RESEARCH

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE FROM AN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract: This paper is aimed at reexamining intercultural communication from an identity social constructionist perspective and offering a linguistically-based research framework. The social constructionist approach holds that knowledge and reality are constructed through discourse, interactions and/or social interchange. This study maintains that language in action as communication in general serves dual purposes. It does not only build the social world, but also constructs identity - a critical issue in our global community recognized by many scholars (as most recently as Jandt, 2016; Fukuyama, 2018). Identity, though, is not just a social construct, but can operate as part of the purpose of communication as well. Recognizing that it is difficult to find clearly-defined methodologies in interdisciplinary areas such as intercultural communication (IC), this study proposes a research framework, grounded in pragmatic theory, and taking speech acts as the basic unit of analysis. The paper also offers implications for foreign language education (FLE) as the nature of FLE is the development of intercultural communication competence (ICC).

Keywords: identity, self-image, intercultural communication, social constructionist, speech acts

1. Introduction

In 2016, Jandt published "An introduction to intercultural communication: identities in a global community ". Previously, many other works deal with the issue of identity, but this one highlights the relationships between intercultural communication and identity in a big way – in the title. Communication is not limited to informing about the world, but it puts the issue of identity in play. In a globalizing world, identity seems to be the name of the game. We can even find the phrase "identity politics". It connotes how critical the issue of identities and/in intercultural communication is now. IC probably is as old as the history of mankind. The term "intercultural communication" is credited with Hall (1959). It happened when people from one tribe tried to communicate with others to satisfy their needs. The merchants who travelled the globe to sell their goods were engaged in IC, too. It explains why IC studies are believed to begin with business-related training. A large number of MBA programs include Intercultural Communication as one subject in its curriculum. Teaching a foreign language is essentially teaching the ability to communicate, and to do things in another language, or culture. This is intercultural

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communication *per se*. Following is an example illustrating the importance of ICC in our global village.

A Turkish male graduate student in the US lived in a residence hall where he shared a room with an American student. One day his roommate went into the bathroom and completely shaved his head. The Turkish student discovered this fact when he visited the bathroom and saw the hair everywhere. He returned to his room and said to his roommate, "*you've shaved your head*". "The American student replied, "*Yeah, I did*".

The Turkish student waited a little, then said, "*I discovered you shaved your head when I went into the room and saw the hair*, "*Yeah*" the American student confirmed (Varner & Beamer, 2006: 28).

Obviously, the Turkish student, who comes from a collectivist background, was being indirect. What he wanted was for the American to clean the bathroom, but he did not say something like, "Hey, you made a mess of the bath room. Now clean it". In this situation, the American failed to understand the Turkish student's intention. So, he simply said "yeah", apparently a little annoyed.

In this paper, I subscribe to the view that language in action as communication serves dual purposes: to construct the social world, and to build identity. Whenever we speak or write, we do not just say something about the world, and about us. We always and simultaneously construct. The social world and identity have become the two foci of a great deal of research in linguistics, social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and anthropology. I should, though, add that we need to see the social world and identity in a different light. They are not just as products of the social interactions, but they can operate as purposes of our communication. This

paper examines IC and ICC from an identity perspective.

2. The why of IC and ICC

The world as we know now is globalizing. Globalization 3.0 started around 2000 and was shrinking the world from a size small to a size tiny (Friedman, 2005), and easing the flow of labor and capital. There are multiple reasons why ICC is important. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) suggested there exists the need to enhance ICC to adapt to global and domestic workforce diversity fueled by globalization and integration. For example, an ASEAN single market and production base shall comprise five core elements: free flow of goods; free flow of services; free flow of investment; freer flow of capital; and free flow of skilled labor**.** (See *ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint*). Vietnam and Korea are now home to more than 100,000 people on each side. Next, ICC can help improve intercultural communication, and engage in creative problem solving (Ting-Toomey, 1999), and deepen our self-awareness. Without interaction with outsiders, differences become difficult to understand and difficult not to judge (Charon, 2004). Finally, what ICC can do is to help people to adapt to the new environment or ecology. It faciltates the adaptation processes among the self, the cultural community, and the larger environment. It can help to deal with conflicts in our intercultural community, and it may be good for world peace, too.

