. These are the foundations of ICC (Deardorff, 2006; Huber & Reynolds, 2014). Therefore, classroom learning and informal learning have an interdependent relationship on ICC development, and a meaningful intercultural development program needs to allow learners to reflect on their previous life experiences to understand and value their informal ICC development (i.e., Byram, 1997; Hua, 2014). Study abroad is one way for learners to informally develop their ICC in the present, but immersion in other cultures and societies alone is not enough to guarantee ICC development (Hua, 2014). Hua claims that support from "cultural mentors" and structured learning, is required for learners to make sense of their intercultural learning experience. This also would suggest the need to further support learners on their return as a structured program could help learners to reflect and value their intercultural experiences and understand their development.

The next section will present a discussion and suggestions on two areas that are also vital towards the development of an effective intercultural and foreign language development program. Until now, this paper has demonstrated that both learners and the concept of ICC are multidimensional. This causes challenges to understanding the process of intercultural development and also the consideration of how to assess learners. Assessment is also part of Gregersen-Hermans and Pusch's (2012) five key principles to designing an effective program. However the authors will suggest that applying complexity theory to intercultural development can provide a better understanding of learners and assessment.

Discussion

Complexity Theory: A Way to Appreciate Intercultural Development

Complexity theory within second language acquisition (SLA) is a relatively new and under researched area, this is even less so within intercultural education. However, some SLA research (i.e., Alemi et al., 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 1997) shows language, language learning, learners and classrooms as complex dynamic systems. The logical extension is to evolve this research to the field of intercultural development too. The authors propose that complexity theory could help to understand learners' individuality and their process of development, which in turn could help assessment methods to be appreciated from a new or different viewpoint. As mentioned in previous sections, individuals have a number of interdependent factors that influence their ICC development (cognitive, affective, behavioral and socio-cultural). Complexity theory can account for learners consisting of systems (factors) with a number of subsystems. Alemi et al. (2011,

p. 35) describe a complex system as consisting of the following features:

- A large number of similar but independent elements.
- Constant movement and responses to other agents.
- Adaptiveness to ensure survival.
- Self-organisation in which order in the system forms spontaneously.
- Local rules that apply to each agent.
- Progression to make the system more sophisticated and larger.
- Unpredictability.
- Subtractivity.

The systems and subsystems involved within intercultural development are language, learners, language learning, the process of intercultural development and the act of intercultural communication. Larsen-Freeman (1997) points out how non-linearity is the most common element of aspect of any complex system and the binding constant that affects learners, and the process of language learning. Therefore, from a complexity point of view, language learning is not a linear process, as learners do not master one item before moving to the next item (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). This can be appreciated by recalling our own experiences of acquiring our first language. In addition, the non-linear aspect of intercultural development is demonstrated by Deardorff's process model of ICC (2006). In this model, Deardorff argues that ICC development is an ongoing endeavour, where individuals need to continually revisit aspects of their ICC in order to further develop. One way for learners to value the circular process of intercultural development is to encourage that intercultural development involves actual experiences, conceptualization and reflection from those experiences which then allows learners to further experiment for their next experience (Gregersen-Hermans & Pusch, 2012). However, this complex view of development starts to present problems to the educator as the current educational paradigm, especially foreign language learning, is built on the premise of linear learning and standardised goals. Therefore, the authors suggest that intercultural and foreign language learning programs need to fundamentally focus on the process of learning, rather than encouraging learners to achieve predetermined goals. By valuing process over product, learners can value and start to understand the importance of their past experiences, their different rates of development and focus on their personal goals of development. This leads to the final question - if a complex view of ICC development is considered, how can this be assessed effectively?

ICC Assessment: A Need for Multiple Assessment Methods

The topic of ICC assessment has been discussed throughout intercultural education related literature, and a consensus has yet to be reached (i.e., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Huber & Reynolds, 2014). The authors will suggest that if the process of intercultural

development is favoured over asking learners to achieve set objectives by the end of the course, then multiple assessment methods can be used to measure ICC development during the course. However, as researchers are in agreement that ICC development occurs during one's lifetime and no peak can be reached (i.e., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), educators and learners cannot view development in absolute terms. From this point of view, educators and learners should also view the period of the training course as a way for learners to gain momentum to develop ICC.

Deardorff (2006) argues that assessment primarily starts with the definition of ICC and that all those involved in the learning process need to be explicitly aware of the definition given. Following this, Deardorff suggests that assessment needs to occur throughout the training period and not just one or two points in time. Also, from a complexity theory point of view, any kind of assessment would have to cater for the various factors that make up an individuals' ICC. Huber & Reynolds (2014) propose that the combination of cognitive, affective and behavioural factors involved in ICC, requires both analytical measurement, and holistic and reliable judgments of individuals' performance, either singularly or together with others. Therefore multiple measures such as portfolios, learning contracts, self-reflections and self-assessments, peer assessments can be used to measure ICC from different perspectives (i.e., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

The authors would also suggest that external assessment instruments can be adapted for use with one's own context, however it is important to confirm that the choice of assessment aligns with the program outcomes and how the program has been designed. Assessing ICC developing is challenging, least of all is that it is also time consuming for the educator to devise the multiple assessments and evaluate the students too. ICC assessment remains a much underdeveloped field, but it is clear that traditional assessments that value product over process are not entirely suited towards effective assessment of intercultural and foreign language development.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced key theory related to intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and key principles for educators to create effective and meaningful intercultural and foreign language development programs. The authors presented the need for awareness and understanding individuality in the process of intercultural development is fundamental. Amongst the key principles to consider when designing a course, this paper described pedagogical approaches that include incorporating elements of classroom, fieldwork and informal learning. Finally, the authors suggested that by applying complexity theory to intercultural development, educators and learners have a better chance to understand individuality and also to value the process of learning, over product. From this approach, educators have a better opportunity to inform their course outcomes and assessment choices.

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