

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE THEORY:  
INTEGRATING ACADEMIC AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Title

Intercultural Communication Competence Theory:

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Integrating Academic and Practical Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

Vevea, Nadene Nichole, Ph.D., Department of Communication, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, North Dakota State University, March 2011. Intercultural Communication Competence Theory: Integrating Academic and Practical Perspectives. Major Professor: Dr. Robert S. Littlefield.

Over the past five decades, scholars of intercultural communication have attempted to define, describe, and otherwise operationalize the concept of competency in an intercultural interaction. This study constructed a comprehensive theory of intercultural communication competence (ICC) grounded in the extant literature and the practical or everyday understanding of the concept. Using classroom data that was validated by a metasynthesis of existing qualitative or ethnographic studies describing ICC, the academic definitions and lay descriptions were each explored and then compared to find points of convergence and points of divergence. The comparative analysis provided the foundation for the development of tenets: ICC is an outcome; ICC is externally perceived and measured; and ICC is bound by the cultural context in which it takes place, conditions regarding interaction goals and power roles of the interactants, and culture specific elements for the holistic ICC theory proposed by this study. An examination of the implications of the newly constructed ICC theory and its future application and implications were explored.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The influx and prevalence of communication technologies are rapidly decreasing the size of the world. Helm (2009) suggested, “as new technologies break down the physical barriers of distance, the possibilities of international communication increase” (p. 91). The increased ability to communicate with people outside our native cultures implies that now, more than ever, intercultural communication interactions happen on a regular basis. As Witteborn (2003) noted, “The study of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is increasingly important in a world that is characterized by intercultural encounters due to population migration, travel, technology development, and cyber-communication” (p. 187). Despite an obvious need to understand intercultural communication competence (ICC), the field of communication has yet to create a cohesive theory which accurately describes this phenomenon.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Several scholars have called for a comprehensive or cohesive theory of intercultural communication competence (ICC); Spitzberg (1989) for example, argued, “Indeed, the literature [on ICC] reveals an unwieldy collection of terminologies, a general lack of specific or practical predictive statements, and a deficit of conceptual explanatory integration” (p. 242). The concerns about the variety of conceptualizations, definitions, and models found within ICC literature have been noted by several others (i.e. Bradford, Allen, & Beisser, 2000; Collier, 1989; Hammer 1989, Kim, M., 1993; Kim, Y., 1991; Martin, 1987; Martin & Hammer, 1989; Ruben, 1976, 1989; Spitzberg, 1991). In fact, as recently as 2007, researchers outside the field of communication studies have suggested,

“the need for a specific conceptual framework of intercultural communicative competence” (Lussier, 2007, p. 310).

The problems with the existing models, definitions, and conceptualizations of ICC are numerous. While some scholars complained that, “a satisfactory model of ICC and a scale that translates well into different cultures is yet to be developed” (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005, p. 137), others argued a need to differentiate between cross-cultural competence and related concepts such as adaptation and adjustment (Ruben, 1989), and still others claimed that the, “so-called ‘list models’ and ‘structural models’ of ICC are inadequate in offering a holistic understanding of intercultural interactions” (Rathje, 2007, p. 255). As Rathje (2007) succinctly suggested:

The dizzying amount of material can be explained to a great extent by the lack of any unity in the definition of the term ‘intercultural competence’ itself. Differing understandings of the most fundamental nature of intercultural competence and hence its appropriate application necessarily lead to differing perspectives on the discrete competencies of which it may be composed, or indeed, whether it can be learnt. (p. 255)

The debate surrounding ICC is not limited to its definition. Another major concern for scholars studying intercultural communication and ICC is the scope of the concept and the lack of a sufficient measure.

The existing definitions of ICC generally fall under two broad categories; culture-specific and culture-general. As Arasaratnam (2009) argued, “One of the most useful instruments in this climate of globalization and performance evaluations based on intercultural competency would be an instrument which not only evaluates ones

intercultural communication competence, but also performs well amongst participants from multiple cultural backgrounds” (p. 2). The locus of ICC measurements has varied based on the focus of previous studies. In their argument for a culture-centered model, Banks, Gao, and Baker (1991) suggested that competency can be measured from “the group’s way of being” which, in turn, placed “participants’ meanings and motives at the center of intercultural miscommunication” (p. 108). On the other hand, Spitzberg (1994) took a goal- or outcome-based approach in measuring ICC, while Kim (1991) suggested that ICC is independent of success or outcomes and should be centered on self measurement of capabilities.

The problem with the lack of a unified definition or understanding of ICC is not merely a conceptual issue. The concept of ICC has been linked to several intercultural communication theories. According to Gudykunst (2002), “there are at least 15 theories covering different aspects of intercultural communication” (p. 183). Among these theories are at least seven which claim, in part, to predict effective communication outcomes or intercultural communication competence: cultural convergence theory (e.g., Barnett & Kincaid, 1983), anxiety/uncertainty management theory (e.g., Gudykunst, 1995), effective group decision making theory (e.g., Oetzel, 1995), communication accommodation theory (e.g., Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota, 1995), intercultural adaptation theory (e.g., Ellingsworth, 1983), identity negotiation theory (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1993), and networks and outgroup communication competence theory (e.g., Kim, 1986). As nearly half of the current theories of intercultural communication purport to predict or result in ICC, these theories would be strengthened by a formal theory of ICC.

### **Aim and Scope of Project**

This dissertation answers the call for a comprehensive and cohesive theory of ICC. A comprehensive theory of ICC brings together and gives credence to existing literature of ICC and provides practical benefits for a rapidly shrinking world. However, a theory of ICC not only benefits intercultural communicators and scholars, but the field of communication as a whole. As Atwater (1996) noted:

For a field that entertains both basic and applied research interests, communication has much to do in generating theoretical frameworks which link both areas of inquiry. Further, there is considerable opportunity for developing new theoretical frameworks in the applied research arena. Often in the academic world, applied research is viewed as second-rate scholarship because it is atheoretical. This perspective is unfortunate; applied research offers an opportunity for the academy to demonstrate the relevance of its research to non-academic communities. Some applied communication research would benefit significantly from theoretical treatment. Further, active theory-building in the area of applied communication seems long overdue. This arena appears to be a venue that could be better exploited in promoting the scholarly credibility and visibility of the communication field. (p. 542)

The proposed theory of ICC integrates the work of previous scholars with the practical uses of the term by the general public; and uses these collective efforts to offer a holistic conceptualization of ICC. Before undertaking the construction of a new theory of ICC, understanding how some of the key concepts and terms are defined and understood is essential.

## Definition of Key Terms

One component in the challenge for creating a unified theory of ICC lies in the variety of labels associated with “competency.” For example, Bradford, Allen, and Beisser (2000) noted that, “cross-cultural adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural success, cross-cultural effectiveness, cross-cultural failure, personal adjustment, personal success or personal failure, cross-cultural awareness, multiculturalism, cultural competency, and intercultural competence” (p. 31) have been used interchangeably with ICC and that, “the two most frequently used terms seem to be *intercultural communication competence* and *communication effectiveness*” (original emphasis, p. 31). To avoid similar denotative issues in this paper, three key terms are defined here: theory, intercultural communication, and competence.

### Theory

Kaplan (1964) described the nature of reality and human experience, “the content of our experience is not a succession of mere happenings, but a sequence of more or less meaningful events, meaningful both in themselves and in the patterns of their occurrence” (p. 294). It is within those patterns of experience that theories are born. Ultimately, a single theory is, “a set of related propositions used to classify and explain aspects of the universe in which we live” (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 21). As Miller (2005) noted about theories in the field of communication, “A theory is not the communicative behavior itself but an abstract set of ideas that help us make sense of the behavior” (p. 22). Put simply, a theory is a guide to understanding our daily experiences and for theory to be practical, it must fulfill specific functions.



Krippendorff (1993) described the creation of theory as a human social activity. Littlejohn (2007) elaborated on this understanding of theory creation by defining, “as a *human* activity, it is subjectively determined. Human beings create it, test it, and evaluate it. As a *social* activity, theory making is done within communities of scholarship that share a way of knowing and a set of common practices” (original emphasis, p. 5). Littlejohn also noted the particularly important relationship between theory and practice: “theories drive practice, but practice drives theory. In other words, our theories influence what we do, and what we do influences our theories” (p. 5). The specific functions of theories that operationalize the process of theory creation are explored in detail in chapter two. In formulating a new theory of ICC, understanding how theories have been built in the past and how theorists describe the theory construction process is necessary.

### **Intercultural Communication**

Inherent in the definition of intercultural communication is the concept of culture. Understanding culture is necessary because, “culture is largely responsible for the construction of our individual and social realities and for our individual repertoires of communicative behaviors and meanings” (Porter & Samovar, 1994, pp. 19-20). The concept of intercultural communication is relatively new considering that many communication scholars and textbooks have identified Hall (1959) as the father of the field of intercultural communication. However, the definition used in understanding intercultural communication is significant when constructing a theory of ICC, as Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) highlighted, “the study of competence in an intercultural interaction is often influenced by the researcher’s definition of intercultural communication” (p. 138).

Scholars have used a variously defined and explained intercultural communication. Gudykunst (2002) for example, noted that intercultural communication happens, “between people from different national cultures, and many scholars limit it to face-to-face communication” (p. 179). Taking a message creation perspective, Porter and Samovar (1994) offered that, “intercultural communication occurs whenever a message that must be understood is produced by a member of one culture for consumption by a member of another culture” (p. 19). In Kim’s (2010) definition of the progression of intercultural communication studies:

interest in the micro-level interface of individuals across cultures and societies continue to be the focal domain of intercultural communication theory and research, while keeping it close to the area of interpersonal communication within the communication discipline. On the other hand, the domain of intercultural communication has evolved largely independently from areas of communication investigating macro-structural issues of ‘international communication,’ ‘global communication,’ and ‘development communication.’ (p. 453)

What Kim highlighted in the previous definition are the branches that the communication field has developed when studying culture. In the past, most studies involving culture were identified as intercultural communication; the new branches separate international mass communication (global communication), nation-to-nation political communication (international communication), and the bottom-up communication coming out of developing countries (development communication) from the communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, now understood as intercultural communication. However, Gudykunst (2002) argued that intercultural communication is

most closely related to “one ‘type’ of intergroup communication” (p. 179). In this understanding of intercultural communication, researchers are not limited to one-on-one interactions, but still avoid overstepping the mass communication aspects of international communication.

This study utilized Gudykunst’s (2002) identification of intercultural communication as a type of intergroup communication. Additionally, Kim’s (2010) assertion that, “intercultural communication can be conceptually differentiated from interpersonal communication based solely on the relatively high degree of difference in the communicators’ internalized culturally or subculturally rooted system of meaning, knowledge, values, and worldviews” (p. 454) best describes the combination of culture and communication necessary for the goal of creating a culture-general theory of ICC.

### **Competence**

Scholars studied interpersonal communication competence well before they applied the concept of competence to intercultural communication interactions. The first mention of the concept of interpersonal competence came from Foote and Cottrell (1955) and was used in relation to identity and psychological health. White (1959) later described competency as, “the primary human drive or motivation to master the environment” (p. 298). Part of the problem with establishing a base understanding of ICC, as noted by Bradford et al. (2000), stemmed from the “inconsistencies in terminology and lack of conceptual explanatory integration” of interpersonal communication competence (p. 28). Though the initial attempts at defining interpersonal competency were found in fields other than communication, the works of Argyris (1962), Argyle (1969), Weinstein (1969),

Habermas (1970), and Hymes (1970) addressing the phenomenon brought competency to the field of communication.

Bradford et al. (2000) mentioned that, “concern for practical goals initially took precedence over theory development” and “researchers concerned with intercultural communication competence came from different disciplinary perspectives with a variety of assumptions, outcome goals, and methodologies” (p. 29). The two most commonly used terms in extant literature were intercultural communication competency and intercultural communication effectiveness; the main difference being their predicted outcomes of appropriateness compared with effectiveness (Bradford et al., 2000). The use and choice of these terms may have been related to the function of the relationship between them during interactions that Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) described as an evaluative process: “The perception of competence is a graduated phenomenon in which behaviors, affective responses, and cognition are enmeshed within an unfolding dynamic process of conversation” (p. 109). In other words, the appropriateness outcome of ICC encompassed the outcome for intercultural communication effectiveness, thereby making competency the more holistic term. The interpersonal roots of competency and the progression of the concept of competency play a significant role in building a new and comprehensive theory of ICC.

### **Summary and Preview**

The goal of this dissertation is to provide the theoretical and practical basis for a comprehensive, unified theory of intercultural communication competence (ICC). In chapter two, a comprehensive exploration of the extant literature which have defined and operationalized the broad concept of competency and the more specific concepts of

communication and intercultural communication competency is provided as a framework the academic conceptualization and progression of ICC. Chapter three defines the functions of theory, the theory construction process, and the evaluation of theories to guide the steps taken in this project. Chapter four highlights the methodologies utilized in this study and demonstrates the process of the overarching goal to create a comprehensive theory of ICC.

Chapters five and six, respectively, present the qualitative results of a classroom data collection process and a metasynthesis of existing research to explain everyday or practical perceptions of competence. In chapter seven, the practical perspectives are compared with the academic conceptualizations of competency through a comparative analysis. The results of the comparison serve as the foundation for the proposed theory of ICC as presented in chapter eight. Finally, chapter nine provides implications and directions for future research for the newly constructed ICC theory.

## **CHAPTER 2. ACADEMIC CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF COMPETENCE**

This dissertation constructs a comprehensive theory of ICC integrating both everyday perspectives and academic conceptualizations. The theory constructed in this study does not diminish the previous ICC work, but instead incorporates and concentrates the extant literature. This chapter explores the historical progress of the academic conceptualizations of ICC. Initially scholars studied interpersonal communication competence well before the concept of competence was applied to intercultural communication interactions and served as the foundation for current perspectives of ICC. Just as the field of intercultural communication was born out of interpersonal communication, the development of intercultural communication competency found its roots in interpersonal communication competency.

### **Historical Progression of ICC**

The first mention of the concept of interpersonal competence came from Foote and Cottrell (1955) and was used in relation to identity and psychological health. White (1959) later described competency as, “the primary human drive or motivation to master the environment” (p. 298). Though the initial attempts at defining interpersonal competency were found in fields other than communication, the writings of Argyris (1962), Argyle (1969), Weistein (1969), Habermas (1970) and Hymes (1970) brought competency to the field of communication.

Because many of the initial explorations of ICC were grounded in the need for a practical understanding of (and ability to teach) competency, the trait and behavioral approaches to ICC have been and remain most popular in academic research. These

approaches to ICC offered lists of behaviors, skills, and attitudes necessary for successful intercultural interactions (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Academic Components of ICC**

Barna (1976)	Language (Knowledge and Use) Preconceptions and Stereotypes	Nonverbal Cues Anxiety	Evaluations
Parks (1976)	Choose Communication Strategies Enact Communication Strategies	Predict Responses Accurately Assess Results	Identify Goals
Ruben (1976)	Display of respect Self-oriented role behavior Tolerance for Ambiguity	Interaction posture Interaction management	Orientation to knowledge Empathetic
Wiemann (1977)	Relaxed Ability to change communication	Empathetic	Supportive
Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wisemann (1978)	Ability to deal with psychological stress	Ability to communicate effectively	Ability to establish interpersonal relationships
Brislin (1981)	Knowledge of the subject matter Ability to use traits (such as tolerance) Potential to benefit from the interaction Personality strength	Language Problem-solving abilities Ability to complete tasks	Communication skills Task orientation Positive orientation to opportunities
Brislin, Landis, & Brandt (1984)	Past experiences Perceptual and cognitive sets of a world view	Anxiety	Goals Self-Image
Spitzberg & Cupach (1984)	Knowledgeable Empathy	Appropriate behavior use Social Skills	Cognitive complexity Attitude
Kim (1991)	Adaptability		
Beamer (1992)	Acknowledging diversity Analyzing communication episodes	Organizing information according to stereotypes Generating "other culture" messages	Posing questions to challenge stereotypes
Ting-Toomey (1993)	Identity Management	Resourcefulness	
Bennett (1996)	Sensitive/Sensitivity		
Fantini (2000)	Respectful Patient Curious Tolerance for ambiguity	Empathetic Interested Motivated Willingness to Suspend Judgment	Flexible Open Has a sense of humor
Spitzberg (2000)	Motivation to apply culture-specific knowledge Appropriateness	Knowledge of specific cultural rules Effectiveness	Skills to apply culture-specific knowledge
Kupka, Everett, & Wildermuth (2007)	Foreign language competence Contextual interactions Appropriateness Intercultural Affinity	Cultural distance Skills Effectiveness	Self-awareness Motivation Knowledge

Regardless of the approach to ICC, one overarching theme was the presence of cognitive, affective, and behavioral categorizations of its components. Though the trait-based approaches to ICC have suggested that characteristics and skills necessary for competent outcomes are inherently found within an individual, some components can be learned, such as Ting-Toomey's (1999) assertion that awareness and repeated exposure to intercultural interaction can improve these skills.

### **1970-1979**

In both the fields of interpersonal and intercultural communication, competency was initially based on the individual characteristics of the communicator, as opposed to the outcome of the interaction. In these first explorations into the concept, the goal of the researchers appeared to center on defining the term.

Ruben (1976) proposed a list of seven behaviors or dimensions required to accomplish interpersonal competence: Display of respect; interaction posture; orientation to knowledge; empathy; self-oriented role behavior; interaction management; and tolerance for ambiguity. Under this model, display of respect referred to the proper use of "eye contact, body posture, voice tone and pitch, and general displays of interest" (p. 339). *Interaction posture* was defined as being "descriptive, nonevaluating and nonjudgmental" (p. 340), while *orientation to knowledge* was simply defined as the ability to recognize that knowledge can be individual; people engaged in an interaction may not perceive truth or being "right" in the same way. Ruben (1976) defined *empathy* as the ability to attempt to see things from the other person's perspective, and *self-oriented role behavior* referred to the ability to demonstrate flexibility in "function roles" related to "task accomplishment and problem solving" (p. 342). *Interaction management* suggested an ability to engage in



turn-taking or conversational flow management with regard to the needs and desires of the other person and *tolerance for ambiguity* was simply the ability to adjust quickly and comfortably to the unknown elements of situations (Ruben, 1976).