This globalization and integration process highlights the importance of one's identity as we are engaging with the intercultural world. Who am I? Our identity tells us about who we are in terms of our gender, social class, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, our power, ideologies, and value systems from a

certain point of view (Hoa, 2017). It is often viewed as one's self-image in other disciplines such as literary studies, communication studies, social psychology.

Toomey and Chung (2006) believe that our cultural values and beliefs may provide us with the critical reference points to construct our complex identities and to make sense of others'. There is no doubt that it is identity that binds people together. Jandt (2016) attaches great significance to understanding identity as it can "explain our past, provides insights about the present and predict our future". The issue of identity is now gaining greater significance as Fukuyama (2018) describes its importance in terms of the phrase "The Triumph of Identity". Everywhere one seeks to define one's identity: who I am or just "a natural and inevitable response to injustice". Fukuyama (2018) has this to say about the role and significance of identity "People will never stop thinking about themselves and their societies in identity terms". According to Cannadine (in Jandt, 2016), there are six determinants of identity including religion, nation, class, gender, race, and civilization. The landscape is intriguing, but our identities can be defined by race, gender, workplace, education, affinities, and nation, (Fukuyama, op.cit.). In fact, other determinants may be at play such as geography, region, profession, etc. Identity, however, does change in social interactions, and can assume new meanings. And I want to add that identity can be used to define a person, or a group.

The following story was told to me. The story teller was an American professor of business and commerce from Kansai University, Japan. He was taking a group of Japanese students to the furniture-making village of Dong Ky, north of Hanoi in August 2018. They conversed with the locals there about the needs to expand their market access

to Japan to make more money. To sell their products to Japan, they were told to change the styles, the details of their products to suit the Japanese tastes. What happened was that the locals said no, and the professor found out that these folks were very proud of their past, and they said they do not like the folks in towns.

What can we make of this story in modern Vietnam? We simply do not just get a glimpse of what the speakers said about their life and work in the village of Dong Ky, but we sense the identity/self-image that the folks in this narrative wished to build: traditional and conservative ideologies and respect of traditions. They wanted to set up a contrast as they were not afraid to talk about the differences between their life styles and those of the urban people. If they followed the advice of the professor, we might view them as innovative, open to change, or dynamic (the new identity).

The term "Intercultural communication" consists of two stems: culture and communication, about the relationship between these two constructs, Hall (1959), a pioneer in IC, said metaphorically, "Culture is communication. Communication is culture." IC may be defined as a symbolic interactional process whereby individuals of two or more different cultures or cultural communities construct shared meanings and identities in social contexts (Ting-Toomey, 1999). What is clear from this definition is that IC is an interactional process using symbols which can either be verbal or non-verbal. The other key thing to keep in mind is that different cultures or cultural communities are involved. A model of overlapping interacting cultures may be presented below. Culture A and culture B represents where speakers come from. The overlapped Culture C is the adaptive constructed space for them to communicate. It is expected that this C culture will continue to grow.
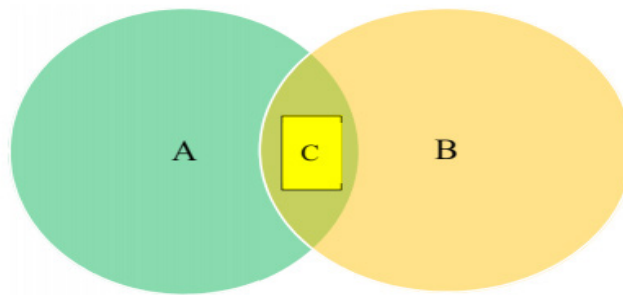
Last, the word "communication" may be misleading to some people as it may connote the idea of sharing or transmitting some information about a certain state of affairs only. But in reality, communication, be it intercultural or intracultural, is about constructing the social world, and creating identities in social contexts. Whenever we speak or write, we are engaged in saying, doing and being/identity (Gee, 1999). Earlier, Halliday talked in the same fashion about the three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. I subscribe to the view that in this process, identity construction assumes greater significance and really drives the interactional process. Culture is identity. Identity is culture. However, we must not forget that intercultural communication in the context of foreign language education is, first and foremost, linked to acquiring verbal communicative competence in a foreign language.

IC competence is related to the concept of intercultural competence, whose scope is broader. It refers to the ability to do many things across cultures like to think and act effectively and appropriately, to function, and to communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds. It includes knowledge, skills, motivation attitudes, and awareness.

