



University of Sussex

Sussex Centre for Language Studies

‘The world is mine’: The application of discourse ethics to intercultural communication and lessons for the classroom

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Research question

How and to what extent do pre-sessional language learners engage in intercultural communication outside the classroom?

Findings

Outside the classroom, learners' intercultural communication was more likely to occur on campus; elsewhere, it was mainly restricted to service transactions. Few learners were mediators.

Conclusions

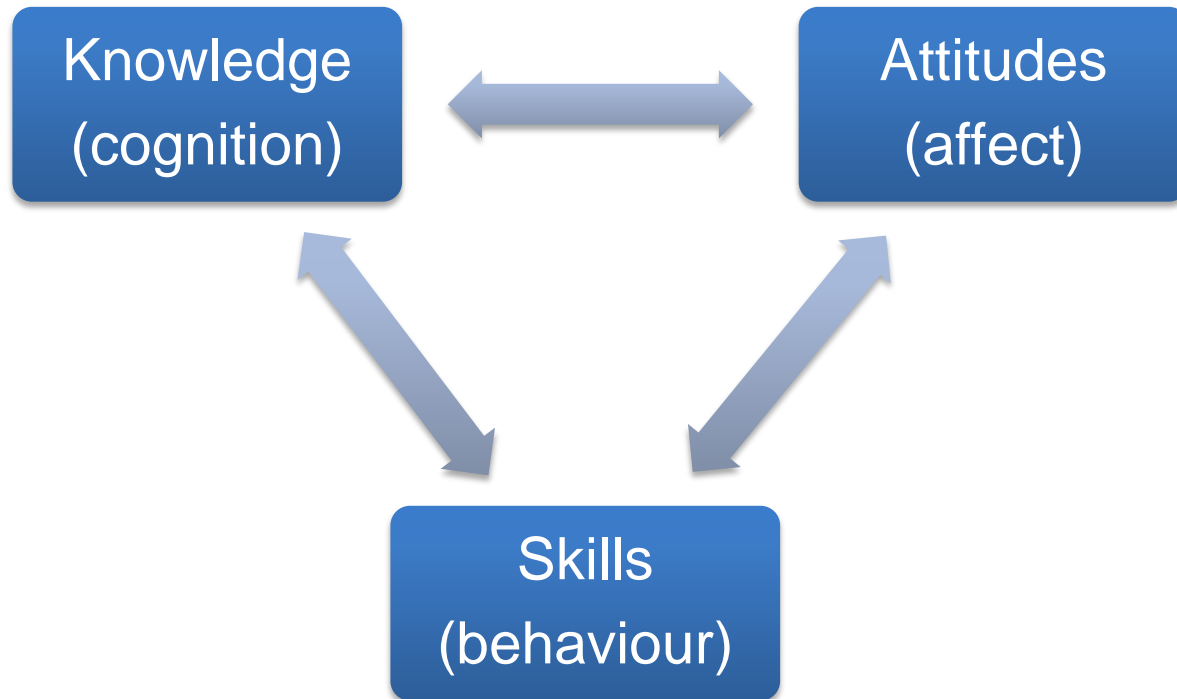
- Need for a structured instrument to enable learners to reflect on fieldwork in the classroom.
- Role for diagnostic peer assessment?
- Variations in IC fieldwork participation may relate to language proficiency.
- A minimum level of language is needed for mediation.

Factors in intercultural communication

	Skills Interpret and relate <i>(savoir comprendre)</i>	
Knowledge Of self and other ; Of interaction: Individual and societal <i>(savoirs)</i>	Education Political education Critical cultural awareness <i>(savoir s'engager)</i>	Attitudes Relativizing self Valuing other <i>(savoir etre)</i>
	Skills Discover and/or interact <i>(savoir apprendre/faire)</i>	

(Byram 1997: 34)

Learning dimensions of ICC



(based on Fantini 2012: 272)

Mediating ability

‘ ... someone with Intercultural *Communicative* Competence is able to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language. They are able to negotiate a mode of communication and interaction which is satisfactory to themselves and the other and they are **able to act as mediator** between people of different cultural origins. Their knowledge of another culture is linked to their language competence through their ability to use language appropriately – sociolinguistic and discourse competence – and their awareness of the specific meanings, values and connotations of the language.’

(Byram 1997: 71, my emphasis)

Skills of interpreting and relating

Ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.