Barna (1976) presented one of the first constructs of competency in an intercultural setting including five variables: language, nonverbal cues, preconceptions and stereotypes, evaluation, and anxiety. This model has not been widely cited due to the broad and unclear definitions of the components listed by Barna (1976), but it was a precursor for the behavior-based models and conceptualizations of ICC presented in more recent research. In a similar argument, Parks (1976) claimed the only way that communicators could be successful was by identifying their goals, predicting the responses, choosing manageable communication strategies, enacting those strategies, and accurately assessing the results or outcomes of the interaction.

Wiemann's (1977) writings on interpersonal communication competence suggested that success was, at least in part, due to the characteristics of the interactants. Wiemann (1977) claimed communicators who were perceived as relaxed, empathetic, supportive, and able to change their communication were also perceived as competent. Similarly, Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman (1978) suggested that ICC was comprised of three factors: Ability to deal with psychological stress; ability to communicate effectively; and the ability to establish interpersonal relationships. Hammer et al.'s (1978) model focused, as most of the initial trait-based approaches to ICC had, on one individual's personal characteristics and traits to predict or measure competence.

## 1980-1989

The first intercultural communication textbooks were published in the mid- to late-1970s (Rogers, Hart, & Mike, 2002), which suggested that formal courses in intercultural communication were not developed until the late 1970s and early 1980s. The need to be able to teach intercultural communication competency required a new kind of research. In the 1980s, the focus on individual characteristics remained a central focus of competency research, but other more teachable elements of competency began to take shape.

Brislin (1981) created a model of ICC that included six types of social skills: Knowledge of the subject matter; language; communication skills; positive orientations to opportunities; ability to use traits such as tolerant personality; personality strength; social relations; problem solving abilities; task orientation; potential to the benefit of the interaction; and the ability to complete tasks. While mostly self-explanatory, Brislin's (1981) description of *positive orientation* to opportunities closely matched Ruben's (1976) *tolerance for ambiguity*. One unique element of this model of ICC was the attempt to integrate behaviors with trait based variables through the inclusion of ability to use personal traits in the model.

Later, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) described competence as an evaluative process; "The perception of competence is a graduated phenomenon in which behaviors, affective responses, and cognition are enmeshed within an unfolding dynamic process of conversation" (p. 109). In other words, the appropriateness outcome of ICC encompassed the outcome for intercultural communication effectiveness; thereby making competency the more holistic term. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) identified three "competence attribute categories" (p. 192) which included cognitive, affective, and behavioral. In this model,

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) suggested personal knowledge, attitude, and behaviors were the foundation for competency. This perceptual approach to ICC was embraced further by Spitzberg (1988) who suggested: “Competent communication is interaction that is perceived as effective in fulfilling certain rewarding objectives in a way that is also appropriate to the context in which the interaction occurs” (p. 68).

Brislin, Landis, and Brandt (1984) proposed a model of ICC based on six antecedents to intercultural communication interactions that attempted to combine trait and behavioral approaches to ICC grounded in a culture-specific context: (1) past experiences with people of the target culture; (2) role and norm differences; (3) anxiety; (4) the goals of the intercultural training; (5) perceptual and cognitive sets of a world view; and (6) self image: that is, to see oneself able to “walk in the other’s moccasins” (p. 5). This model, even in the word choices of the antecedents, heavily focused on the “target culture” values and perspectives that were implied to be the host culture.

Bennett (1986) proposed a model of ICC that outlined personal or individual sensitivity. This model suggested six stages of development beginning with ethnocentric denial of difference, to defense against difference, then to the ethnorelative stage of acceptance, adaptation, and integration of difference (Bennett, 1986). Bennett’s (1986) model claimed that competence was closely related to intercultural sensitivity and, like Ting-Toomey’s (1993, 1996) identity management and negotiation models that came after it, the stages of self-improvement ultimately led to improved interactions or competency.

Martin and Hammer (1989) took a perceptual approach to ICC and argued that, “this view of competence as social impression is useful because it can be equally applied to the study of within culture competence (an intracultural context) and between culture

competence (an intercultural context)” (p. 305). Martin and Hammer’s (1989) understanding of ICC was one of the first that focused on the communication participants’ perception of the outcome of the interaction as a measure of the competency.

### **1990-1999**

In the 1990s, the “politically correct” movement called for individuals to explore their ethnocentricities and confront the stereotypes and prejudices they held, all while celebrating and being sensitive to the cultures surrounding them (Poole, 1998). Poole (1998) described during this era: “I object to any form of political correctness--Left or Right--that attempts to limit deep and thoughtful examination of complex cultural issues” (p. 163) and instead proposed that being culturally sensitive was more important than being politically correct. This attitude was also reflected in the research produced during the 1990s, through the exploration of concepts such as mindfulness and culture-specific understandings of competency.

Kim (1991) proposed a model of ICC grounded in a single trait: adaptability. More specifically, Kim (1991) suggested, “the capability of an individual’s internal psychic system to alter its existing attributes and structures to accommodate the demands of the environment” (p. 276) would determine competency. Within an intercultural interaction, Kim described:

adaptability means the individual’s capacity to suspend or modify some of the old cultural ways, to learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways, and to creatively find ways to manage the dynamics of cultural difference/unfamiliarity, intergroup posture, and the accompanying stress. (p. 268)

In summarizing this trait-based model, Kim (1991) claimed “the heart of ICC is metacompetence” (p. 268). While Kim (1991) saw competence as a mostly cognitive and internal trait, this idea was somewhat limited considering that Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) pointed to traits such as cognitive complexity, empathy, and social skills as predictors of perceived competency.

Taking a more practical or applied approach, Beamer (1992) offered a model of ICC designed to train individuals to become more competent. In this model, Beamer (1992) proposed a five level process: Acknowledging diversity; organizing information according to stereotypes; posing questions to challenge the stereotype; analyzing communication episodes; and generating “other culture” messages. Ultimately, Beamer suggested that the “key to understanding other cultures is asking questions in an ongoing challenge to previously held signs” (p. 285). The model proposed by Beamer (1992) described ICC as a process rather than a goal; each new intercultural interaction offered more insight into competency.

Lustig and Koester (1993) described a perceptual approach to studying ICC focusing on, “identifying groups of attitudes or perceptions which were related to successful intercultural interactions” (p. 64). However, as Lustig and Koester (1993) suggested, researchers utilizing this approach have had limited success because of the complex nature of competency due to the likelihood of individual success in one interaction, but failure in another. Lustig and Koester (1993) suggested that the fragmented studies of ICC could be separated into four different investigative approaches: Trait approach; perceptual approach; behavioral approach; and culture-specific approach.

By focusing research within a specific culture or context, researchers increased the predictability and/or control of competence.

Ting-Toomey (1993) suggested the exploration of ICC from an identity negotiation perspective, also referred to as having a “resourcefulness” trait. Ting-Toomey (1993) stated:

Effective management of identity dialectics, such as security-vulnerability or inclusion-differentiation, can enhance the individual’s sense of self-esteem, which in turn enables individuals to deal more effectively with new situations and to access communication resources more easily. (p. 100)

Ting-Toomey (1999) later refined identity negotiation into a theory of identity management. As Ting-Toomey (1999) described, “identity negotiation theory emphasizes that identity or reflective self-conception is viewed as the explanatory mechanism for the intercultural communication process” (p. 39). Ultimately a theory of intercultural communication -- identity negotiation theory -- was grounded in eight central identity domains: Cultural identity; ethnic identity; gender identity; personal identity; role identity; relational identity; facework identity; and symbolic interaction identity (Ting-Toomey, 1999). While the eight central identity domains of INT were not the only identities that people had brought with them into an interaction, Ting-Toomey (1999) believed these eight were most relevant to the intercultural communication interaction.

The most important underlying feature of identity negotiation theory is the concept of *mindfulness*, described by Ting-Toomey (1999) as, “a learned process of ‘cognitive focusing’ with repeated skillful practice” (p. 40). With mindfulness at the core, Ting-Toomey (1999) outlined ten central theoretical assumptions, grouped into five dialectics of

“identity security-vulnerability, familiarity-unfamiliarity, inclusion-differentiation, connection-autonomy, and stability-change” (p. 41). Ting-Toomey (1999) asserted that identity negotiation theory, “assumes that human beings in all cultures desire both positive group-based and positive person-based identities in any type of communicative situation” (p. 40). Ultimately, the theory had three outcomes; people in an intercultural interaction wanted to feel understood, respected, and supported.

### **2000-2010**

In the most recent writings and research of ICC, scholars have begun to trying to narrow the focus of competency. Whether by narrowing the previously compiled lists, or by creating fewer required categories to achieve competence, modern scholars have attempted to combine the previous work into a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the concept of competency.

After compiling a comprehensive list of the traits and behaviors linked to ICC competency in previous research, Spitzberg (2000) created a model of ICC competence based largely on these terms and with the framework of Spitzberg and Cupach’s (1984) model designed for understanding interpersonal communication competency. As scholars had no universally accepted guideline or description for being communicatively competent across all circumstances, Spitzberg (2000) argued that the difficulty of competent intercultural communicative exchanges resulted from the diversity of contexts and their corresponding perceptual rules. Only the knowledge of specific cultural rules, the skills to apply this knowledge, and the motivation to use these skills could facilitate appropriateness and effectiveness, which was the rationale Spitzberg (2000) used to claim that the five

components of knowledge, skills, motivation, appropriateness, and effectiveness were interdependently connected.

Bradford, Allen and Beisser (2000) proposed that “concern for practical goals initially took precedence over theory development” and “researchers concerned with intercultural communication competence came from different disciplinary perspectives with a variety of assumptions, outcome goals, and methodologies” (p. 29). The two most commonly used terms in extant literature were *intercultural communication competency* and *intercultural communication effectiveness*; the main difference being their predicted outcomes of appropriateness compared with effectiveness. As noted by Bradford et al. (2000), “the trait approach was taken by researchers interested in trying to determine the personality and individual characteristics of persons who seemed to have success in intercultural interactions” (p. 33).

Behavioral-based models and approaches of ICC were those whereby, “researchers have observed the behavior of successful intercultural communicators or collected self-reports of behaviors which communicators felt helped themselves or others to effectively communicate in intercultural contexts” (Bradford, et al., 2000, p. 34). According to Bradford et al. (2000), the culture-specific approaches to ICC, “in contrast to the other three approaches assumes that competence requires culture-specific awareness and behaviors, such as the ability to show respect in Japan” (p. 34). Fantini (2000) described the ICC speaker as having “respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, motivation, a sense of humour, tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to suspend judgment” (p. 38).



Wiseman (2002) noted a growing consensus that “ICC competence involves knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures” (p. 208). Ultimately, this combination of ideas suggested that ICC was the enactment of effective and appropriate behaviors reflecting knowledge and motivation for the interaction, and all of these components were measured through the perceptions of the interaction participants and/or the researcher.

However, as Wilson and Sabee (2003) identified, a culture-specific approach did not exclude the other three approaches: “Certain skills and certain behaviors are thought to cause appropriate and effective communication across contexts and situations. But appropriate communication depends on the context, and effectivity on the expectations and goals of the interactants” (p. 4). Essentially, Wilson and Sabee (2003) argued that appropriate and effective communication or ICC can only be understood within the culture of both the context and the individuals interacting.

Witteborn (2003) proposed that the only way to truly study ICC required taking an *emic* approach by studying competency from within a specific culture. In proposing this approach, Witteborn (2003) offered seven propositions for conducting research on ICC:

- (1) members of a speech community negotiate communicative competence in speech events,
- (2) members of a speech community have a shared socio-cultural knowledge about the goals of the interaction in a particular speech event, the act sequence, the tone of the event (key), the channels used, and the norms for interaction and interpretation,
- (3) the interlocutors affirm and disconfirm their cultural knowledge of these elements during the speech event,
- (4) these affirmation and disconfirmation processes can reveal what it means to communicate

appropriately in the speech event, (5) contextualization cues are linguistic means that help to make the affirmation and disconfirmation processes transparent, (6) the study of speech events is one way to explore communicative competence *in situ*, and (7) speech events can be studied by combining Hymes' (1972) SPEAKING framework and Gumperz (1977) contextualization cues approach. (pp. 196-197)

In this model for studying ICC, Witteborn's (2003) final proposition calling for the combination of Hymes' (1972) SPEAKING framework and Gumperz's (1977) contextualization cues approach necessitated the need for researchers to use repeated participant observation in order to identify breaches of norms and the necessity of having the interlocutors' input on label the speech events themselves.

Borrowing from Spitzberg's (1988) model of ICC, Hajek and Giles (2003) introduced a process model that defined ICC as:

...process of obtaining desirable communicative outcomes through the appropriate management of levels of individuation/stereotype expectation in communication, given a cognitive awareness of all participants cultural orientations, cultural history, and motivations. (p. 952)

In their study, Arasaratnam and Doerfels (2005) suggested that individuals who were viewed by others as competent intercultural communicators shared several common traits; namely, those who possessed ICC also possessed empathy, intercultural experience, motivation, global attitudes, and an ability to listen well during conversation. These findings led Arasaratnam and Doerfels (2005) to conclude that, "a person who is competent in one intercultural exchange possesses something within himself/herself that enables him/her to engage a different intercultural exchange competently as well" (p. 157).

Schoenhuth (2005) offered a perspective of ICC that incorporated the culture of both intercultural communication participants when describing competency as “a level of cooperation is achieved that is agreeable to all participants . . . allowing the existing diversity...to be exploited for the achievement of common goals” (p. 103).

More recently developed was the “rainbow model” of ICC (Kupka, Everett, & Wildermuth, 2007). Though this model combined trait and behavior approaches to ICC, its premise was based on culture-specific rules and expectations like Spitzberg’s (2000) model. The rainbow model of ICC consisted of ten components of competence: (1) foreign language competence; (2) cultural distance; (3) self-awareness; (4) knowledge; (5) skills; (6) motivation; (7) appropriateness; (8) effectiveness; (9) contextual interactions; and (10) intercultural affinity. The theoretical foundation of the rainbow model was mainly built on six central theories, which included systems theory, social construction of reality theory, social learning theory, cultural identity theory, identity management theory, and anxiety and uncertainty management theory (Kupka et al., 2007). Canary, Cupach, and Serpe (2007) suggested that “people’s assessment of an interaction means more to the relationship than the effect of the message” (p. 80).

Many of the initial studies of ICC “primarily found its application in student exchange or international technical aide programmes” (Rathje, 2007, p. 254) which meant that the studies were typically framed from a Western or United States’ perspective. The Western-centric models of ICC still exist, and have prompted scholars to question whether a culture-specific or culture-general theory of ICC was more appropriate (see Collier, 1989; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983; Koester et al., 1993). While there are strengths and limitations with both approaches, a culture-general approach offered the potential to

increase understanding of the interactive dynamics of communication between culturally different individuals, as opposed to highlighting unique cultural norms and practices in a culture-specific approach.

### **Summary**

The models and definitions of ICC proposed during the first two decades of ICC research were nearly all skills-based with elements that could be learned and taught to individuals wishing to improve their intercultural interactions. More recent models of ICC have focused on combining the early behavioral frameworks with perceptual and culture-specific approaches to ICC. Though not always directly addressed in the studies themselves, apparently these endeavors were largely motivated by an attempt to improve the existing and scattered definitions of ICC by providing a narrower scope and starting point.

The wide range of the existing models and conceptualizations of ICC encompassed nearly all paradigms and epistemologies. Constructing a theory incorporating the variety of perspectives presented a unique challenge for this researcher. In an effort to accommodate the range of academic conceptualizations, the next chapter explores the process of theory construction providing the guidelines for how a comprehensive theory of ICC might be developed.

### CHAPTER 3. THEORY CONSTRUCTION

The previous chapter highlighted the historical progress of the academic conceptualizations of ICC. Over the last several decades, scholars with a variety of paradigms have examined ICC from their unique vantage. The overarching goal of this project was to construct a comprehensive theory of ICC incorporating the wide ranging academic perspectives and the everyday, practical understandings of competency. Successful construction of a theory requires exploration into the functions, construction, and evaluations of theory.

#### Definition

Across academic disciplines, theories take on a variety of shapes; some offer researchers the ability to make predictions, some offer thick description of a specific phenomenon, and others provide models for understanding. The variance of theories inhibits understanding of the nature of theory itself. Breaking down the concept of theory more fundamentally, Merton (1976) claimed:

Like so many words that are bandied about, the word theory threatens to become meaningless. Because its referents are so diverse--including everything from minor working hypotheses, through comprehensive but vague and unordered speculations, to axiomatic systems of thought--use of the word often obscures rather than creates understanding. (p. 39)

Furthermore, according to Sutton and Staw (1995), "There is a lack of agreement about whether a model and a theory can be distinguished, whether a typology is properly labeled a theory or not, whether the strength of the theory depends on how interesting it is, and whether falsifiability is a prerequisite for the very existence of theory" (p. 371). The form

and function of theory varies widely dependent upon both the discipline and the paradigm of its creator. Within the communication field, three broad categories can describe the paradigms of theorists: social scientific; interpretivist; and applied or multi-paradigmatic.

### **Paradigms**

Generally speaking, theories in the communication field fall into three broad categories. Social scientific scholars use theories that define, describe, predict, and control human behaviors; while interpretive scholars are more interested in theories providing an understanding of varying perspectives of the human experience. Finally, in the area of applied research in communication, researchers consider multi-paradigm approaches, allowing for a combination of the other approaches to theory. While some theories of communication fall outside these three broad areas, the social scientific, interpretivist, and multi-paradigmatic are dominant. These paradigms not only determine the function of theories, but also provide the means to evaluate and determine the strength of theory. In evaluating the creation of new theory, Sutton and Staw (1995), suggested:

When theories are particularly interesting or important, there should be greater leeway in terms of empirical support. A small set of interviews, a demonstration experiment, a pilot survey, a bit of archival data may be all that is needed to show why a particular process *might* be true. Subsequent research will of course be necessary to sort out whether the theoretical statements hold up under scrutiny, or whether they will join the long list of theories that only deserve to be true. (p. 383)

On the other hand, Weick (1995) argued that theory is as much a process as it is a product; the stages of theory development are as important in evaluating theory as examining the final product. Despite these broader understandings of what theory should look like, each

of the three paradigms found within communication research has developed measures or guidelines for evaluating the strength of their theories.