3. Constructing identity

I now clarify the notion of "identity", as used in this study. Identity is viewed as the self-image of an individual. As such, it is the make-up of the major traits or defining characteristics of an entity, or in other words, of identities. An individual can possess multiple identities.

Identity can be social or personal. Social identity refers to self- and other-categories or characteristics which define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories. These features serve as markers that indicate what that person is, in the eyes of others (their society), and put that person in the same group as other individuals who share the same attributes. Some macro-labels are "national, religious, class, race, professional, gender, etc." Personal identity includes attributes unique to each of us or the things that make you you. Social and personal identity, however, define each other in the sense that the same self-aspect can provide the basis for a collective (social) identity, and at the same time can be construed as a constituent or element of one's individual identity (Simon, 2004).

There are two kinds of approaches to identity. The essentialist view will say that it is fixed, and variations are deemed as secondary. The constructionist view will hold that "individuals' identities are neither fixed nor necessarily given by birth." It is multiple, emerging, and continuously evolving as work in progress in social interactions. There are crucial implications. If we hold identity to be fixed (the

essentialist view), we tend to put people in the boxes of their culture: we can expect individuals to behave in ways that are presumed to be in line with their fixed identities. Thus, there exists a possibility to predict how people will behave and react in their social interactions (Triandis, 1995). But this can lead to risks of stereotyping. But if we see identity as work in progress, something that is evolving, or something we can change, adjust, and construct, or negotiate, we won't risk boxing people, and we can reshape our identity as we adapt to a changing world and reality. We have an open mind as we interact with individuals from other cultures. This paper takes the constructionist approach to identity, which, inevitably, leads to the adoption of an identity construction perspective. This implies that we use verbal and nonverbal language in social contexts as resources to construct the social world, relations and identities. This view is shared by researchers in anthropology, linguistics, psychology, sociology, history, literature, gender studies, and social theories, among others (Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006).

According to Ting-Toomey (1999), there are three assumptions involved. First, in every type of communicative encounter, individuals represent and create their identity of "self-image", or "self-conception". The next issue is how they acquire their identity as a result. The answer is it comes about as a result of their interactions with other individuals. Finally, they can either feel secure or vulnerable in the process depending on the specific situations they find themselves in.

Using language is actually an active building process. We construct and reconstruct social reality and identities not just via language, but also via language in social interactions (Gee, 1999). This concern of this paper is IC and ICC mainly from the perspective of building identity – a social construct. Seeing identity as a social construct implies a reorientation from a more essentialist position. A person's identity, whether it be social, personal, is something that is not just enacted, but constructed in discourse; and language (verbal and nonverbal) offers choices to do this job (Potter & Whetherell, 1987).

The construction of identity spells out what it equals and what it differs from. Identity construction can happen in a myriad of ways, for example in art by way of metaphor or symbolic communication (Dowling, 2011). Discursive psychologists such as Potter and Whetherell (1987), and critical discourse analysts (Fairclough, 2001) see identity as a discursive construct. That is something we use verbal and nonverbal linguistic resources to create in socially-situated interactions. To create our identities, we can perform the speech acts (direct or indirect) of asserting, defining, or redefining, modifying, challenging and/or supporting their own and others' desired self-images" (Ting-Toomey, 1999) in socially situated interactions. In extreme cases, they have to give up on their own identities. The following example from Toomey & Chung (2006: 313) provides an illustration of how identity construction happened. This implies the crucial importance of language as resources used for constructing or re/negotiating identities.

"The 19-year old Thi Nguyen was a contestant for Miss Vietnam 2003, Southern California. Throughout the pageant, she was challenged by others and also by her own opinion concerning whether she was "Vietnamese enough" in this larger U.S. cultural world. "It's hard", she mused, "because most of us were born here in the US., and we're very Americanized. However, we're all in that same boat of not being American enough for the Americans and not being Vietnamese enough for the Vietnamese. Another contestant with red highlights in her

hair, Kelly Ly, remarked, "my parents tell me all the time that I don't fit in to the traditional [image of a] Vietnamese girl … I figure I should try to stand out by being myself" (Nguyen, in Toomey & Chung, 2006).

What is apparent from this example is both Thi and Kelly were somewhat confused about their identity. They may have asked themselves, "Am I Vietnamese enough to participate in this pageant in the case of Thi, and I am American enough to be described as someone not fitting into the traditional image of a Vietnamese girl?" They can be seen as struggling with their identity identification. These two girls were experiencing a sense of identity insecurity or identity self-doubt.