Objectives (ability to) [include]:

(c) **mediate** between conflicting interpretations of phenomena

The intercultural speaker can use their explanations of sources of misunderstanding and dysfunction to help interlocutors overcome conflicting perspectives ... can help interlocutors to identify common ground and unresolvable difference.

(Byram 1997: 61, my emphasis)

Critical cultural awareness

Ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

Objectives (ability to) [include]:

(c) the ability to interact and **mediate** in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of those exchanges by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes.

(Byram 1997: 101, my emphasis)

Skills of discovery and interaction

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.

Objectives (ability to) [include]:

(g) Use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for **mediation** between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture

(Byram 1997: 63, my emphasis)

The skill of discovery

One mode of discovery is obviously through social interaction ... They may also be called upon not only to establish a relationship between their own social identities and those of their interlocutor, but also to act as **mediator** between people of different origins and identities. It is this function of establishing relationships, managing dysfunctions and **mediating** which distinguishes an ‘intercultural speaker’, and makes them different from a native speaker.

(Byram 1997: 38, my emphases)

Location

- The classroom
- Fieldwork
- Independent learning

(Byram 1997: 64-70)

Minimum language level for mediation?

‘I can intervene appropriately in discussion, using a variety of expressions to do so. I can help the development of a discussion by giving feedback, follow up what people say and relating my contribution to theirs.’

(Council of Europe. Spoken interaction: Interaction B2+
Eaquals Bank of descriptors – as Levels.)

Discourse for ICC

Conventional terms:

- 1) transaction (unequal speaker roles, short turns, topic unstated)
- 2) conversation (equal speaker roles, variable turns, topic drift)
- 3) discussion (variable speaker roles, longer turns, topic deconstructed)
- 4) -

Habermas's (1984) discourse ethics:

- 1) success oriented (non-social) instrumental action and (social) **strategic** action
- 2) **communicative** action
- 3) critical discourse
- 4) the ideal speech situation

The study

Participants

Two classes 23 students

10-week summer pre-session course

Future Masters courses: Banking & Finance, International Marketing, Technology & Innovation Management

Primary data

Suggested speaking activities (intervention)

Daily journals (23 SS)

Questionnaire (23 SS Week 1)

Questionnaire (23 SS Week 10)

Semi-structured interview (4 SS Week 4)

Stimulated recall interviews (10 SS Post-course)

Daily Journal

Write about any speaking situation in English you have outside the classroom.
You should say

- Where the speaking took place
- Who took part
- What happened

And how you felt about the interaction.

Questionnaire Week 1

- Biographical and background questions
- How do you feel about your experiences since your arrival in the UK of communicating in English out of class?
- What difference, if any, has writing the Daily Journal made to your communication in English?
- How did you respond to the list of Speaking Challenges provided by your tutor? What did you do? What was the result?
- Describe the most memorable communication you have experienced since your arrival in the UK. You could say
 - when and where the communication took place
 - who was involved
 - what happenedand explain why it was memorable.

Questionnaire Week 10

1 Describe the best speaking experience you have had since you arrived in the UK. You could say

- when and where the communication took place
- who was involved
- what happened

and explain why it was the best.

2 Describe the worst speaking experience you have had since you arrived in the UK. You could say

- when and where the communication took place
- who was involved
- what happened

and explain why it was the worst.

Semi-structured interview

1. Describe your previous experience of meeting people from other cultures.
2. What difference did meeting these people from other cultures make to you?
3. How did you feel about the speaking challenges?
4. Did any of these experiences change how you felt about UK culture?
5. Did they change your attitude or ideas about your culture?

Stimulated recall interview

1. Show me 3 places where you met people who you thought at first were very different from you.
2. Who is this person / these people?
3. Tell me how you felt when you first met them.
4. Did you feel the same about them at the end of the meeting? (How did you feel then?)
5. What happened in the meeting to cause the change?