### **Social Science**

The social science perspective, sometimes referred to as the functionalism-positivism, is the dominant paradigm in terms of theory used and created in the communication field (Lewis & Grimes, 1999). Shaw and Costanzo (1970) offered four interrelated functions of theories: To organize experience; to extend knowledge; to perform an anticipatory (or predictive) function; and to stimulate and guide further research.

Littlejohn (1999) provided a list of nine possible functions of theory: (1) help us organize and summarize knowledge; (2) help us focus on important things; (3) help clarify what is observed; (4) tell us how to look/observe; (5) help us predict; (6) help us learn more by suggesting new research avenues; (7) help us communicate ideas by providing vocabulary and organizational framework; (8) help us control our environments; and (9) help us think critically about our experiences (p. 30). The common descriptive words found in social science writing on theory are *define*, *describe*, and *predict*.

Chaffee (1996) conceptualized theory as “concept explication” which incorporated a process of the preliminary identification of a concept or theory, observation of the phenomenon, primitive and derived terms, validity, reliability, unit of analysis, and relationship to time. Regardless of how theory is conceptualized, the function(s) of theory are consistent. While the communication field has historically borrowed from the fields of sociology, social psychology, and political science when building its own theoretical frameworks, the purpose or function of theories in the social science paradigm of the

communication field generally serve to define, describe, predict, and control communication behavior (Atwater, 1996).

From a social scientific approach, theories can provide practical utility and these scholars have established criteria to determine the effectiveness of theories in fulfilling these functions. Shaw and Costanzo (1970) offered nine criteria for effective theories which were broken down into two categories: necessary and desirable. Three of the nine criteria fall into the necessary criteria: Logically consistent; consistent with accepted facts; and testable. In the desirable category, Shaw and Costanzo argued that theory should be simple, parsimonious, consistent with related theories, interpretable, useful, and pleasing to the mind.

Specific to the predictive function of social science theories, verification and validation are necessary to prove that the ordered relationship exists. Lastrucci (1963) noted:

Thus, for example, to say that the theory of inherited characteristics has been validated: by demonstrating it in a given number of predictable instances is tantamount to saying that the expressed relationship is a reliable one. To an increasing extent, scientists tend to avoid implications of causality by thinking of verification as an expression of high reliability. (pp. 236-237)

Runkel and Runkel (1984) argued the complexity of theory, in part, stemmed from the perspective of the researcher and could be problematic when the theorist was confined to the standards of one paradigm:

*Theory* belongs to the family of words that include *guess, speculation, conjecture, proposition, hypothesis, conception, explanation, model*. The dictionaries permit us



to use *theory* for anything from “guess” to “a system of assumptions, accepted principles, and rules of procedure devised to analyze, predict, or otherwise explain the nature or behavior of a specified set of phenomena” (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Social scientists will naturally want to use terms with more care than they are used by the general populace. They will naturally want to underpin their *theories* with more empirical data than they need for a *speculation*. They will naturally want a *theory* to incorporate more than one *hypothesis*. We plead only that they do not save *theory* to label their ultimate triumph, but use it as well to label their interim struggles. (pp. 129-130)

Runkel and Runkel’s (1984) critique of the standards of the social science paradigm of theory construction were answered in the interpretive paradigm.

### **Interpretive**

Theorists who subscribed to an interpretive approach typically employed inductive methods for both theory construction and evaluation. Ultimately understanding and making sense of the unique human experience is the goal of interpretive scholars. The qualitative or interpretive scholar engages in “inquiries based in the contingencies of meaning [and] can produce insights about the human condition” (Lindlof, 1995, p. 10). The construction of interpretive theory is perhaps best described by the methodologies employed in their creation.

Interpretive scholars typically use qualitative research methods such as participant observation, interviewing, focus groups, and ethnography (Lindlof, 1995). As described by Denzin and Lincoln (1998):

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created in given meaning. (p. 8)

Interpretive research is admittedly and purposefully value-laden, context focused, and subjective in nature. As Lindlof (1995) suggested, the varied methodological choices of qualitative researchers, “permit the sort of flexibility essential to qualitative work. The researcher, however, decides how and when to engage phenomena within the field of action. Qualitative inquiry is personal, involved inquiry” (p. 5). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), interviewing, for example, allowed participants to share their life histories which “stand as a rich source of understanding in and of themselves” (p. 81). Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated “Interviewing is about obtaining interviewees’ interpretations of their experience and their understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 36).

One benefit of interpretive research, especially for scholars employing observational methods, was their ability to unobtrusively record individuals participating in a natural setting (Keyton, 2001). Interpretive inquiry also offered the researcher the ability to “provide information about those who cannot speak for themselves” (Keyton, 2001, p. 72). Interpretive research produces a rich description of communication phenomena that social scientific scholarship cannot.

According to Allen, Titsworth, and Hunt (2009) “quantitative researchers . . . are interested in asking ‘how questions.’ A qualitative researcher might be much more interested in studying the more typical day-to-day communicative behaviors of people” (p.

5). Unlike the social scientist focus on the population at large, the exploration of unique human experiences of interpretive scholars significantly limits the broader application of their research. Similarly, as many interpretive projects require that participants be observed in their natural environment, some communication environments may be off-limits or impossible to observe (Keyton, 2001). Unlike some social scientific methods, data collection process in interpretive research can require a significant amount of time to accomplish which can also be a (sometimes significant) drawback of these methods.

### **Applied/Multi-Paradigm**

Laudan (1977, 1982) claimed that the first and most important function of a theory was its ability to solve “interesting” or “important” problems (p. 14). Likewise, Kaplan (1964) took a practical approach to theory and argued that though theory and practice have been traditionally separated into two separate entities, “Theory is *of* practice, and must stand or fall with its practicality” (p. 296). Littlejohn (2007) also noted the particularly important relationship between theory and practice: “theories drive practice, but practice drives theory. In other words, our theories influence what we do, and what we do influences our theories” (p. 5). Practical or applied scholars often created theory that utilized multiple paradigms because, as Poole and Van De Ven (1989) noted, when using multiple paradigms, researchers “look for theoretical tensions or oppositions and use them to stimulate the development of more encompassing theories” (p. 563).

Lewis and Grimes (1999) suggested, “Multiparadigm theorists value paradigms as heuristics that may help scholars explore theoretical and organizational complexity and extend the scope, relevance, and creativity of theory” (p. 673). Given Sutherland’s (1975) broader definition of theory as, “an ordered set of assertions about a generic behavior or

structure assumed to hold throughout a significantly broad range of specific instances” (p. 9), Weick (1999) claimed that the key elements of theory were indicated by the words *ordered*, *generic*, and *range* in Sutherland’s definition. Weick also claimed:

As generalizations become more hierarchically ordered, behaviors and structures that are the focus of the generalizations become more generic, and as the range of specific instances that are explained becomes broader, the resulting ideas are more deserving of the label *theory*. (p. 517)

The generic nature of a multi-paradigm theory allows for a greater range of applications. According to Dubin (1967), “In any applied field, the theory or theories utilized have to confront reality when they are put to the applied test” (p. 18). Ultimately then, the true measure of an applied or multi-paradigm theory lies in its application to the real world.

### **Construction of Applied/Multi-Paradigm Theory**

Krippendorff (1993) described the creation of theory as a human social activity.

Littlejohn (2007) elaborated on this understanding of theory creation:

as a *human* activity, it is subjectively determined. Human beings create it, test it, and evaluate it. As a *social* activity, theory making is done within communities of scholarship that share a way of knowing and a set of common practices. (p. 5)

In constructing new theory, Sutton and Staw (1995) suggested that “lack of consensus on exactly what theory is may explain why it is so difficult to develop strong theory in the behavioral sciences” (p. 372). To answer the call for a new theory of ICC, the use of a multi-paradigm approach is most appropriate. The multi-paradigm approach, according to Lewis and Grimes (1999):

helps the theorists manage their bounded rationality and, thereby, accommodate opposing views within a metaparadigm perspective. Metaparadigm denotes a higher level of abstraction, from which “accommodation” does *not* imply unification or synthesis but, instead, the ability to comprehend the paradigmatic differences, similarities, and interrelationships. The goal is a more rich, holistic, and contextualized purview. (p. 675)

The varied and sometimes conflicting conceptualizations of ICC as highlighted in chapter two justify the creation of a multi-paradigm theory as the only option to encompass the work that has already been done.

Sutton and Staw (1995) also noted what theory building is not: Data (which instead are used to confirm, revise, or discredit existing theory); lists of variables or constructs (which require explanations of the inclusion and connections to add value to theory); diagrams (which should only be considered clarification of relationships); or hypotheses or predictions (which can serve as bridges between theory and data). Ultimately, these authors suggested that, despite arguments against the use and creation of theory, “without constant pressure for theory building, the field would surely slide to its natural resting place in dust-bowl empiricism” (p. 380).

Lewis and Grimes (1999) proposed that “building theory from multiple paradigms is messy and far from schematic. Metatriangulation-in-action is highly iterative, as theorists necessarily fluctuate between activities” (p. 676). To begin a multi-paradigm theory, they suggested looking to previous work concerning the phenomenon, just as Sutton and Staw (1995) suggested, “References to theory developed in prior work help set the stage for new conceptual arguments. Authors need to acknowledge the stream of logic on which they are

drawing and to which they are contributing” (p. 372). Ultimately, Lewis and Grimes (1999) argued that theory construction was a three-phase process including groundwork, data analysis, and theory building. Within the first step of groundwork, the job of the researcher was to provide focus, gain a multi-paradigm understanding, and address common referents. This step could be accomplished through a thorough review of extant literature. The second phase required that the researcher recognize paradigmatic influences, cultivate diverse data interpretations, and experience paradigm “language-in-use” through analysis of new or existing data (Lewis & Grimes, 1999, p. 677). Finally, in the third phase of theory construction, the researcher should juxtapose paradigm insights of the phenomenon; motivate interplay between the paradigms; and assess theory quality and the theory building process (Lewis and Grimes, 1999).

Just as a multi-paradigm theory seeks to combine perspectives on one phenomenon, applied theory attempts to combine perspectives in an effort to create practical utility.

Dubin (1976) suggested:

A theory tries to make sense out of the observable world by ordering the relationships among elements that constitute the theorist’s focus of attention in the real world. The process of building a theory requires hard work and ingenuity. (p. 26)

The steps proposed by Dubin (1976) for creating applied theory included first choosing the elements and relationships of interest, then determining how the elements were related, specifying the boundaries of the theory, and finally, explaining how the “system state” or “condition of the system as a whole” functioned (pp. 27-28). While Dubin’s (1976) model

of theory construction was more broadly defined, the general principles were similar to the three phases found in multi-paradigm theory construction.

In a narrative describing the construction process of the Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory--an example of an applied or multi-paradigm theory--Petronio (2004) explained:

We appreciated the perspective offered in Social Penetration Theory, yet, it was Altman's argument on privacy that piqued our interest. Using a boundary metaphor to illustrate the notion of private space and territory, Altman presented a valuable way to picture privacy. From his insightful work, it became clear to me that one way to overcome the lack of structure in the disclosure literature was to study not only the process of disclosure, but also factor in the notion of privacy in the form of private information. (p. 194)

Petronio (2004) described the first step in the process of constructing a new theory. CPM evolved based on a foundation of previous research into the phenomenon of disclosure. Similarly, this project will base a new theory of ICC on previous conceptualizations of competency.

Weick (1999) suggested that "theory building is virtually indistinguishable from problem solving" (p. 518) and continued by arguing for "greater emphasis on representations as a selection environment and less emphasis on validation as the ultimate goal of theory construction" (p. 518). Despite the resistance of multi-paradigm theories to evaluation, one measure of the value of these theories lies in their application. For example, when describing the utility of CPM, Petronio (2002) noted:

This theory leaves room for self-correcting actions to take place in order for the system to evolve and remain functional. Thus, people can change the rules to fit their needs, accommodating new situations and different requirements so that they can maintain a certain level of control over privacy boundaries in their lives. (p. 33)

CPM is a theory that is descriptive and predictive while still offering the potential to explore the unique individual experience. The practical utility of CPM and other applied or multi-paradigm theories is one of the best evaluative tools for measuring its value.

### **Summary**

The rationale for this dissertation was the creation of a unified and holistic theory of ICC. Based on the functions of theories in three identified paradigms, an applied or multi-paradigm approach to ICC appeared to best accommodate the variety of conceptualizations presented by previous scholars in chapter two. Incorporating the variety of paradigms represented in extant literature required exploration of their merits, as Toulmin (1961) wrote,

there is only one way of seeing one's own spectacles clearly: that is, to take them off. It is impossible to focus both on them and through them at the same time... We shall understand the merits of our own ideas, instead of taking them for granted, only if we are prepared to look at these alternatives on their own terms and recognize why they failed. (pp. 101-102)

One way this dissertation tests the merits of the academic conceptualizations of ICC is to compare them with the everyday, practical applications of the phenomenon. The next chapter explores the methods through which the foundation of this comprehensive theory of ICC are revealed.



## **CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGIES**

The previous comprehensive literature review of ICC conceptualizations and models provided an academic definition of ICC. As the overarching goal of this study is to create a comprehensive theory of ICC; the theory itself must define, describe, predict, and control communication behavior. In an effort to describe ICC, this study utilized a multi-phased methodological approach to reveal the practical and everyday enactment of ICC.

The first phase of the study explored a set of existing data, collected as part of classroom assessment, in which students were asked to draw pictures of and describe an incompetent intercultural communication interaction. To discern the reliability of these data, the second phase consisted of a metasynthesis of existing qualitative descriptions of ICC. In the third phase, a comparative analysis explored the points where the academic definitions and practical descriptions converged and diverged. The combination of these three phases provided the framework for the creation of a unified theory of ICC.

### **Phase I: Classroom Data Collection**

Participants in this study were undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory Intercultural Communication course at a mid-sized, Midwestern university. As part of the regular assessment process, students were asked to visually depict incompetent intercultural interactions. Their responses were anonymously recorded using self- or university-created identification numbers, and completion of the study had no effect on their course grade. Of the 71 students enrolled in the course, only students who completed all three phases of the assessment were included in this analysis. Thirteen students did not complete all three phases of the study and one student completed all three phases but did not fully complete

the worksheets. These fourteen student responses were not included in the analysis. A total of 57 student responses were included in this study.

### **Procedures**

From the first class period introducing students to the course expectations and goals, *intercultural communication competency* was defined as effective and appropriate communication between people from other cultures. In addition, *intercultural communication* was defined for students as communication that takes place between two or more individuals from different cultures. As part of the course assessment process, at three points during the semester (beginning, middle, and end), students were given worksheets to draw pictures of their understanding of intercultural communication incompetence. The worksheet provided at each of the three phases was unchanged. The worksheet was given to students during the first week of class, the second copy of the worksheet was distributed the eighth week of class, and the final worksheet was given to students during week fifteen (the week before the final exam).

The required textbook for this course was Martin and Nakayama's (2010) *Intercultural Communication in Contexts*, which incorporated the narratives of real-life intercultural interactions from the experiences of the authors, their students, and popular culture reports throughout the book. In addition, the course required students to complete ten hours of service learning at a local organization with a specific vulnerable population (e.g., a nursing home, a homeless shelter, an organization devoted to assisting New Americans in their transition to the United States) during which they could experience intercultural interactions in their own lives. At no point in the textbook or during the semester were students shown specific visual examples of communication competence, but

concepts related to competency were part of the lectures and readings. Based on the complicated nature of and conflicting definitions for ICC competency, students were asked to draw examples of *incompetent* communicators and/or interactions.

### **Measures**

A worksheet was given to all students at the beginning, middle, and end of a semester long, introductory intercultural communication course. The worksheet first asked students to illustrate intercultural incompetence with the following instructions: “Draw a picture of intercultural communication incompetence in the space below. You do not need to be an artist to complete this assignment. Simply illustrate an example of intercultural communication incompetence. There must be at least two people in the illustration; one who is competent and who is incompetent.” Students were then asked to identify the setting of the interaction, to describe the competent communicator, the incompetent communicator, and describe the incompetence being depicted in their picture.

In addition to visually representing and defining their understanding of intercultural communication incompetency, students answered two Likert-type questions about their level of affiliation or identification with both the competent communicator and with the incompetent communicator (1 = very affiliated to 5 = not at all affiliated). While these responses offered no real opportunity for statistical analysis, the responses helped to identify students’ perceptions of their own competency level which provided a basis for course assessment.

### **Analysis**

At each stage of the study, student responses first were categorized based on the identification of the interactants depicted (i.e., the culture students assigned to the people in

their drawings). This categorization resulted in two broad groupings of “American and Non-American” and “Other Cultural Groups” (i.e., able bodied/physically challenged, children/adults, religious affiliation, and unidentified cultures were all included in this group). Next, the worksheets were organized based on the type of incompetency identified by the students. These were deductively separated into three broad areas of “behavior/skills,” “cognition/knowledge,” and “attitude/affect” based on the extant literature that defined these terms as elements of competence (Beamer, 1992; Brislin, 1981; Fantini, 2000; Kupka et al., 2007; Parks, 1976; Ruben, 1976; Spitzberg, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Finally, the broad groupings were subdivided into several categories, including language use, nonverbal gestures, customary practices, and discrimination/stereotyping.

### **Phase II: Metasynthesis**

The value of a metasynthesis is its ability to “allow new insights and understandings to emerge through a process of a re-conceptualization of themes from secondary qualitative analysis of existing qualitative data sets and reviews of published qualitative papers” (Protheroe, Rogers, Kennedy, Macdonald, & Lee, 2008, p. 3). A metasynthesis of the narratives of non-academic participants’ experiences with ICC can offer insight into the accuracy and effectiveness of the existing academic definitions of ICC. Conducting metasynthesis offers researchers the ability to find new value in previous works and insight into phenomenon not previously highlighted (Campbell et al., 2003). Much like the purposes of this project, Vevea and Miller (2010) conducted a metasynthesis of narratives to evaluate the effectiveness and comprehensive nature of an existing communication model/concept.

Noblit and Hare (1988) described the successful syntheses of a meta-ethnographic method based on small groups (containing 2-6 papers) of closely related studies.