The issue of identity construction has a crucial implication for language education. Intercultural communication is not exclusively concerned with representing and constructing reality, but more than that, it constructs identity verbally and nonverbally. The issue for the language educators and IC researchers is to conduct research into how these symbolic realizations of identities occur. Although IC has been well-researched, but my observation is that most of the research done to date is not linguistically grounded and based.

4. Defining ICC

ICC is closely related to IC. After all, as language educators, we want to help develop ICC in our learners. What is ICC and what will ICC consist of? ICC refers to the abilities individuals have to communicate or construct identities appropriately, effectively, and satisfactorily in intercultural encounters (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) at cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. As such, it has become a must-have attribute of individuals these days, who need it to assist identity definition, to make sense of the

multiple institutions of a complex world, to get prepared for intercultural dialogue, and work for world peace and democracy. ICC is really about identity.

There are a number of approaches to ICC. It is "as "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment" (Chen & Starosta, 1998-9: 28). They outline three key components of intercultural communication competence: intercultural sensitivity (affective process), intercultural awareness (cognitive process), and intercultural adroitness (behavioral process), defined as verbal and nonverbal skills needed to act effectively in intercultural interactions. Wiseman (2001) posits that ICC "involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures". This definition points to "effectively" and "appropriately" as the two criteria of ICC. Effective ICC means that individuals achieve its communicative goals, and appropriate ICC "entails the use of messages that are expected in a given context, and actions that meet the expectations and demands of the situation".

The psychological perspective suggests the key components of ICC include "motivation, self- and other knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty". From this perspective, knowledge may include self- and other-awareness, mindfulness, and cognitive flexibility. Building knowledge of our own cultures, identities, and communication patterns takes more than passive experience (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). From a foreign language education perspective, ICC should consist of verbal and nonverbal competence, socio-cultural background knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivations (Toomey & Chung, op.cit.). Others add awareness and flexibility.

Verbal and nonverbal competence plays a key in successful intercultural communication. Canale and Swain (1980) posited that communicative competence consists of four components: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Of the four components mentioned above, linguistic competence assumes a pivotal role, and may take life-long efforts to acquire. It may be argued the other three components are embedded in linguistic competence.

Knowledge here refers to what one knows about a culture, its values, beliefs, and worldview. The general thinking about the relationships between culture and our behaviors is that cultural values are instrumental in determining and shaping our communication (Kluckhohn, 1967; Hofstede, 1980/2001; Rokeach, 1972). An awareness of cultural values has become imperative for effective and appropriate intercultural communication. For example, Andersen (2015) observed that individuals from high-power distance cultures consider employers to be their mentors and will not question orders. The constructs of individualism vs. collectivism lead to the differences between communication styles (Ting-Toomey, 1999; Triandis, 1995) as follows:

Individualism	Low-context	Direct	Self-enhancement	Person-oriented	Talk
Collectivism	High-context	Indirect	Self-effacement	Status-oriented	Silence

From an intercultural communication perspective, knowing that the interlocutor comes from an individualist culture could prepare us for behaviors that are not part of our being. For example, a collectivist arriving late for an appointment may blame the traffic or other factors rather than acknowledging that it is his fault. This is in line with what intercultural scholars have said, "collectivists tend to attribute to external causes where individualists attribute events to internal individual causes (Newman, 1993). "Knowledge" also refers knowledge of the linguistic systems and how they operate. We need to acquire knowledge of nonverbal communication as well. It is crucial to be able to use both types of knowledge to communicate meanings and to construct our complex identities. Ting-Toomey (1999) added the dimension of mindfulness to knowledge – the first effective step to enhancing our awareness of our thinking and judging. Mindfulness is being aware of "what is going on in our thinking, feelings, and experiencing".

Skills and flexibility refer to our operational abilities to integrate knowledge, attitude, awareness in our intercultural social practice. Ting-Toomey mentioned such skills as values clarification skills, verbal empathy skills, identity support skills, facework management skills, and etc. Flexibility refers to the abilities to adapt to intercultural interactions in an appropriate and effective manner as is required by the situation in which the interlocutors find themselves in.