Secondary data

Linguistic

- Language level (CEFR)
- Discourse style (Habermas 1984)
- Structural analysis (Block 2010)

Cultural

- Engagement with ‘Speaking challenges’
- Representation of ‘the other’
- Evidence of mediation

Participant A

Chinese

Age 24

Finance & Management

Participant A

Language level (CEFR)

High B2

Discourse style

strategic action

Structural analysis

I (I)

British (61)

Speaking challenges

Volunteer for Brighton digital festival

Attended Iftar dinner at local mosque

Volunteer for Circus Street Bike Hub

The other (how different)

- English landlord (childlike mind/comes home only at weekends)
- French Law student (English language conversation partner) (biography and interests)
- holiday landlord in Edinburgh

Mediation

For Chinese classmates on post-course holiday to Scotland



Participant L

South American

Age 28

Informatics

Participant L

Language level (CEFR)

Mid B2

Discourse style

communicative action

Structural analysis

I (2)

We (7)

Chinese (13)

British (42)

Speaking challenges

Attended Iftar dinner at local mosque

Independent fieldwork

Meetup.com English-Spanish conversation

Bought second-hand bicycle in local market

The other (how different)

Chinese flatmate (culture, language, ideas about the world)

North American course mate (language)

British conversation partner (looked Spanish)

Mediation

For large group of multicultural pre-sessional peers, negotiating with University accommodation office

The logo of the University of Sussex, consisting of the letters 'US' in a stylized, bold, serif font.

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Participant W

Chinese

Age 24

Business &
Management

Participant W

Language level (CEFR)

High B2

Speaking challenges

0

Discourse style

strategic action

The other

Chinese student met previous term (brave)

Current classmate from China (positive and quick acting)

Pre-sessional classmate from China (loves gym)

Structural analysis

I (1)

we (7)

Japanese (151)

Chinese (153)

Mediation

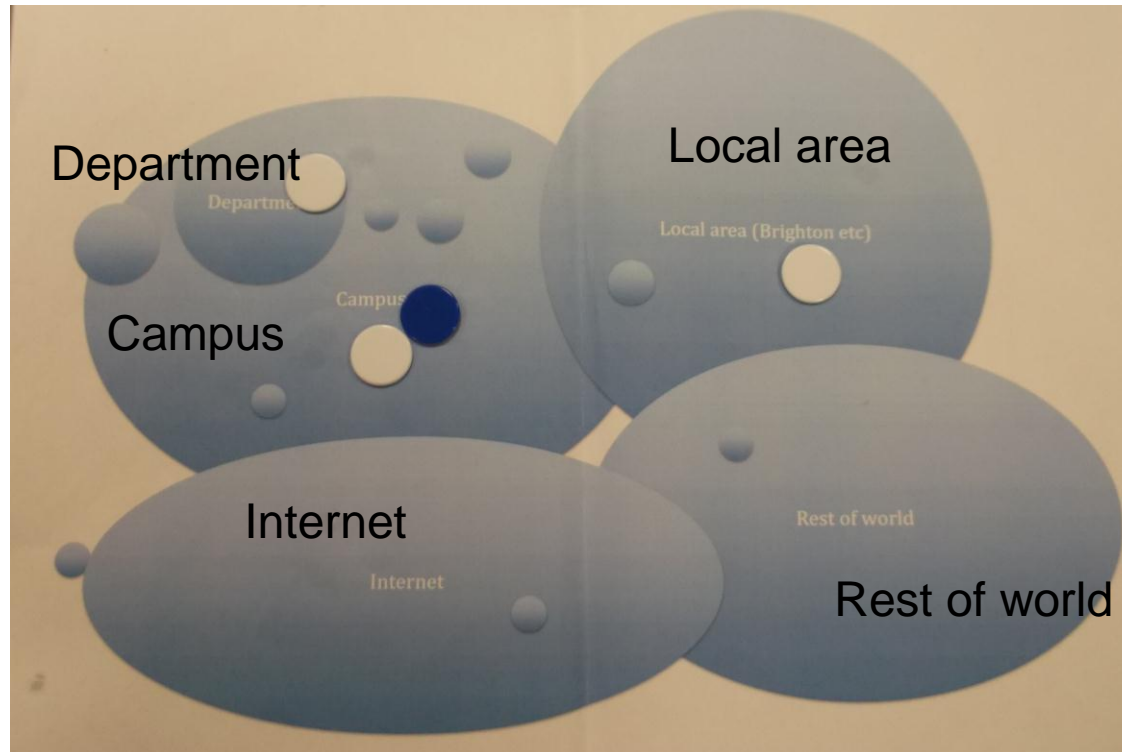
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Assessment

‘... *savoir faire* is probably best assessed through analysis of performance by the learners themselves, retrospectively.’

(Byram 1997: 109)

Example of stimulated recall instrument



Limitations

- Variation in the nature and quantity of data collected
- Language level required for data made additional demands on participants
- Possible cultural difference in concepts like subjective feeling

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