According to Noblit and Hare, studies in a successful synthesis can have three possible relationship types: reciprocal or directly comparable; refutational or contradictory; or they may represent a line of argument. Campbell et al. (2003) tested the validity of Noblit and Hare's meta-ethnographic method and proved reliability. Based on the validity and reliability of Noblit and Hare's (1988) methods for metasynthesis, the current study modeled this framework.

### **Procedures**

Before conducting the synthesis, various databases and studies were searched for articles related to ICC. The scope was limited to studies reporting qualitative, narrative data about ICC from non-academic perspectives in order to gain insight into practical or everyday perspectives and understandings of ICC. After reading a variety of studies on the topic of ICC, the researcher determined that the country of origin and/or the professional and educational level of the study participants would not serve as a filter for selection in the metasynthesis. Studies considered for this synthesis must have demonstrated reciprocal relationships and incorporated experiences of adults with ICC, including the narrative of the participants themselves. Studies utilizing quantitative measures or summarizations of lay experiences with intercultural interactions were eliminated from consideration for this metasynthesis.

The initial search for the key terms "intercultural communication" and "competence" in the EBSCO database reduced to only peer-reviewed publications yielded 139 results. The abstracts of every study listed were read and, if the article appeared to

meet the criteria of the metasyntesis, the full-text article was scanned. In the end, the EBSCO search produced five articles that fulfilled the guidelines set for this study. A second search was conducted using the SAGE publication database. Using the same list of key terms, the initial search produced a list of 97 articles and four additional articles suitable for inclusion in this metasyntesis.

### **Analysis**

As outlined in the meta-ethnographic approach, lists summarizing the authors' original findings using their terms and concepts were drawn up for each of the selected papers. Using the framework provided by the extant ICC literature, the studies included in the synthesis were first coded using the three overarching categories of cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements.

### **Phase III: Comparative Analysis**

To shape a holistic theory accurately defining and describing both the academic and non-academic concepts of intercultural communication competency, the researcher conducted a comparative analysis. As Miller (2000) discussed in the creation of new theory:

While it seems unlikely that any position will win the day, the many options discussed can give us guidance in the practice of scholarship, as we are confronted with problems that indicate the need to combine, work between, or even integrate perspectives. This rich set of approaches greatly increases the possibility that the fruits of research . . . will be substantial, rather than just a smile hanging in the air, with no cat at all behind it. (p. 33)

The unit of analysis for the comparative analysis was the specific descriptive terms, variables, and/or adjectives used to define or describe intercultural communication competency. In the initial analysis, a constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to develop context categories. The comparison between the two sets of data primarily focused on points of convergence and divergence. Using the descriptive terms of the non-academic operationalizations of (in) competency, convergence was found whenever the denotative definitions matched or closely matched the variables found within the academic literature.

### **Summary**

The combination of phases and methodologies utilized in this project offered a comprehensive framework demonstrating how ICC was conceptualized from both academic and practical perspectives. In combining these perspectives, the groundwork for the development of a comprehensive theory of ICC was laid. Using the points of convergence and divergence as a foundation, the conditions for a comprehensive theory of ICC emerged.

## CHAPTER 5. CLASSROOM DATA RESULTS

To create a comprehensive theory of intercultural communication competence (ICC), this research undertook a three-phase process of analysis. After reviewing the extant literature on the concept of ICC from an academic perspective, the next step involved an exploration of the everyday application and conception of ICC to validate the literature. Obtaining a practical understanding of ICC was accomplished through the acquisition of student perspectives of incompetence. Much like the concept of willingness to communicate has benefited from measures that explored unwillingness to communicate, this data collection utilized student perspectives on incompetence to highlight their comprehension of competence.

One learning objective for an undergraduate level course on intercultural communication was to help students become more competent intercultural communicators. As part of the course assessment for this outcome, students were asked to draw pictures of incompetent intercultural interactions on three separate occasions during the semester; the beginning, the midpoint, and the end. In one of the classes where this assessment was used, 71 students were enrolled in the course, but only 57 sets of the assessment were used with their unaltered words as a basis for providing practical understandings of ICC. Each data collection point asked students to draw a picture of an incompetent intercultural interaction, define the context in which the interaction occurred, identify the competent and incompetent communicators, and describe the incompetence taking place. Based on the students' descriptions of the incompetence occurring in their drawings, the artifacts were placed into the broad categories of behavior/skill, cognition/knowledge, or affect/attitude for each phase; from which, subcategories inductively emerged.



### Data Collection Point 1

The first data collection point occurred the first week of class. In the first phase of data collection, the majority of student respondents identified Americans and Non-Americans as the people in their images (n=40 or 70.2%). The remaining seventeen student respondents identified the characters in their images as members of other cultural groups which included physical ability (n=4), race/skin color (n=3), generational affiliation (n=3), socioeconomic class (n=2), religious affiliation (n=1), and unidentified groups (n=4). The following descriptions of incompetence created by the respondents were categorized into behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes (See Table 2).

**Table 2: Data Collection Point 1 Results**

Data Collection 1			
<b>Behavior/Skills</b>	n=9	nonverbal	n=9
		language	n=27
		cognitive consistency	n=7
<b>Cognition/Knowledge</b>	n=35	lack of cultural awareness	n=1
		prejudice/assumption	n=11
<b>Affect/Attitude</b>	n=13	open-mindedness	n=2

#### Behavior/Skills

Every student was asked to create a drawing that depicted an interaction of some kind. While the pictures themselves nearly always offered an enactment or behavior of, the students' descriptions of the incompetence contributed to their placement into each category. Within behavior, action words or descriptions of actions were used to identify the drawings falling into this group (n=9).

**Nonverbal.** All of the drawings that were identified as describing behaviors were related to nonverbal interactions (n=9 or 15.8%). Students who described nonverbal

behaviors typically identified a cultural norm difference. For example, one student wrote, “The American is about to enter the Japanese school wearing shoes, he does not know that it is improper to wear shoes into the Japanese school. Japanese wear slippers inside their schools.” Similarly, another student highlighted differences in customs, “The native from Spain was trying to give the normal, friendly greeting of kissing the person’s cheek, while the American was getting upset that she was invading his personal space, not realizing the norms of the culture.” A third student wrote, “The man from another country is incompetent because he thinks it is weird that the woman wants to shake hands. His culture doesn’t do that. The woman considers this incompetent because the man doesn’t know this is part of the culture in the U.S. and he is hesitating.” One student highlighted specific gesture differences in their drawing of an “American celebrity” giving the peace sign to an “Australian crowd” whose speech bubbles said, “I can’t believe he just flipped us off” and further explained that, “The celebrity did not realize he was doing something that could or would offend the crowd--because he did not study the differences of that culture.” Three other students recognized gestures with meanings that varied between cultures, and one student drew and described someone driving “on the wrong side of the road,” as being incompetent. The final student in this category described how “I interrupt them when they are speaking because I want them to speak English,” identifying interruption as the incompetent behavior.

### **Cognition/Knowledge**

Knowledge or cognitive ability differences were the most frequently cited forms of incompetence by student respondents (n=35 or 61.4%). These interactions were typically highlighted with question marks above the drawings of people or within the speech bubbles

themselves. In coding these descriptions, words such as “did not know” or “understand” were indicative of being part of the cognition/knowledge category.

**Language.** By far the most predominant form of incompetence described by students was a lack of shared language (n=27). In terms of language difference, the vast majority of student responses were tied to the actual language spoken (n=23). In these instances, students explained, “The incompetent one is the American trying to find something he needs. He doesn’t know how to speak Spanish. He is in Spain trying to speak English because he doesn’t know Spanish.” Another student described, “Staring and speaking in an unfamiliar language unknown to the locals especially the uneducated,” while one other respondent claimed, “This person was an English speaking person in a Chinese speaking area. She talks louder in her own language assuming the other person can’t hear her. Shouting.” When students were describing language as the source of incompetence, all of them identified the context as belonging to the competent communicator. One student explained this in the description of their drawing:

The person from Mexico [is incompetent] because if Americans are going to be considered “incompetent” communicators if they go to another country, I don’t think there should be a double standard for those coming to the U.S.. Coming to live in another country without knowing the language/culture.

As this student highlighted, the host culture or person’s language was the “appropriate” or “competent” one. One student succinctly stated, “They don’t understand each others’ language, which is causing a barrier.”

Not all students who identified language knowledge as the source of incompetency were referring to the language spoken; one student identified sign language compared to

spoken language as a barrier to ICC. Three other students identified either dialect or accent as the source of incompetency. For example, one of these students said, “The student (who speaks without an accent) thinks the teacher (who has a thick accent) is hard to understand because of her accent, but the teacher probably thinks the student is hard to understand,” while another described, “The customer is speaking in a dialect that the attendant can’t understand.”

**Cognitive consistency.** Another knowledge-based incompetency identified by students was linked to content specific awareness (n=7). In this subcategory, one student drew an adult talking about “National Guard, Dow Market, and role of the U.S. in tsunami relief efforts” to a small child holding a book entitled, *Trains*, and explained that the incompetence was, “Talking about a subject that the listener does not understand at all.” Similarly, two other students identified adults and children as not understanding what the other was talking about in the explanations of their drawings. In another example, a student drew a picture of an “accountant” and a “motorcycle enthusiast” engaging in a conversation and described, “The accountant at the biker bar is unable to help the motorcyclist achieve understanding of his ideas and thoughts.” The final three drawings that fell into this category were of a leader offering a confusing speech to his/her followers, a lack of shared experience between friends of different socioeconomic classes, and an American traveler without the necessary items for travel abroad.

**Lack of cultural awareness.** One student specifically identified knowledge of different cultural beliefs or values as a source of intercultural incompetence (n=1). In the drawing, the student depicted two women inside a church with a speech bubble over the head of one woman talking about “hooking up.” The student identified the incompetency:

“She is completely disregarding the other person’s beliefs and assuming that they are the same as her own, even though she knows some of the values clash with her own, she continues to talk to and offend the other person.”

### **Affect/Attitude**

The final category of incompetence related to the attitudes of the people in the drawings. For student descriptions to fall into this category, words like “rude,” “closed-minded,” and “assumed” were used to identify affect or attitude. This category contained thirteen respondents who identified either a prejudice/negative attitude or openness as the source of incompetence (n=13 or 22.8%).

**Prejudice/assumption.** The majority of students in this category identified prejudice as the cause of incompetence (n=11). Several students described the negative assumptions made by communicators as one student highlighted: “The store worker talks slower and loud to the woman because he sees she’s in a wheelchair and thinks this means she is mentally handicapped.” Another respondent described, “The cashier assumes that the handicapped person can’t do anything and is wasting her time. Also, the cashier assumes the black person is poor and is a sponge on society.” A third student detailed these kinds of negative assumptions when they drew a picture of a teacher saying, “Why wouldn’t you Indians look me in the eye? Pay attention!” and then described the incompetency as, “Calling names and assuming they are not listening because of their cultural ways.”

Assumptions were not the only source of negative attitudes described by student respondents. Discrimination was cited by four students, one of whom drew a picture of a “Black Guy” saying, “Hey yo Homie! Wanna go hang at ma Crib?” and a “Business Man”

saying, “Did he just call me a BABY? He must be stupid and uneducated.” In a similar drawing, a student participant identified an “American” man saying, “Based on your squishy eyes I can tell you’re a Jap, bub” while the other man said, “Jerk. Actually, No. I’m from Taiwan,” and then described the incompetence, “Judging by only one feature simply infers where they are from and shows no regard for them and their heritage.” Aside from the assumptions and discriminations, the other three students whose responses fell into the affect/attitude category identified rudeness as the source of incompetence. For example, one student drew a picture of an “American girl” asking a “Muslim girl” questions such as, “My name is Katie, what is yours?” then, “I can’t hear you through all of that clothes-- What? Why are you wearing that?” This student then described the incompetency as, “The American girl asks rude questions or what may be considered rude to the Muslim.” Similarly, another student drew a picture of a “Texan” who said “Howdy their little fella, I’m from Texas. Are all you guys this short?” to the “Asian” man who had asked, “Hi, My name is Mau, I live in Hong Kong. Where are you from?” Again, this student identified the incompetence as, “The man from Texas is being rude and inconsiderate at the other man’s attempts to strike up a conversation.”

**Open-mindedness.** Finally, two students identified an unwillingness to be open-minded as the source of incompetence. One of the students stated quite simply, “He’s not trying to communicate.” The second student drew a picture of children playing basketball, with one wheelchair bound child asking, “Can I play too?” and the other children responding, “How can you play?” The student participant described the incompetence as, “They are having a closed mind when dealing with a sport that usually involves running but doesn’t mean you have to run on your legs.”

**Data Collection Point 2**

At the midpoint of the semester, students were again asked to draw pictures of incompetent intercultural interactions. In the second data collection, the majority of student respondents identified Americans and Non-Americans as the people in their images (n=30 or 52.6%). Ten students used a general or generic description of culture (n=10). The remaining seventeen student respondents identified the characters in their images as members of cultural groups based on race/skin color (n=7), religion (n=6), gender (n=2), and sexual orientation (n=2). The students’ descriptions were used to categorize their responses for the source of incompetency as behaviors, knowledge, or attitude (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Data Collection Point 2 Results**

<b>Data Collection 2</b>			
<b>Behavior/Skills</b>	n=15	nonverbal	n=11
		separation/avoidance	n=4
<b>Cognition/Knowledge</b>	n=23	lack of cultural awareness	n=15
		language	n=6
		cognitive consistency	n=2
<b>Affect/Attitude</b>	n=18	prejudice/assumption	n=12
		rudeness/meanness	n=6

**Behavior/Skills**

Just as in the first data collection point, the descriptions from student respondents who listed a behavior or action as the source of incompetence were grouped together (n=15). While nearly all students depicted some sort of action in their drawing, the respondents who described the source of intercultural communication incompetence as someone “doing” something wrong (as opposed to “knowing” or “being aware” of the improper behavior) were included in this category.

**Nonverbal.** Several respondents mentioned nonverbal communication behaviors as the source of incompetence (n=11). The majority (n=6) of these students referred specifically to the “thumbs up” gesture. As one student explained, “The American person is using the thumbs up sign but it has a negative meaning in the other person’s culture and can be taken offensively.” A second student described, “At different parts of the world, nonverbal expressions people use differ as well as verbal communication. To Italians and middle easterners thumbs up is a very offensive body language.” The “thumbs up” was not the only incompetent gesture described as one student highlighted, “The Hawaiian gestures ‘hang loose,’ which is common to do, however the man is insulted because it means something else; something negative in his country.”

Aside from gestures, two students identified incompetent greetings; both suggesting that the incompetent communicator attempted to shake hands with someone whose cultural tradition was to bow in greeting. Similarly, another student described the incompetent communicator in their drawing as, “The American is showing the bottom of his foot to someone who thinks it is disrespectful according to their culture.” One student respondent drew a picture of a “Catholic” being hit by another figure and explained, “The person with the bat is beating the Catholic because he doesn’t understand and/or like/agree with his religion.” The last student who identified a behavior as a source of incompetence described the communicators’ use of space; “The American moves away from the Saudi to a distance that is comfortable for him, which is further than the distance that the Saudi wants, so the Saudi keeps walking toward the American, and the American keeps stepping back.”

**Separation/avoidance.** Four students identified the separation of cultural groups or the avoidance of cultural groups as a source of incompetence (n=4). In one example, a



student identified him/herself in the drawing of a “Muslim church” and explained, “I don’t know how they are responding to the leader or what they are saying; I am not participating.” Two of the student respondents identified incompetent communicators as those who did not understand what was happening, but simply separated from the situation. Similarly, the fourth student who identified separation as a source of incompetence stated, “The two students who aren’t trying to understand the people and are separating themselves. They are not trying to accommodate to the other people in the restaurant and staying by themselves.”

### **Cognition/Knowledge**

In the second data collection point, cognition/knowledge was again the most popular source of incompetence listed by the student respondents (n=23, or 40.4%). Unlike phase one, where language was the main source of cognition/knowledge incompetence, in phase two, students most commonly cited a lack of awareness of cultural customs or values as the cause for incompetence.

**Lack of cultural awareness.** The most commonly cited source of incompetence in an intercultural interaction was the lack of knowledge or awareness of cultural customs or values (n=15). Four respondents talked about differences in religious practices as one student described:

The person who just walked into the church is the outsider because he is talking loudly and not being respectful. He probably hasn’t been in a Catholic church before. He is being disrespectful in the church by talking loudly and not acting prayerful. The person kneeling and praying considers this very incompetent as when a person goes into a church, he should be respectful.

While these four respondents focused on knowledge about religious practices, four other students highlighted the lack of understanding about differences in the value of time. For example, one student stated:

The individual who was waiting doesn't understand that all cultures aren't like his where you are always on time and you explicitly explain yourself if you are not.

They do not realize that there are things more important than being late for a meeting.

In another explanation of time differences, a respondent described, "The American is upset that the Mexican is running late. The Mexican doesn't understand why Americans are so uptight with time and would rather put focus on family; the meeting will eventually happen." Five other students talked about the lack of knowledge that the incompetent communicator had regarding proper greetings. One student explained, "Mr. Jefferson (American businessman) is incompetent as he has not bothered to learn from the culturally accepted greeting of the country he is visiting (Asian)." While another respondent suggested, "The American businessman should have done his homework on the customs of Japan and reciprocated the proper Japanese tradition of bowing when greeting." The final two students who talked about a lack of knowledge of cultural customs or values as the source of incompetence mentioned specific cultural practices. One student mentioned the purpose or view of beef cattle in "American" versus "Indian" cultures, and the other student talked about inappropriate clothing for women in Syria.

**Language.** Six students identified language as a cause for intercultural communication incompetence (n=6). In three of the examples, student respondents described an inability to speak a common language. One of these students explained, "The

Americans are not using words from the French language (like coffee and bagel) and therefore are unable to order.” In another student’s drawing, the student identified him/herself as one of the communicators and described how, despite having some knowledge of the language, he/she still felt incompetent because, “I was trying to speak of something I was rather knowledgeable on, but in a tongue I was not, so I looked very unprepared.” Similarly, a second student who placed him/herself in the drawing explained, “I had to explain in English what I meant by ‘flyer,’ when English isn’t the number one language spoken in the store.” The last student who listed language as a source of incompetence referred to an accent as a source of incompetence: “Our teacher is standing in front of the desk talking about something. The students have a hard time understanding him because he has a strong accent and because he talks very softly (difficult to hear him).”

**Cognitive consistency.** In terms of cognitive consistency, two students identified a mismatched knowledge base as a source of incompetence in an intercultural interaction (n=2). In one case, the respondent described, “The city person does not know what a tractor is, or what it is used for,” identifying a lack of experience with a cultural product. In the other example, the student explained a lack of educational understanding between a teacher and his students, “The TA isn’t helping the students with the lab. The instructions provided make no sense (it is for older equipment) nor is his writing on the board legible. He keeps on telling them to just read the instructions.”

### **Affect/Attitude**

Just as in the first data collection point, the student respondents who listed some kind of affect or attitude in their description of incompetence were included in this category (n=18). Specifically, student respondents who identified or used words such as *assume*,

*prejudice, discriminate, stereotype, or rude* were coded as affect/attitude as the primary source of incompetence.

**Prejudice/assumption.** The second most commonly reported source of incompetence overall was prejudice or assumptions (n=12). In one drawing, the figure of a “Girl from Taiwan” asked, “Please, I would like a cheeseburger” and the woman behind the counter responded, “You guys eat cheeseburgers?!?” to which the girl replied, “Umm . . . yes, sometimes. Thank you.” The respondent who drew the picture described the incompetent communicator as, “Works at McDonalds, commonly stereotypes.” In another example, a respondent explained his/her drawing of prejudice as a source of incompetence:

The car salesman is rude and prejudiced against the woman that wants to buy a vehicle. He calls her a saucy Mexican woman which was wrong. The car salesman who decides to categorize the woman based on her race, which assumes wrong. He also assumes that because the woman is of a different nationality she is poor.

However, not all of the prejudiced sources of incompetence were based on nationality; in another drawing, a student respondent suggested incompetence because, “The cashier thinks he is going to steal because of the color of his skin.” Another student described, “The incompetence demonstrated is that the professor assumes that all black people feel the same way on a certain subject. Also, that all black people are African Americans.”

Five of the student respondents suggested that incompetence occurred when a communicator assumed everyone was the same (either like themselves or like the stereotypes of their culture). For example, one student respondent explained, “The American assumes that business practices are the same no matter where he goes and he’s not being considerate of his host. Extending a hand to shake, the Japanese don’t like

physical contact in this setting and consider it rude.” Another respondent described, “The white guy is stereotyping about how the Asians are known for just studying all the time and not having any social life.” The final three responses that fit into the prejudice/assumption category included making a judgment without any facts, choosing an assistant simply because they shared a skin color, and assuming sexual orientation; “The kid is concluding that the girls are lesbians just because they are holding hands.”

**Rudeness/Meanness.** In this category, students identified incompetent communicators as those who were being mean or rude to the other person or people in their drawing (n=6). For example, one student explained, “The white girl uses the “n” word referring to the black kid she wants to play with,” while another said:

She is asking him [the Native American man] a question that is a common stereotype and she is very uneducated about his culture. She should not ask such rude questions and should get to know him first. Although she didn’t say this in her mind, she also has another stereotype of thinking he is an alcoholic.

In another example, a student respondent highlighted joking behavior that was rude or mean, “The man is an incompetent communicator because he assumed it was okay to make crude jokes about women.” Two of the respondents suggested that incompetence was a result of someone thinking that it was “not normal” that people would engage in cultures different than their own. The final student respondent that fit into this category referred to sexual orientation, “The boy/girl couple is making negative comments about homosexuals aloud in a public place so everyone can hear and it offends the two girls.”

### Data Collection Point 3

The third data collection point occurred during the last week of the semester prior to the final exam. During this final data collection, student respondents again identified Americans and Non-Americans as the most common people in their images (n=27 or 47.4%). There were six students each who identified religious (n=6) and generational affiliations (n=6). The remaining eighteen student respondents identified the characters in their images as members of cultural groups based on race/skin color (n=4), socioeconomic class (n=5), gender (n=1), and generic or general cultural groups (n=8). The students' descriptions were used to categorize their responses for the source of incompetency as behaviors, knowledge, or attitude (See Table 4).

**Table 4: Data Collection Point 3 Results**

Data Collection 3			
<b>Behavior/Skills</b>	n=17	Nonverbal	n=14
		separation/avoidance	n=3
<b>Cognition/Knowledge</b>	n=26	Language	n=9
		lack of cultural awareness	n=13
		cognitive consistency	n=4
<b>Affect/Attitude</b>	n=14	prejudice/assumption	n=10
		rudeness/meanness	n=4

#### Behavior/Skills

Just as in the first data collection point, of the seventeen respondents who identified a behavior as the source of incompetence (n=17 or 29.8%), fourteen referred to nonverbal behaviors (n=14), and three identified separation or avoidance (n=3) as the specific misdeed. To classify or code these responses, the student descriptions of their drawings

were examined and placed in this category if the source of incompetence was listed as an inappropriate behavior.

**Nonverbal.** In this category, three respondents wrote specifically about the use of the “thumbs up” gesture. In one student explanation, “Fred [American on vacation] obviously thinks that the ‘thumbs up’ sign is universally understood as to mean good job. Karl [native born Italian] is offended by the gesture, not encouraged.” In another example, “One person gives a thumbs up thinking the person gave a good presentation. To the other person [presenter] it is an insult to give a thumbs up.” Similarly, seven students identified incorrect nonverbal greetings as a source of incompetency. Four of these students referred specifically to a handshake or a bow as one student noted, “The business man from China doesn’t understand that hand shake is the way Americans greet each other. He is bowing when he could just shake his hand.” Two students explained how hugging can be a source of incompetence, “The American businessman (the incompetent communicator) is trying to give the Japanese businessman a hug at their first meeting, which is very inappropriate,” and “The Japanese man politely bows to show respect, however, the American wants to give him a hug which is rude and impolite for the culture.” While another student stated very simply, “He is greeting the other person in the wrong way.”

The remaining four respondents who wrote descriptions highlighting a behavior as the source of incompetence focused on other nonverbal behaviors. For example, one respondent identified an attempt to touch another’s shoulder as incompetent and one student respondent suggested that kneeling and praying would be considered an incompetent behavior by the Jewish community. In the third example, the student respondent explained:

The American student who is studying abroad has his hand raised, but hasn't really been called on because in their culture, they don't (the students) normally ask questions of their teachers/professors. So, this would be incompetent on the American student's part according to the Japanese culture.

Finally, the last student identified a paralinguistic source of incompetence, "The person who is speaking in a very loud voice, being disruptive. He is not going with the norm and expected behavior. He is not showing respect to the others because he is talking so loudly."

**Separation/avoidance.** Three students identified someone avoiding or separating themselves from different cultures as justification of their incompetence. In one example, a student self-identified to be one of the characters in the drawing and claimed that the man from another culture did not ask for help, but was upset that he could not find what he was looking for. In the second drawing, the student respondent explained, "Shalome understands their culture, but chose not to change his actions." The third respondent who identified separation or avoidance as the source of incompetence claimed, "The three separate groups that contain people of the same race are incompetent. They are not making an effort to communicate with others. The competent communicators are making an effort to communicate."

### **Cognition/Knowledge**

In this category, student descriptions of incompetency were coded based on words or phrases such as, "did not know," "was not aware," and "did not understand." Just as in phases one and two, the knowledge/cognition category had the highest overall number of student responses (n=26 or 45.6%).



**Language.** When identifying language as a source for incompetence, eight respondents suggested that the actual language spoken was the root cause, while one student claimed that an accent or dialect made language the cause of incompetence (n=9). For example, one student identified, “The couple on vacation doesn’t know basic words in Thai like toilet or bathroom, so they are using English which isn’t spoken in Thailand.” Another student argued a similar issue, “The American tourist does not speak/understand Spanish.” As one student participant highlighted, “The American in a foreign country spoke English, making the Chinese man confused, and unable to communicate with him,” ultimately sharing the commonly presented belief that the competent communicator is the host person or culture. The singular student who identified an accent as a source of incompetence noted, “The customer cannot understand what the waitress is asking very clearly because the waitress does not speak clear English because it is her second language.”

**Lack of cultural awareness.** Thirteen student respondents listed some kind of lack of awareness of cultural differences as the source of incompetence in the intercultural interaction that they drew (n=13). In one example where a student self-identified as one of the characters in the drawing, she explained:

All the Latino boys look after Aly (Mexican girl). They make sure she is ok, that no one is bothering her. Make sure she comes home. I always tell them that she is 21 years old, and that she can take care of herself. I’m use to girls taking care of themselves. I don’t understand why they have to be so protective of her.

The lack of understanding in this example was echoed in others, as one student wrote, “The customer is insensitive and unaware. He does not realize that food from another culture

might smell a little different. He immediately thinks something is wrong when he smells the African market.” Food was in other student explanations of incompetence, as one student described, “Cows are sacred in India and beef products are not eaten. Therefore, it is incompetence showing for the American tourist to ask for a steak.” Another respondent highlighted cultural misunderstanding:

The American doesn't understand Japan's culture. In Japan, people like to get to know a person before jumping right into business, they aren't ever rushed. The American wants to rush everything because he is time conscious and doesn't understand Japanese culture.

Similarly, four other student respondents commented on incompetence as a result of time orientation differences. Three other respondents suggested that individuals demonstrate incompetence by simply not understanding as one explained, “The American is being incompetent because he doesn't understand Muslim's culture or beliefs and he insults his beard.” One student respondent noted a lack of awareness of cultural greeting practices, “Doesn't comply and understand to the bowing. He is out of respect for the person from Asia and doesn't know the customs.” The final response that fit into this category mentioned a broader example of how people flocked to the funeral of an important figure, but failed to appreciate the death of Jesus at Easter time.

**Cognitive consistency.** Four students identified a lack of shared understanding or experience as a source for intercultural incompetence (n=4). In one case, a student described, “Not understanding their medical perspective” for their drawing of a doctor and patient interaction. Another student identified the difference in the depth of knowledge between a teacher and student as a source of incompetency, while the third student also

used a student-teacher example and explained, “Well, the students (some) don’t understand the test or material the instructor went over – this could bother the instructor as well as the students.” The fourth respondent identified a lack of shared experience in their drawing, “The city person is asking questions that the farmer feels are very obvious to anyone in the farming culture.”

### **Affect/Attitude**

Just as in the previous two data collections, student participants in the third data collection described incompetency based on the feelings of the communication interactants. The student responses that fell into the affect/attitude category were those claiming the feelings of the incompetence communicator as the cause for incompetence. In this phase, ten students identified the use of prejudice or assumptions as the source of incompetence and four noted mean or rude attitudes (n=14, 24.6%).

**Prejudice/assumptions.** The student responses that fell into the prejudice/assumption category were those that used words like “assumed,” “stereotyped,” and “judged” to describe the incompetence taking place in their drawing (n=10). In one drawing, a woman said, “I would never buy Tacos from a couple of dirty, stupid, and ugly Mexicans.” The salesman in reply said, “Excuse me miss, but I heard that and it is an extremely naive assumption.” Meanwhile, the second salesman is asking two other customers, “What can I make for you today?” One customer commented, “These are the best tacos in town” and the other replied, “That’s because only Mexicans know how to make tacos.” In the description of the incompetence in this scene, the student respondent said, “The woman says some prejudiced words to the taco vendors and the vendor calmly tells the women that what she says is not appropriate.” Food was tied to the source of

incompetence in another respondent's drawing which described, "The lady at the table who is making a rude remark about the smell of her food. She is passing judgment, loudly and rudely, about a cultural entity that is not her own culture." Two other student respondents noted incompetent communicators were individuals who assumed everyone is or should be like themselves. In one description, the respondent commented, "He [white man] just assumes everyone not like him by race is from another country. Which is not true and its very one minded." The other respondent commented on expecting people of the same race to share the same use of slang.

Slang was tied to the source of another student's understanding of intercultural incompetence. In the drawing, a "Cowboy" says to a "Black" man, "yo, yo, yo. What's up Homeslice?" While the "Black" man was thinking "What an idiot." In the description of the incompetence, the student responded explained, "The cowboy doesn't really know the black person, but is trying to talk to him like he thinks black people talk. The black person is offended and is walking away." Two respondents identified teachers as incompetent communicators for making judgments about their students based on cultural differences. One of these respondents noted, "The teacher is assuming that the Middle Eastern students' parents don't care about their education because they didn't come to a conference. However, that culture values education differently and assumes the child will perform well in school." Three other respondents mentioned how judging people based on how they looked was grounds for incompetence. One of these students described, "The non-Islamic man is assuming that the other is responsible for a bomb threat simply because of his race and the way he looks." Another student described the deeper levels of judgment in his/her drawing, "The American woman is judging the Muslim woman for what she is wearing

because she believes the Muslim woman's clothing symbolizes the control men can hold over women and doesn't see the clothing from the Muslim woman's point of view."

**Rudeness/meanness.** Students who used terms such as *rude*, *mean*, or *offensive* in their descriptions of incompetence were included in this category (n=4). In one example, a student described, "He is making negative connotations towards Jews and the couple (who is Jewish) finds it very offensive, especially after inviting them into his home." Another student highlighted the use of negative language in another form, "The guy who thinks something is dumb but instead says 'that's so gay.' Calling something gay when there is a gay couple talking with him." The remaining two respondents in this category identified speaking or asking questions "rudely" to another person as the source of incompetence, as one of the respondents explained, "The Jew doesn't understand it is customary for Muslims to wear that and rudely asks if she is hot in all that clothes. The Jew displays incompetence by asking rudely, 'Aren't you hot in all that clothes?'"

### Summary

While the students offered many different examples to explain their conceptualizations of competence, all of their responses were identifiable and able to be placed into three broad categories: behavior; knowledge; and attitude. Each of these broad categories were sub-divided based on specific words and phrasing chosen by student respondents in their descriptions of their drawings. Despite numerous examples, several recurring themes occurred within all three data collection points.

In terms of behaviors, students identified nonverbal behaviors and separation or avoidance as sources of intercultural communication incompetence. Specifically, the respondents highlighted inappropriate greetings, gestures, use of space, touch, and dress as

the core incompetencies shown through nonverbal communication. As for separation and/or avoidance, respondents suggested that the incompetent communicators were those who removed themselves from an interaction with people of another culture. Asking students to draw incompetence led to many images of behaviors or actions, but some of the student respondents' descriptions of the incompetence led to underlying justifications, such as lack of knowledge for the Incompetencies they drew.

Within the knowledge/cognition category, students identified language, cognitive consistency/shared experience, and lack of cultural awareness as the main sources of incompetency. Typically, when students identified language as the problem in the intercultural interaction, they were referring to a lack of a shared spoken language. However, presence of an accent, dialect, and sign language were also noted as potential causes for incompetence. The concept of cultural awareness included the range of normative practices, cultural values, beliefs, and customs; while each of these elements could include a variety of expected behaviors, the lack of shared understanding ultimately creating the incompetency. Sometimes, in the case of the attitude/affect category, the problem in the intercultural interaction was not what was unknown, but what was assumed.

Two subcategories emerged from the attitude/affect group of responses; prejudice or assumptions, and rudeness or meanness. The stereotypes and assumptions highlighted by the student respondents were unique and did not really follow a pattern except that they were nearly all negative (the only exception was one student whose interaction identified a "white basketball player" assuming that "black" basketball players would be naturally better athletes). The rudeness or meanness described often was linked to overt racism or sexism in the drawing, name-calling, or asking stereotypical questions of someone.

Ultimately, with the exception of fifteen drawings (eight not identifying a specific cultural setting, one in which both parties were identified as incompetent, and six identifying a teacher/student interaction), all of the incompetent communicators were those describing behaviors, knowledge, or attitudes in conflict with the host culture or person. Whether students identified the context as a “predominantly Chinese speaking area” or “U.S.A.,” the host culture or person was the competent communicator. Overall, the findings from this data collection process were largely in agreement with extant academic literature conceptualizing ICC.

In the next chapter, a metasynthesis of qualitative data from previously published studies pertaining to ICC will help to validate this classroom data collection and the points of convergence between these practical understandings and the academic literature will be more fully developed in chapter seven. Finding the intersection between academic and practical conceptualizations of ICC will result in the framework necessary for the construction of a comprehensive theory.

## CHAPTER 6. METASYNTHESIS

The goal of creating a comprehensive theory of ICC requires an exploration of the practical understanding of competence. In the previous chapter, the results of students enrolled in an undergraduate intercultural communication course drawing images of incompetent intercultural interactions were provided. These student interpretations of the drawings provided insight into the concept of competency through their depictions of misbehaviors. Similarly, this chapter draws upon the everyday conceptualization of competency through an examination of existing qualitative research regarding ICC.

This metasynthesis used extant literature containing direct quotations from study participants who described competency in intercultural interactions. As Noblit and Hare (1988) noted, the successful syntheses of a meta-ethnographic method is based on small groups (containing 2-6 papers) of closely related studies. After applying conditions for inclusion, nine studies were selected for this chapter. First, each of the studies represented was outlined, then the participant responses were placed into the same categories of behavior, knowledge, and attitude.

### **Aim of Studies Included**

Each of the nine studies included in this metasynthesis offered direct quotations from their study participants. In most cases, the participants identified others whom they knew to be competent, but some of the studies included participant self-reflection on their own competence. In chronological order, this chapter provides each of the studies' original goals and findings.

Taylor's (1994) study explored how participants learned to become interculturally competent. Identifying and interviewing "interculturally competent" individuals resulted in



a model that illustrated the learning process for becoming interculturally competent and suggested that the theory of perspective transformation partially explained this learning process.

Sheer and Chen's (2003) study explored the experiences of culture in Sino-Western business negotiation. The study found that the Chinese cultural value of personal relationship and Chinese business practices were major factors influencing negotiations, and the Chinese interviewees further identified system constraints as a main factor in Sino-Western business negotiations. Ultimately, successful strategies by Chinese negotiators focused primarily on rational, professional approaches, while those offered by Westerners centered on effective coping of Chinese social values.

Chang and Tharenou's (2004) study was designed to assess the competencies needed to manage a multicultural group of subordinates. Five themes emerged suggesting that the competencies needed to successfully manage a multicultural group were cultural empathy, learning on the job, communication competence, general managerial skills, and personal style. Though the goal of the study involved more than ICC, only the study responses addressing communication competence were included in this metasynthesis. Similarly, Hajro and Pudelko's (2004) study explored the competencies of successful multinational team leaders. The study found that effective leadership of a multicultural group required that a leader must be cross-culturally competent and multilingual to motivate team members to fully explore, exploit, and transfer valuable knowledge within the team and beyond.

Along the same vein of research, Matveev's (2004) study explored the concept of ICC with respect to effective performance of multicultural work teams. The study claimed

that effective communication skills/abilities, cultural awareness and understating, open-mindedness and non-judgmental attitude, and personal competence and intelligence were essential. Both American and Russian participants contributed to the data, describing American managers as valuing a person's skills, communication abilities, factual information exchange, and cultural knowledge; while Russian managers described a competent, well-rounded conversational partner as having linguistic fluency, intelligence, and being able to engage in a deep "soulful conversing."

Holmes' (2006) study compared current approaches to ICC with Chinese students' learning and communication experiences in a New Zealand "pluricultural" classroom. The study indicated that the Chinese students' rules for communication, such as face negotiation, maintaining roles, and harmony and relationships, were not compatible with the New Zealand rules for competent classroom communication. The study ultimately suggested a need for including culture- and context-specific factors, and an exploration of power relations when theorizing about or investigating ICC.

Closely related in context, Hiller and Woźniak's (2009) study examined a program at European university on the German–Polish border that enrolled a high number of international students and was founded to promote intercultural competence in Europe. The program aimed to give students the possibility of "experiencing, discovering, and discussing the diversity of values and worldviews in special workshops" (p. 114). Hiller and Woźniak (2009) highlighted student experiences with the program, suggesting that the program successfully improved ICC at the university and could be transferred to other international academic institutions. Similarly, Helm's (2009) study explored what online

learner diaries can offer about learners' gains in intercultural competence from participation in telecollaboration projects.

Torres' (2009) study examined Latino conceptualizations of ICC. The findings indicated that the participants, despite variations in socioeconomic and generational statuses, shared a common knowledge base regarding the competencies needed for Latinos to successfully navigate within different cultures. Overall, the cultural model of Latino intercultural competence that emerged incorporated a set of skills that integrated traditional cultural values along with attributes of self-efficacy (Torres, 2009).

These nine studies included in this metasynthesis represented a variety of cultures, contexts, and fields of study. While some of the studies did not exclusively explore ICC (or necessarily intend to examine ICC), concepts related to ICC emerged in the participant quotations in each project. Using the same categories as chapter five, the quotations from these studies were divided into behaviors, knowledge, and attitude.

### **Behaviors/Skills**

In the participant descriptions of competent intercultural interactions (either their own or someone else's), behavior and skills were combined for this category as both were ultimately an assessment of performance. Unlike the previous chapter of student descriptions of incompetencies, this chapter revealed fewer reports of specific behaviors and more discussion of application of knowledge or skills that improved perceptions of competence.

### **Communication Skills**

Some of the managers in Matveev's (2004) study described effective communication skills as, "having the ability to interpret cultural differences," "rephrasing

and explaining messages so that they are understood by different cultures," "possessing good listening skills," "asking questions," "being observant of cultural clues," and "being able to speak more than one language" (p. 57). One manager in Matveev's (2004) study mentioned the importance of listening skills:

A very important aspect of intercultural competence is that they [managers] are very good listeners. This quality allows them to hear what customer needs are, to interpret them in a proper way for that [geographic] region, which gives them some advantage when they are talking to people here in North America or their colleague from other part of the world. (p. 57)

Similarly, an individual in Torres' (2009) study explained how the ability to build relationships aids in ICC:

I think a lot of it is the relationship part of it. This person kind of knows both ends of it. The culture of the United States and the culture of the United States or Mexico and so he has meshed it together. He is able to relate to the U.S. culture and also the Hispanic culture. So I would say, yeah, just that relationship building with different types of people. (p. 586)

While these participants each identified specific communication skills that enabled an intercultural communicator to be competent other behaviors, such as nonverbal communication skills, improved the perception of ICC.

### **Nonverbal Behaviors**

In Taylor's (1994) study, one participant shared his/her experience with behavioral incompetence:

I started watching the way people did things. I remember a lady got really upset when I went into someone's refrigerator once. I went to help the hostess open a bottle of wine. I picked the bottle I brought to open, figuring I was doing her a favor, but everybody just like 'God, what's she doing ...she went into her refrigerator.' I could see by the way people reacted that I shouldn't have done that. (p. 166)

Similarly, a second participant in Taylor's (1994) study explained how improper behaviors could lead to other barriers for ICC:

My closest friend was [Mia] and she was the one that sort of turned me on to what it was like there and when I would make mistakes . . . One time [Mia] told me I needed to wear two skirts. I said, "What do you mean I need to wear two skirts?" She says, "We never wear just one skirt here." They will wear a cloth [wrapped over their shoulder and waist] and they just don't wear one cloth, they wear two cloths. You need another one to keep [the first one] up. So basically, she was telling me I was being immodest. It would never have occurred to me that I was being immodest . . . I know that stuff like that can be a big barrier, if people feel like you are being immodest, then they are not going to talk to you for fear of embarrassing themselves. (p. 167)

In another example from a participant in Sheer and Chen's (2003) study, eye contact became an indicator of ICC:

I have gone through many negotiations. In the beginning, I never looked directly into the other side's eyes. I thought it was impolite to do so and I never had the habit of staring at people I did not know very well-I still don't . . . After a couple of

meetings with a Canadian investor, whose interpreter asked me privately whether I was really interested in the joint venture. I said 'of course.' I was surprised and asked why he asked me such a question. He replied that his boss (the Canadian investor) felt I did not pay attention to him and I always looked away. I learned the lesson. Afterwards, I made an effort to look at the 'other side.' I am still not very comfortable about this. But it helps negotiations. (p. 61)

The behaviors described by participants in these studies identified specific instances of competence or incompetence based on what was actually done. As many of the metasynthesis participants noted, however, behaviors were often informed by the knowledge of the culture.

### **Knowledge**

Managers in Matveev's (2004) study suggested that being "willing to acquire knowledge about another culture," having the "desire to understand and being aware of cultural differences," "acquiring knowledge of history, culture, cultural institutions, views and qualities," and possessing "awareness of cultural differences and understanding these differences" were all vital elements to competent intercultural interactions (p. 57). A 28-year-old Russian manager in Matveev's (2004) study highlighted the broader role of knowledge in ICC, "[Interculturally competent colleague is] highly intelligent, with broad knowledge, able to see things that are not common in everyday communication, and has specific educational level, erudition, and culture" (pp. 57-58).

### **Common Experience**

One Russian participant in Matveev's (2004) study reflected on his perception of the most important dimension of intercultural competence:

If you are able to establish common grounds and make anybody talking with you, then you can understand this person's inner world, his/her uniqueness and cultural differences, and take all this into account. The national culture is an aggregate and averaged term. Every person has his own unique way to express his culture to a greater or lesser degree. Without knowing the country of origin of a person, possessing adequate communication skills will help you to find out what country this person is from and build your relationship with this person based on this information. (pp. 58-59)

While this manager focused on the unique differences between cultures, one Chinese student studying in New Zealand commented on the need to educate her peers about their commonalities to improve ICC:

When group work finished I will ask him, I will tell him, if you have religious belief, your religion is God or Catholic, in China, our religion we are the Buddhism, but I think the guideline is the same. They tell others to love others. But we don't need you to love me, but just respect me at least. But I didn't tell him until now. But I think I should tell him. I learned that you also needn't to respect him, and don't smile, and just to show that you are not below him. I think we are same level. We are equal, so just speak with those guys in serious face! (Homes, 2006, p. 28)

In describing what they learned from all of their previous experience with intercultural interaction, a participant in Taylor's (1994) study highlighted the need to find shared understanding:

I also learned that people, when you dig deeply enough, are pretty much the same. It's just that you have to take different ways to get to that. But when you really get

to the core, people pretty much . . . I mean people hurt, people laugh, people bleed, people want to relate, and everybody wants to be hugged now and then. And that's what is the beautiful thing about getting to know different peoples, and different cultures. (pp. 167-168)

Finding or having common experiences when in an intercultural interaction provided a shared base of knowledge for the interactants to draw upon and improve the perceived ICC. However, when those common experiences were not available, another way to increase the chances of ICC was by understanding the specific customs, values, and traditions of the host culture.

### **Culture Specific Awareness**

In describing the ICC workshop he attended, one student in Hiller and Woźniak's (2009) study talked about the influence of specific cultural norms on intercultural interactions, "The first game I found really interesting. It really made me think. At the beginning I was, let's say 'angry' that this man treats this woman in such unappropriate (sic) way. But after the explanations of the rules in this society I changed my point of view completely. It's really interesting how we interpret things" (p. 121).

An example shared by a participant in Taylor's (1994) study highlighted not only the necessary knowledge of customs, but also how attitudes and the culture specific hierarchies for competence:

The first half-hour is all these speeches that they give at every single meeting. It's just a formality welcome, thank-you, thank-you, by everybody 800 times and all this. All of these speeches start with the same, let's call it a paragraph maybe it's two. It's like . . . peace be on to you in the Arabic way . . . You can do it in Arabic



if the audience is known to be almost all Moslem. Then you go into the English stuff for the Christians in the crowd. It's always the same and . . . I just refused to do that. I thought I am not copping out. These guys need to learn how to have a meeting where they don't waste all this time . . . But you know what clicked for me in a meeting where it really pissed me off at first and then I thought 'What an adolescent! I thought you had finally learned this.' You know in those adolescent days when you just refuse to do something because you're just going to refuse to do it, because it's the principle of the thing. And that's what I was doing. An American guy came in who was working with our university on a different project. I watched him at one of our meetings. This guy couldn't say hello to you walking down the street in Indonesian to save his life, but someone somewhere had helped him memorize that opening of a speech in a meeting. So the first time he went to one of these meetings he stands up and gives that speech. They [Indonesian hosts] didn't care what he said the rest of the day. He said the right speech. 'He was in like Flynn (sic).' This guy is wonderful. I just thought 'Shit, I've been spending all my life trying to speak Indonesian and deal in substance, all I've got to do is get the form right and these guys will appreciate what I am doing.' Some of those lessons came hard. I was really stubborn. The American culture was my personal style that I wouldn't let go of. (p. 165)

Though the experience of this participant highlighted a culture specific hierarchy in necessary knowledge, it also mentioned a common knowledge requirement of a successful intercultural interaction: language.

## Language

Just as the students in the previous chapter mentioned the potential problems of a language barrier, respondents in these studies acknowledged the significant role that language plays in ICC. For example, an international student in Homes' (2006) study decided to delay communication with students from the host country until she felt more comfortable with her language skills, "Mostly, I make a mistake and everybody can't understand me, so that maybe one years later, or half year later is better [to start trying to talk to NZ students]" (p. 25).

In another example, a participant in Torres' (2009) study stated, "speech and being able to communicate your ideas. It's not just speaking English, it's being able to communicate what you are thinking to others" (p. 588). Language came up in Hajro and Pudelko's (2004) study of multinational team leaders as well:

Working with . . . HQ, one of the biggest barriers and challenges, is just the language barrier and certainly that has implications for me and for M. . . . Somebody is translating for us. You know, I am spelling out this part of information and somebody needs to translate this to her and I have no idea what it is that is being communicated to her. And I just hope that they grab and pass on the entire essence of what I am saying and not just kind of filtering what they consider the most important part . . . . We depend on the trust of the translators . . . I am the leader of the team in Vienna and everything would be much easier if I could speak German. (p. 188)

In a slightly different perception, a participant in Helm's (2009) study described the ability to adapt language style based on context in order to achieve competency, "I also keep

switching between formal and informal register when coming to Padua: while in the University proper, I try to speak the best Italian I can, while when I'm out with my friends I fall into dialectic inflections" (p. 99).

### **Attitude/Affect**

The study participant responses that were categorized as an attitude or affect were those mentioning feelings, open-mindedness, and some form of empathy or sympathy. Because some of the participants were describing the competence of others, the attitude and affect elements of competency were highlighted more often and in greater depth than the attitudes described by students in the previous chapter.

### **Openness**

A Russian manager in Matveev's (2004) study explained how cultural sensitivity was an integral factor in ICC:

[It is important to] have basic norms and qualities of intercultural and international communication such as respect, openness, understanding that every person has his/her own social space, which is more important in Western cultures, differentiating between professional and private relationships, understanding time differences, and building the bridges in communication, both in friendly and professional situations. (p. 57)

A manager in Chang and Tharenou's (2004) study indicated that real respect and appreciation for the differences with ICC is essential: "ability to appreciate differences, not just understand them but to appreciate them, to more than to accept them, but to really enjoy them, to really like the difference" (p. 65). One of the subordinates in Chang and Tharenou's (2004) study mentioned how sincere appreciation for unique cultures is a

necessary component of ICC for managers: “She does come up to you personally and does talk to you about your cultural background and also, other than the festivities, it’s not just a token thing” (p. 65).

A participant in Helm’s (2009) study indicated how overcoming the attitude of home culture was necessary to achieve ICC:

Living in the North of Italy gives you a way of thinking which relies a lot on attention to wealth and money in general . . . As I said my family has had a great influence on me: most of my family is a little conservative, so my education lingered on old values like truth, being faithful, manners, etc. I think this is a good way to grow up. But it’s had some downside as well, like intolerance (it’s endemic to this region), close-mindedness (sic) (which I didn’t pick up) and some other nastiness. (p. 99)

Being open to difference was not the only attitude necessary for improving ICC; several of the studies’ participants suggested that openness had to be combined with the desire to interact with the host culture.

### **Motivation**

One participant in Torres’ (2009) study described someone who is interculturally competent: “I would say their ability to strive for more, and always looking to be more successful, basically” (p. 585). Another man in the same study suggested competent intercultural communicators would be “An ambitious person is a person that is thinking about accomplishing great things, great goals. Not merely finding a job that earns maybe \$30,000 a year but a person who is thinking about being the head...[it is these people] that

are always thinking about becoming managers of an organization whatever it may be” (Torres, 2009, p. 585).

A senior manager in Matveev’s (2004) commented on the significance of attitude in comparison to knowledge in terms of ICC:

Personality would be the first [dimension]. Knowledge on products, business, and different culture does not necessarily allow you to use it in the right way.

Personality characteristics such as motivation, eagerness to understand and learn about different cultures, and acceptance of individuals of different cultures. I

believe it really starts with a person, if she/he has motivation, a desire to succeed in an international role, and in being exposed to different cultures. The second would

be the skills [dimension]. And the third would be cultural knowledge: there are certain things you need to know about a culture to avoid making disastrous

mistakes. (p. 58)

A female student in Homes’ (2006) study commented on building intercultural relationships: “I think it’s [a] different view about the relations. We have different cultural backgrounds so we think different things, so sometimes they don’t think that’s [my ideas are] important, so they ignore that. I think, ‘Okay, that’s all right!’” (p. 27). In another situation, one participant in Taylor’s (1994) study described their initial struggles and attitude when first engaging in intercultural interactions abroad: “I felt very uncomfortable and very frustrated. I had to do something I really didn’t want to do, but I just did it...Some of the time I blundered through . . . For the most part I just got out there and started working” (p. 164).

### **Characteristics/Traits**

Unlike the students in the previous chapter, since some of the participants in the studies included for this metasynthesis were describing other competent communicators, there were instances where personality traits or characteristics played a role in their definitions of competence. For example, one participant in Torres' (2009) study described a competent intercultural communicator as someone who has a strong character:

After my parents had a divorce . . . she [my mother] came out to the United States with my brother and I so she not only worked full time but she would go to school full time at night and, characteristics I saw there were, you know, determination, sacrifice, she had to give a lot of sacrifice in order to get where she is at now. (pp. 586-587)

Another participant in Torres' (2009) study highlighted the need for strong character and work ethic: "You have to be creative. Never be afraid to take an extra step and do a little more than you're required" (p. 587). Similarly, a participant in Matveev's (2004) study noted personality trait differences based on culture, "[People from the] cultures, which are used to work with Americans, are more forgiving; other cultures are more rigid" (p. 59). The inherent personality traits and characteristics described by the participants were bound to the unique individual interpreting them and context of the interaction.

### **Summary**

This chapter explored the everyday conceptualizations of competency through the participant quotations found within a metasynthesis of nine previously published studies. The one notable difference between the extant descriptions of ICC and the student drawings was the inclusion of personal characteristics or traits that led to improved ICC.

However, the majority of the responses fell into the three broad categories of behavior/skills, knowledge, and attitude/affect as identified in the extant literature (Beamer, 1992; Brislin, 1981; Fantini, 2000; Kupka et al., 2007; Parks, 1976; Ruben, 1976; Spitzberg, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

Just as in the student depictions in chapter six, several of the behaviors mentioned were linked to incompetence as opposed to competence; they highlighted what the participants had done or observed that was not correct. In addition to specific behaviors, several of the participants in these studies mentioned the application of knowledge (or skills) necessary to achieve competency which included active listening, asking questions, and being observant.

In the knowledge category, language was a factor for the participants in these studies just as it had been for the students in chapter six. In addition, knowledge of the cultural customs, traditions, and values of the host culture were also identified as necessary components for competent intercultural interactions. Finding or having similar experiences or commonalities was another element noted by study participants that played a role in successful intercultural interactions.

Unlike the previous chapter, the participants in this study offered a broad set of attitude/affect elements of ICC. Having a willingness to learn or being open to cultural differences and challenges was highlighted by several participants as a necessary component of ICC. Similarly, acknowledging cultural differences was insufficient, respect for and of these differences was also noted as improving ICC. Beyond the openness required to achieve ICC, the participants identified a motivation, desire, or drive to succeed in intercultural interactions as necessary factors.

The descriptions of competency offered in this chapter confirmed the student depictions of incompetency in chapter five. In chapter seven, the results of these two analyses will be combined with the existing conceptualizations of competency offered in the literature to find points of convergence and divergence. Where these three groups of data come together, the framework of a comprehensive theory of ICC begins.



## CHAPTER 7. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Providing a practical and theoretical comprehensive theory of intercultural communication competency (ICC) was the rationale for this dissertation. Rather than to deny or refute the existing conceptualizations and understandings of ICC, this project incorporated these existing perspectives. In an effort to integrate the academic conceptualizations and practical understanding of ICC, the extant academic literature was delineated in chapter two, and chapters five and six examined the everyday understanding of students enrolled in an intercultural classroom and participants in published, qualitative research studies. This chapter triangulates these three sets of data to find points of convergence and divergence in the three sets of conceptualizations of ICC, providing the framework for a comprehensive theory of ICC.

### **Convergence**

In the literature review of academic conceptualizations of ICC, scholars offered both theoretical understanding and practical applications of competence in interpersonal and intercultural interactions. The data collected from students enrolled in an undergraduate intercultural course depicted images and explanations of incompetent interactions; and the metasynthesis of existing studies explored qualitative definitions and descriptions of ICC. While each of these three explorations took unique approaches for understanding ICC, several points of agreement emerged for both broad understanding of competency and some of the specific factors that contributed to ICC. The primary areas of convergence found within the literature and data included the understanding of competency as an outcome that is externally measured; and specific components of behavior, knowledge, and affect were identified as common factors for achieving ICC.

### **Competency as an Externally Perceived Outcome**

In the definition of ICC, the literature and the data all suggested that competency was an outcome of an interaction. For example, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) described, “The perception of competence is a graduated phenomenon in which behaviors, affective responses, and cognition are enmeshed within an unfolding dynamic process of conversation” (p. 109). While the student drawings tended to describe a single incident or interaction, they often included speech or thought bubbles showing reactions from the competent communicator indicating that incompetence (and conversely competency) was the result of both the communication and reaction. In the metasynthesis, several of the participants who were either describing competent individuals or who had been identified by the author as competent, talked about a trial-and-error process of improving competency, suggesting that both interactions and long-term relationship building were part of the process of achieving competency.

In addition to the shared understanding that ICC was an outcome, the three sets of conceptualizations also concurred that competency was measured and perceived externally by the interactants or an outside observer. In the student drawings, only a handful of participants self-identified as characters in their drawings of incompetent intercultural interactions and suggested that the incompetent communicator “didn’t know,” “was not aware,” or in some other terms identified that the lack of competence was not recognized by the individual making the mistake. Some of the participant examples that emerged in the metasynthesis described how the reactions of members the host culture reacted to their behaviors or communication as the litmus for measuring competence.

### **Competence is Contextually Bound**

In addition to understanding ICC as an outcome and externally measured, the academic and everyday understanding of competency deemed the host or host culture as the measure of appropriateness. For example, in the student drawings of incompetence, they identified the context of their drawing before describing the incompetency taking place. With the exception of a few, most students identified the incompetent communicator as those who did not accommodate their behaviors to the host culture.

While all three sets of data pointed to ICC as an outcome measured or perceived externally by the host or host culture, specific factors identified helped or hindered competence. Specifically, the conceptualizations all included behaviors or skills, knowledge, and attitude or affect as necessary components of ICC.

### **Behavior/Skills**

In the coding of the classroom data and the metasynthesis, behaviors and skills were combined as one category because skills were often described as enactments of knowledge or affect. Within the extant academic conceptualizations, few specific behaviors were reported as part of ICC, but behavior was clearly identified as one component in several of the models of competency (Canary et al., 2007; Lustig & Koester, 1993; Spitzberg, 1988; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977; Wiseman, 2002).

**Communication skills and behaviors.** In the academic literature and the metasynthesis particularly, communication skills and behaviors were often cited as a justification for competence. For example, Hammer et al. (1978) suggested that the competent communicator was one who could both communicate effectively and establish interpersonal relationships. Additionally, in the metasynthesis of existing qualitative

reports defining competency, participants mentioned “rephrasing and explaining messages” (Matveev, 2004, p. 57), having good listening skills, and “having the ability to build relationships” (Torres, 2009, p. 586) as necessary components for ICC. Though these same skills were not identified by the classroom participants, their absence was likely due to their assignment to describe incompetent intercultural interactions.

**Nonverbal behaviors.** In addition to strong communication skills, both the academic and everyday descriptions of ICC mentioned nonverbal behaviors as a common component. Because the students in chapter five were drawing their incompetent interactions, several participants identified inappropriate greetings (e.g. shaking hands instead of bowing), touching or invading space of someone from a no contact culture, or gestures that did not share universal meaning (e.g. the “thumbs up” sign, the “peace” or “victory” sign, or a raised middle finger). Participants in the metasynthesis studies also mentioned appropriate dress and manners as potential sources of incompetence. While the academic literature offered few specific nonverbal behaviors, scholars did mention nonverbal cues, eye contact, posture, and tone of voice as factors in determining ICC (Ruben, 1976).

Overall, behaviors were identified the most frequently by both the student participants in chapter five and the participants of the metasynthesis in chapter six because, as both groups explained in their descriptions, the verbal and nonverbal behaviors provided the grounds for judging or assessing competency. Similarly, most models and conceptualizations of ICC from the academic perspective also noted the importance of behavior because of the external validation of competence.

## **Knowledge**

While behaviors provided the grounds for assessing competence, knowledge informed those verbal and nonverbal communication acts. Even when competency was measured based on, for example, an incorrect greeting, the source of the improper behavior was the knowledge of the specific cultural custom. Three key types of knowledge were presented in the academic and everyday conceptualizations of ICC: language; cognitive ability and consistency; and culture-specific awareness.

**Language.** Language was one of the most frequently cited knowledge components of ICC in academic literature. For example, Prosser (1978) only listed two components of competency, and one of them was “known rules of grammar” (p. 97). Language was also one of the most frequently cited sources of incompetency by the student participants in chapter six, typically highlighting the need for a shared or common spoken language or a common understanding of slang. Participants in the metasynthesis similarly mentioned the role of language in achieving ICC both in terms of shared language, trusting translation, and in the ability to code switching to the appropriate dialect.

**Cognitive ability and consistency.** In the academic literature, cognitive ability was related to concepts such as the ability to accommodate a different value system and sharing similar experiences. Kim (1991) suggested that, “the capability of an individual’s internal psychic system to alter its existing attributes and structures to accommodate the demands of the environment” (p. 276) would determine competency. Similarly, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) identified cognitive complexity as a component of ICC. In the student drawings of incompetent intercultural interactions, students explained that the incompetent communicator “did not know” or “was not aware” of the unique meaning of a specific

word or action. In comparison, Ting-Toomey (1999) described the concept of mindfulness as a component of ICC as “a learned process of ‘cognitive focusing’ with repeated skillful practice” (p. 40), also highlighting the cognitive ability necessary to achieve competence. In the metasynthesis, several participants repeatedly described the need to find common ground to have ICC.

**Culture-specific awareness.** When engaged in an intercultural interaction, finding commonalities or shared experiences were helpful in improving ICC, but just as important to both academic and practical understandings of the concept was the knowledge about culture-specific values, traditions, and customs.

### **Attitude**

In both the student drawings and the metasynthesis, attitude and affect were combined into one category because both elements dealt with emotions or frame of mind. In terms of the academic conceptualizations, attitude and affect were both found in a variety of the models and descriptions of competence. Only two real points of convergence occurred in this component of ICC; namely the openness and the motivation of the interactants.

**Openness.** “Not having an open mind” and “unwilling to try and understand” another culture were both reasons given by students as examples of incompetent communicators. Similarly, Ruben (1976) suggested that a tolerance for ambiguity was required to achieve ICC, or the cognitive willingness to tolerate difference. Similarly, Hammer et al. (1978) identified an ability to deal with psychological stress as a mindset required for ICC. The metasynthesis participant responses noted that respect and appreciation for differences in culture was required to successfully achieve competence.

**Motivation.** Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) identified empathy as a key component of ICC. This sentiment was echoed in student depictions of incompetency that included “rude” or “mean” behaviors, as well as the use of stereotypes and discrimination; suggesting that empathy, or at least sensitivity, was needed to achieve competency. Along similar lines, Bennett (1982) noted the necessity of cultural sensitivity to achieve ICC. In the metasynthesis, participants highlighted the need to overcome their fears and feelings of discomfort as well as the requirement to work hard and be motivated to succeed, as factors playing a role in ICC.

### **Traits/Characteristics**

The student participants in chapter five did not specifically describe any personality traits or characteristics of competent communicators, but both the metasynthesis participants and the extant academic literature identified these factors as relevant in ICC. Specifically, in the metasynthesis, participants noted that an eagerness to understand differences and a strong, resilient character were necessary elements of ICC. In the academic conceptualizations of competence, traits such as patience, a sense of humor, and curiosity were all listed as factors for improving ICC.

### **Divergence**

The academic and lay descriptions of ICC diverged on few points. Some of the differences were minor, while others highlighted relevant concepts that were only found in one of the two perspectives. In particular, the role of power identified in the everyday understanding of competence provided a significant addition to the academic conceptualization, while the emphasis on interaction goals suggested by the extant academic literature was not supported by the everyday enactments of ICC.

## **Role of Power**

In the practical or everyday understanding of ICC, when one of the interactants had a power position, the success of ICC was not measure by the context, but by the subordinates. For example, the student descriptions of incompetence in chapter five included several illustrations of students identifying incompetent teachers who did not recognize, accommodate for, or understand the unique cultures of their students. The same feeling was true in the Holmes' (2006) study of Chinese students studying abroad in New Zealand; while these students directly explained cultural differences to their peers, they expected the teachers to accommodate or at least understand their Chinese culture.

Teachers were not the only people in power positions expected to accommodate their students. In exploring multicultural groups and work teams (Chang & Tharenou, 2004; Matveev, 2004) and multinational teams (Hajro & Pudelko, 2004), managerial and team members highlighted the need for the leader to be accommodating to the variety of cultures of their subordinates. These data recognized that power impacted the basic structure of understanding ICC by changing the measure of appropriateness.

## **Interaction Goals**

From the academic perspective, some studies identified goals for the interaction as significant in predicting the competency outcome. For example, Hajek and Giles (2003) and Parks (1976) identified a goal-orientation approach to ICC. In these models, the cultural or contextual guests would be able to measure their competence based on the achievement of specific goals set out before the interaction. No examples of this concept emerged from any of the everyday interpretations of ICC.



### **Summary**

In an effort to build a comprehensive theory of ICC, this chapter compared and contrasted the academic conceptualizations from chapter two with the everyday understanding of competence found in chapters five and six. While the data converged on most of the components of competence, points of divergence occurred. Based upon these findings, understanding competency as an interaction outcome and as contextually bound provided the core of ICC. The culture-specific variables of knowledge, behavior, and attitude were the framework for the cultural expectations needed to achieve competence. In the next chapter, a theory of ICC is proposed based on this integration of the academic and everyday conceptualizations of competence.

## **CHAPTER 8. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

### **COMPETENCE THEORY**

Intercultural communication scholars have called for a comprehensive theory of ICC. In part, the call for a comprehensive theory stems from the fragmented and various definitions of ICC as noted by Rathje (2007); “so-called ‘list models’ and ‘structural models’ of ICC are inadequate in offering a holistic understanding of intercultural interactions” (p. 255). Additionally, Gudykunst (2002) noted no less than fifteen theories of intercultural communication, most of which purported to predict competency in their definitions. The wide variety of definitions for ICC, the fragmented perspectives of its scope, and the theoretical reliance on ambiguous conceptualizations all required the construction of a unified and comprehensive theory of ICC.

The wide range of the existing models and conceptualizations of ICC encompassed nearly all paradigms and epistemologies. The models and definitions of ICC proposed in the first two decades of ICC research were mostly skills-based, learned and taught to individuals wishing to improve their intercultural interactions. The more recent models of ICC have focused on combining the early behavioral models with perceptual and culture-specific approaches to ICC. These endeavors were largely motivated by an attempt to improve the existing and scattered definitions of ICC, giving ICC a narrower scope and starting point.

In constructing a theory that encompassed the range of extant conceptualizations, the best option would be an applied or multi-paradigmatic perspective. The generic nature of a multi-paradigm theory allows for a greater range of applications and provides the flexibility to account for multiple paradigm perspectives. According to Littlejohn (2007);

“theories drive practice, but practice drives theory. In other words, our theories influence what we do, and what we do influences our theories” (p. 5). Practical or applied scholars often create theory that utilizes multiple paradigms because, as Poole and Van De Ven (1989) noted, when using multiple paradigms, researchers “look for theoretical tensions or oppositions and use them to stimulate the development of more encompassing theories” (p. 563). The following theory integrates the work of previous scholars with the practical uses of the term by the general public, and uses these collective perspectives to shape a comprehensive ICC theory.

### **Three Core Tenets of ICC Theory**

The previous academic conceptualizations of ICC were often drafted by Western scholars and from a Western perspective. Additionally, the practical roots of intercultural communication necessitated a teachable approach to competency. Phenomenologically, intercultural communication is an interaction and, therefore, needs to be understood from a perspective that incorporates the process of communication. Achieving competency is not a linear application of specific skills, but an outcome that is as much relational as it is behavioral. Whether exploring the extant academic conceptualizations of ICC or its everyday application, three dimensions provide the most basic understanding of ICC theory in any context.

**Tenet 1:** Intercultural communication competence is an outcome of an intercultural interaction.

Intercultural communication is defined as an interaction between two or more people from different cultural standpoints. Competency is not a behavior, skill, attitude, or affect nor is it a body of knowledge contained within either of the interactants; ICC is an outcome

based, at least in part, on the interaction of these components and, more importantly, based on the entire interaction of the individuals involved. As Canary et al. (2007) described, “people’s assessment of an interaction means more to the relationship than the effect of the message” (p. 80).

**Tenet 2:** Intercultural communication competence is perceived and measured externally.

Not unlike many other theories of communication, ICC is judged externally. Martin and Hammer (1989) defined ICC as social impression because, while individuals may have control over their own communicative behaviors, the impression created ultimately determines competence. Spitzberg (1988) suggested, “Competent communication is interaction that is perceived as effective in fulfilling certain rewarding objectives in a way that is also appropriate to the context in which the interaction occurs” (p. 68). While Spitzberg (1988) highlighted the perceptive nature of competence, the second part of the definition leads to the next tenet of ICC.

**Tenet 3:** Intercultural communication competence is measured by the cultural context in which the interaction takes place.

Nearly all of the literature, like Spitzberg (1988), agreed that to achieve competence, the speaker must accommodate to the host person or culture. Similarly, in the everyday understanding of competence, the student and metasynthesis participants agreed that the cultural context was the indicator for the competence expectations. However, in one of the significant points of divergence between the academic and everyday understanding of competence, cultural context was overruled when power was a significant factor in an intercultural interaction.

**Condition 1:** When a significant power differential exists between the interactants, the person with higher power is expected to accommodate to the culture of the subordinate.

In the everyday understanding of ICC, whenever one of the interactants was identified as a person in power, the rules for appropriateness changed. When no significant power difference exists between intercultural interactants or when power is irrelevant, the outsider is expected to accommodate to the host person or culture. However, in the everyday practice and understanding of ICC, lay descriptions of accommodation made an exception for interactions where power was present. For example, teachers and managers in particular were expected to accommodate for the cultures of their students and subordinates.

### **Context-Specific Conditions of ICC Theory**

The host culture is the judge of ICC so the specific cultural values, normative behaviors, and expectations of the host culture are the only real predictors or measures of ICC. Despite the fact that research of ICC has spanned a variety of unique cultural contexts expectations for competence can vary. As Spitzberg (2000) noted of ICC, only the knowledge of specific cultural rules, the skills to apply that knowledge, and the motivation to use those skills can facilitate appropriateness and effectiveness. Therefore, gaining an understanding of how these elements are measured and judged by the cultural context is the next step in assessing ICC.

Wilson and Sabee (2003) contended that some skills and behaviors seem to be universally competent, “But appropriate communication depends on the context, and effectivity, on the expectations and goals of the interactants” (p. 4). Essentially, Wilson

and Sabee (2003) argued that appropriate and effective communication or ICC can only be understood within the culture of both the context and the individuals interacting. Similarly, Spitzberg (2000) argued that the difficulty of competent intercultural communicative exchanges lies in the diversity of contexts and their corresponding perceptual rules. These explanations lead to two conditions which are significant factors in assessing ICC in an intercultural interaction.

**Condition 2:** The cultural context provides the basis for assessing intercultural communication competence.

**Condition 3:** The interaction goal modifies both the requirements for and assessment of intercultural communication competence.

Whether you are the cultural outsider or the person in a power position, you are expected to accommodate to or for another culture. While the hierarchy of behaviors varies based on specific cultural contexts, repeated sources of competence (and incompetence) are cited in both academic and everyday conceptualizations of ICC. Additionally, when the interaction goal is either task (e.g., getting directions, placing an order, making a purchase, etc.) or relational (e.g., establishing an interpersonal relationship, negotiating a business partnership, etc.), the conditions for the assessment of competence vary. The complex nature of assessing competency as Lustig and Koester (1993) suggested, can lead to individual success in one interaction, but failure in another. An American participant in Taylor's (1994) study lived in Indonesia and provided one of the best examples of the complex nature of the hierarchies of behavior that resulted in ICC:

The first half-hour is all these speeches that they give at every single meeting. It's just a formality welcome, thank-you, thank-you, by everybody 800 times and all

this. All of these speeches start with the same, let's call it a paragraph maybe it's two. It's like . . . peace be on to you in the Arabic way . . . You can do it in Arabic if the audience is known to be almost all Moslem. Then you go into the English stuff for the Christians in the crowd. It's always the same and . . . I just refused to do that. I thought I am not copping out. These guys need to learn how to have a meeting where they don't waste all this time . . . But you know what clicked for me in a meeting where it really pissed me off at first and then I thought 'What an adolescent! I thought you had finally learned this.' You know in those adolescent days when you just refuse to do something because you're just going to refuse to do it, because it's the principle of the thing. And that's what I was doing. An American guy came in who was working with our university on a different project. I watched him at one of our meetings. This guy couldn't say hello to you walking down the street in Indonesian to save his life, but someone somewhere had helped him memorize that opening of a speech in a meeting. So the first time he went to one of these meetings he stands up and gives that speech. They [Indonesian hosts] didn't care what he said the rest of the day. He said the right speech. 'He was in like Flynn (sic).' This guy is wonderful. I just thought 'Shit, I've been spending all my life trying to speak Indonesian and deal in substance, all I've got to do is get the form right and these guys will appreciate what I am doing.' Some of those lessons came hard. I was really stubborn. The American culture was my personal style that I wouldn't let go of. (p. 165)

### **Culture and Context-Specific Elements of Competency**

Knowledge and attitude have been identified as components of competency, but because competency is measured externally, it is therefore determined based on our verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors. Specifically, the communication skills we employ, the languages we are able to speak, and the nonverbal gestures are all the behaviors we engage in that impact an outsider's assessment of our competence.

#### **Communication Skills**

Effective communication skills were identified as necessary component of ICC in much of the existing academic research (e.g. Brislin, 1981; Canary et al., 2007; Hammer et al., 1978; Ruben, 1976; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977; Wiseman, 2002), and many of the skills were identified in the exploration of the everyday application of ICC. Specifically, these communication skills included effective listening, social skills, identity management and negotiation, choosing manageable communication strategies, interaction management, and the ability to build interpersonal relationships.

#### **Language(s) Spoken**

Logically, for individuals to communicate, they must understand each other. Sharing a common language is perhaps the most basic communication requirement necessary for achieving ICC. While interpreters or translators may be available for an intercultural interaction, one participant in Hajro and Pudelko's (2004) study explained the challenges posed when relying on an intermediary:

Somebody is translating for us. You know, I am spelling out this part of information and somebody needs to translate this to her and I have no idea what it is that is being communicated to her. And I just hope that they grab and pass on the entire



essence of what I am saying and not just kind of filtering what they consider the most important part . . . . We depend on the trust of the translators . . . I am the leader of the team in Vienna and everything would be much easier if I could speak German. (p. 188)

The use of a translator or interpreter can help to overcome the lack of a shared language, but, as the previous example highlighted, the challenges when using an intermediary can potentially detract from the perceived competency on either side of the interaction.

Ultimately, when two people do not speak a common language, not only is a significant communication barrier created, but also achieving ICC is virtually impossible.

### **Nonverbal Communication Behaviors**

Nonverbal communication behaviors encompassed a wide variety of acts and were found to be essential elements of perceived competency in the everyday use and assessment of ICC. These behaviors included gestures, dress, eye contact, use of space, and manners. Ruben (1976) also offered that “eye contact, body posture, voice tone and pitch, and general displays of interest” (p. 339) were elements of nonverbal communication that attributed to ICC.

While the behaviors such as communication skills, languages spoken, and nonverbal communication of an individual were the basis for the external judgment of competency, elements of knowledge and attitude informed those behaviors. In particular, awareness of specific cultural values, customs, beliefs, and traditions, cognitive ability, common experience, openness, and motivation were the most commonly cited ICC components of the broader categories of knowledge and attitude.

### **Awareness of Specific Cultural Values, Customs, Beliefs, and Traditions**

Bradford et al. (2000) explained that one way to achieve ICC, “requires culture-specific awareness and behaviors, such as the ability to show respect in Japan” (p. 34). Cultures vary their values, practices, and beliefs, and being aware of these differences is another element of ICC. For example, Spitzberg (2000) argued that only the knowledge of specific cultural rules, the skills to apply this knowledge, and the motivation to use these skills can facilitate appropriateness and effectiveness; the definition of his model of ICC. In the everyday understanding of ICC, culture-specific knowledge or awareness dealt with the appreciation for differences, specifically in terms of religious beliefs, time orientation, and specific cultural practices such as greetings and displays of respect.

### **Cognitive Ability**

The earlier example of the American participant in Taylor’s (1994) study highlighted the necessity of adjusting from the normative practices and values of one’s home culture to the perceptions of the host culture. That participant’s experience with successful ICC in Indonesia was an example of Beamer’s (1997) suggestion that the “key to understanding other cultures is asking questions in an ongoing challenge to previously held signs” (p. 285). Similarly, Ting-Toomey (1999) highlighted the need for *mindfulness*, described as, “a learned process of ‘cognitive focusing’ with repeated skillful practice” (p. 40). This need for *cognitive flexibility* was also noted by Bennett (1986), Hajek and Giles (2003), and Wiemann (1977).

### **Common Experiences**

The everyday descriptions of ICC especially highlighted the need to find commonalities with the host culture or persons. In particular, one of the participants in

Matveev's (2004) study reflected on the vital nature of finding common experiences to achieve successful ICC:

If you are able to establish common grounds and make anybody talking with you, then you can understand this person's inner world, his/her uniqueness and cultural differences, and take all this into account. The national culture is an aggregate and averaged term. Every person has his own unique way to express his culture to a greater or lesser degree. Without knowing the country of origin of a person, possessing adequate communication skills will help you to find out what country this person is from and build your relationship with this person based on this information. (pp. 58-59)

Working to find common ground helps to downplay the differences between the individuals in an intercultural interaction. More importantly, as Schoenhuth (2005) noted, ICC requires that "a level of cooperation is achieved that is agreeable to all participants . . . allowing the existing diversity . . . to be exploited for the achievement of common goals" (p. 103).

### **Openness**

Ruben (1976) suggested that a tolerance for ambiguity was required to achieve ICC or the willingness to tolerate difference. Similarly, Fantini (2000) noted that "tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to suspend judgment" (p. 38) were essential elements of ICC. In addition to tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty, Brislin et al. (1984) suggested the need for individuals engaged in intercultural communication to be able to "walk in the other's moccasins" (p. 5) essentially highlighting the necessity of empathy or the ability to be open to another person's perspective. This need for empathy also was noted as a component of

competency by several other scholars (e.g., Arasaratnam & Doerfels, 2005; Fantini, 2000; Ruben, 1976; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

### **Motivation**

Motivation, or the desire to engage in an intercultural interaction, was a necessary component for ICC. Motivation can also be linked to specific individual attitudes such as sensitivity, desire for success, and being relaxed and supportive. Ultimately, as Ting-Toomey (1999) identified in the identity negotiation management theory, people in intercultural interactions want to feel understood, respected, and supported.

The elements of culture-specific awareness, cognitive ability, common experience, openness, and motivation were the most commonly cited ICC components of the broader categories of knowledge and attitude. The enactment of these elements of ICC becomes the yardstick by which competency can be measured. According to the extant literature and everyday conceptualizations of ICC, the only missing element in this list is personality traits and characteristics. However, since personality traits and unique characteristics have varied values within cultural contexts, and because personality traits and characteristics are inherent and unlikely to change, they are not included in this theory. In a public speaking classroom for example, to teach students how to become better speakers is possible. While elements can be taught to improve speaking ability (e.g., proper posture, cadence, organization, supporting material, length of the speech, and so on), some specific personality traits and characteristics, like charisma and sense of humor, cannot be taught. The same is true for intercultural communication interactions; and though the characteristics and traits listed by previous scholars and everyday practitioners of ICC certainly can help improve the perception of competence, the unique preferences for and

inherent nature of these traits make them less predictable than the previously mentioned elements. Additionally, just as sense of humor, charm, and charisma help improve the perception of one's public speaking ability, these characteristics or traits may only serve to camouflage or minimize missing or improper use of the other competency elements.

### **Summary**

The theory of ICC provided in this chapter began with three tenets guiding the understanding of competence in an intercultural interaction: (1) ICC is an outcome; (2) ICC is externally measured; and (3) the cultural context of the interaction determines what is considered appropriate ICC. The condition related to the third tenet is the presence of a power differential. Based on the everyday application of ICC, if power is both present and relevant in an intercultural interaction, people with power are expected to accommodate their subordinates.

Beyond the three core tenets of ICC, the cultural and context-specific elements guide the determination of competence. These variables were hierarchically ordered based on the conditions of both the interaction goal and the cultural context. Specifically, the variables used to determine competency included the communication skills employed, the languages spoken, the nonverbal gestures used, the awareness of specific cultural customs, values, beliefs, and traditions, cognitive ability, common experience, openness, and motivation.

This comprehensive theory of ICC incorporated both academic and everyday or practical applications of competence in an intercultural interaction. The theory itself provides the framework for future studies of culture which, in turn, provide culture-specific guidelines for the effective practice and measurement of ICC. After constructing this

theory of ICC, the final chapter examines the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed intercultural communication competence theory and proposes directions for future research.

## CHAPTER 9. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The theory presented in this dissertation encompasses the broad range of academic conceptualizations integrated with the everyday, practical understanding of ICC. The true measure of an applied or multi-paradigmatic theory, like the one presented here, lies in its practical application. As Dubin (1967) noted, “In any applied field, the theory or theories utilized have to confront reality when they are put to the applied test” (p. 18). However, as a multi-paradigmatic theory incorporates both social scientific and interpretive perspectives, one way to validate the theory, and thus determine its implications, would be to measure the comprehensive theory of ICC based on both social scientific and interpretive standards.

### **Implications**

Though several measures exist for testing the validity and strength of a social scientific theory, the most comprehensive list was provided by Littlejohn (1999). Included in Littlejohn’s list of attributes of theory were nine components: (1) help us organize and summarize knowledge; (2) help us focus on important things; (3) help clarify what is observed; (4) tell us how to look/observe; (5) help us predict; (6) help us learn more by suggesting new research avenues; (7) help us communicate ideas by providing vocabulary and organizational framework; (8) help us control our environments; and (9) help us think critically about our experiences (p. 30). In the interpretive perspective, theories are measured based on their ability to “seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created in given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 8). This function means that theories produced from an interpretive perspective are considered good or effective if they provide insight into the unique human experience or, in the case of

intercultural research, offer flexibility for unique cultural application. Using these frameworks, the comprehensive theory of ICC constructed in this dissertation was analyzed from both the social scientific and interpretive paradigms, and the theoretical implications were explored.

### **Social Scientific Implications**

The first element required of a social scientific theory is that it helps us organize and summarize knowledge (Littlejohn, 1999). The theory of ICC presented in chapter eight was based on the extant academic conceptualizations and the practical, everyday understanding of ICC. By integrating these two perspectives, the theory encompassed both and organized their elements in a logically consistent manner. The three core tenets of the ICC theory presented provided the basic framework and summary of the necessary components for understanding ICC in any context namely, that: (1) ICC is an outcome; (2) ICC is externally measured; and (3) the cultural context of the interaction determines what is considered appropriate ICC. Additionally, the identification of core tenets, the context specific conditions, and the cultural elements of competency provided the focus of the newly constructed theory of ICC, fulfilling Littlejohn's (1999) second criteria of social scientific theory, requiring that theories help us focus on important things.

The third and fourth criteria of a social scientific theory included helping clarify what is observed and telling us how to look or observe (Littlejohn, 1999). The inclusion of the everyday experiences with ICC provided insight into what was observed. For example, the American participant in Taylor's (1994) study who lived in Indonesia provided a unique example of the culture-specific hierarchies and elements of perceived competence. Additionally, the culture-general nature of the theory presented in this dissertation provides



a guide for the overarching nature of ICC, yet suggests the need to explore culture specific hierarchies of competence.

The required exploration of culture-specific hierarchies fulfills Littlejohn's (1999) theoretical need to help learn more by suggesting new research avenues. First and foremost, ICC is an interaction outcome that only can be measured externally, and the terms of success are dictated by the host person or culture. As the theory is not specific to any one culture, future scholars necessarily will have to explore the value system, normative behaviors, and expectations of a specific cultural context to define the theory appropriately. This necessity for explanation requires the work of qualitative and interpretive study; and once the culture-specific hierarchies are established, the avenues for social scientific scholars to measure and refine the specific elements of ICC will be in place. The lack of specific cultural values in the presented ICC theory provides several opportunities for future scholars interested in ICC in terms of both exploration and application.

The theory of ICC presented in this dissertation perhaps best fulfills Littlejohn's (1999) theoretical element of helping us communicate ideas by providing vocabulary and organizational framework. Rather than listing specific elements of competence such as "shaking hands in the United States" or "bowing in China" the theory constructed provides broad categories, such as "nonverbal communication behaviors," "cognitive ability," and "attitude" as elements of competence. The labels of these culture-specific elements could be challenged or otherwise labeled, but the components of each element were consistent with the extant literature and practical understandings of ICC.

Having an interaction goal (e.g., getting directions to a specific location in a foreign country) is accounted for in the conditions of ICC which impact the hierarchy of the elements of competence. In this situation, perhaps the most important element of competence would be the “language(s) spoken” by the interactants. Additionally, thinking about the contextual requirements of an interaction provided the last of Littlejohn’s (1999) criteria for social science theory; to help us think critically about our experiences.

The two required elements of Littlejohn’s (1999) criteria for a social scientific theory missing from this analysis include: (5) help us predict; and (8) help us control our environments. The culture-general approach to ICC taken by this dissertation necessitates culture and context-specific applications before scientific measures can be constructed. Once culture-specific measures are created, the theory will enable scholars to predict competency in unique contextual situations; a necessary direction for future research. However, as ICC is inherently measured externally, this theory of ICC can improve our preparations, teachings, and attempts for achieving competence. However, internal control over intercultural communication interactions is unlikely. The theory of ICC presented in this dissertation fulfilled key criteria for a social scientific theory. But beyond that, the goal of creating a multi-paradigm theory of ICC required the exploration of its interpretive implications, as well.

### **Interpretive Implications**

As previously stated, the interpretive paradigm stresses the requirement of theory to provide insight into the unique human experience or, in the case of intercultural research, offer flexibility for unique cultural application. The greatest strength of the intercultural communication competence theory produced in this dissertation is its culture-general

perspective. Ultimately, the theory presented does not subscribe to the specific values of any one culture which offers opportunity for application in unique intercultural interactions.

ICC theory is culture-general, so no limitations inhibit the type of culture or intercultural interaction that could be explored. Namely, any group that shares a common set of values, normative behaviors, and expectations of competence can be considered a culture, and interactions with individuals or groups not sharing these same core components could be studied using this theory. For example, ICC theory is equally useful with different ethnic groups as it is with different age groups. For the interpretive paradigm, this flexibility fulfills its requirement for providing insight into unique experiences. For example, while the theory proposed suggests that power is a condition of ICC, the unique experiences of the metasynthesis participants describing their multi-national and multi-cultural work group experiences created this exception. Additionally, the student participants who drew pictures of intercultural incompetence described specific teacher-student and manager-employee contexts in which the expectations for accommodation were reversed from the academic and majority of the practical understandings of competence.

The inclusion of the unique experiences of the student and metasynthesis participants was the sole factor in the inclusion of the power condition for the constructed theory of ICC. This element of the theory suggesting that power plays a role in determining expected accommodation also allowed for the inclusion of the critical paradigm. Ultimately, the theory constructed in this dissertation provided a truly multi-paradigm or applied approach because of its ability to fulfill the criteria for good theory in

both the social scientific and interpretive paradigms. The range of academic scholars who can use this comprehensive theory of ICC is perhaps the greatest advantage of the theory because it does not limit, but instead requires, the work of many to examine and use its findings to advance knowledge in the communication discipline.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The introduction of the ICC theory provides scholars with the opportunity to retrospectively review and analyze how its presence earlier in the development of intercultural communication research may have affected the conceptualization, methodologies, and findings of intercultural competence. The studies included in the metasynthesis of this dissertation, for example, may have produced a very different understanding of ICC had the theory already been in place.

For example, Taylor's (1994) study of "interculturally competent" communicators interviewed individuals who had lived in foreign cultures for extended periods of time. The study resulted in a model that illustrated the learning process for becoming interculturally competent and suggested that the theory of perspective transformation partially explained the learning process. However, had the ICC theory been in place before Taylor's (1994) study, the results could have produced culture-specific hierarchies of elements of competency directly from individuals who had achieved ICC in those settings. In various types of studies, like Taylor's (1994), exploring the meaning or definition of competence, using the ICC theory would have allowed for placing the theory within context and the creation of culture and context-specific measures. Similarly, Sheer and Chen's (2003), Chang and Tharenou's (2004), Hajro and Pudelko's (2004), and Matveev's (2004) studies all could have provided both culture and business organization-specific

hierarchies of the elements of competency instead of producing further definitions and understanding of the concept of ICC.

### **Future Research**

Though the culture-general nature of this comprehensive theory of ICC provides significant benefits in terms of a lack of paradigm restrictions or specific culture types, its culture-general approach does create some limitations necessitating future research. Perhaps the biggest challenge for future research in applying the newly constructed, comprehensive theory of ICC lies in the amount of time required for the unique, culture-specific contextualization of the theory. This requirement is not a limitation nor a surprise, given that Witteborn (2003) proposed that the only way to truly study ICC required studying competency from within a specific culture.

The metasynthesis of existing qualitative research highlighted the unique cultural experiences of study participants. One element mentioned by some of these participants was the necessity of a connection to a cultural insider to help guide and gauge their competence. For example, a participant in Taylor's (1994) study emphasized the importance of this kind of relationship: "My closest friend was [Mia] and she was the one that sort of turned me on to what it was like there and when I would make mistakes . . ." (p. 167). While not a necessary component for achieving ICC, this type of relationship may be essential for scholars applying the newly constructed and comprehensive ICC theory to an unfamiliar cultural context.

In the long run, a significant body of research is needed before measures of ICC can be created and the practical application of the theoretical tenets and framework verified. However, once the unique hierarchy of expectations of competency is established for

specific cultures, the communication behaviors of outsiders can be measured by quantitative researchers observing interactions or providing questionnaires to intercultural communication interactants. Perhaps more importantly, creating the culture-specific models of the expected elements of competence will offer a better basis for both teaching and learning the behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for achieving ICC.

Helm (2009) suggested that, “as new technologies break down the physical barriers of distance, the possibilities of international communication increase” (p. 91). The ability to communicate with people outside each of our native cultures implies that now, more than ever, intercultural communication interactions happen at an accelerated pace. Witteborn (2003) claimed, “The study of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is increasingly important in a world that is characterized by intercultural encounters due to population migration, travel, technology development, and cyber-communication” (p. 187). This dissertation provided a united and comprehensive theory describing this phenomenon from both academic and everyday or practical perspectives. With future research applying this theory of ICC to specific and unique cultural contexts, perhaps intercultural communication interactants will not simply grow in frequency, but also in competency.

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