Attitude and motivations is another integral part of ICC, as it can involve the cognitive and affective layers (Toomey & Chung, op.cit.). It refers to our readiness to learn about, interact with others (Ting-Toomey, op.cit.), and adopt an open mindset. Our mindsets can be ethno-centric and ethno-relative. The ethno-centric mindset means we use our own worldviews and cultural values as the reference points.

By contrast, an ethno-relative mindset will take into account the other person's cultural frame of reference. An English native with an ethnocentric frame of mind would be critical of a speaker from Asian countries, who may ask him how old he is, and how much he makes a month. On the other hand, one with an ethno-relative mind would try to make sense of the situation: why does he ask me these questions? Is he being curious or just wanting to show some concern? This will naturally ease the interaction process as one tries to construct one's identity.

Awareness refers to the way we understand the situations, sensing the atmosphere, perceiving the interlocutors' needs and goals. It is observed that ICC does not come about all at once. Its development can be conceptualized as a staircase model (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 51-52), passing from unconscious incompetence stage through conscious incompetence and conscious competence stages to the highest level of unconscious competence stage. This model is presented below:
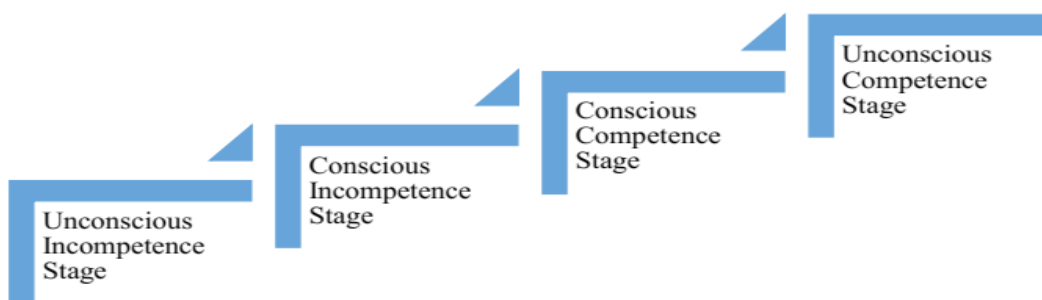
5. Researching IC from an identity constructionist perspective

The focus of research that this paper advocates is to study the relationships between identities and intercultural communication: how identities are constructed in this type of interactions. The missing link, though, is the apparent lack of attention given to how IC behaviors and interactions are realized verbally and nonverbally. There exists the need to use identity as a cultural variable in our research to make it theoretically based, alongside the cultural variables mostly used including individualism vs. collectivism, low vs. high context communication, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity vs. femininity (Gudykunst in Spencer-Oatley, 2007).

The emic and etic approaches

Following Pike's (1966) discussion of phonemics and phonetics, we can apply either the emic or etic approaches. The emic approach entails a study of identity and IC behaviors only from within one culture, based on constructs that are relative to internal characteristics. In contrast, the etic orientation conducts studies of IC in many cultures from an external position, using absolute or universal constructs (Berry, 1980, adapted). Emic analyses often use qualitative research methods whereas etic studies are equated with quantitative ones (Gudykunst in Spencer-Oatley, 2007). However, IC research should be theoretically based, incorporating identity as a variable.

As a language educator, I see the need for a linguistic approach to studying IC, which involves researching the linguistic realizations of those relationships. Put another way, it is about how verbal resources are used to

communicate, and to construct and/or to make sense of identity in intercultural interactions. The key actor is the speaker or writer at the center of the process. He or she makes sense of the social context, has a communicative purpose in mind, and performs IC behaviors as guided by the desired self-image, and values. In this sense, social reality and identity operate as drivers behind his or her communication, not just its products. Because we want to project a certain identity and build a certain piece of social world, we will deploy the verbal (or nonverbal) resources accordingly, influenced in some way by the cultural values that we hold. It is a very complex process involving a host of factors, including cultural values, communicative purposes, social contexts. Isolating the effect being studied (identity or cultural values) presents a formidable challenge that research design of IC has to cope with.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to find clearly-defined methodologies in interdisciplinary areas. Intercultural communication studies are such an area. The search continues for a linguistic analytic basis. Positing that speech acts serve as the basis for identity construction as discussed in "Constructing identities", and that speech acts are the minimal operational unit, I suggest a pragmatically-oriented approach to study IC (Hoa, 2018: 8). It takes speech acts as the minimal unit of analysis, focusing on the following items and their linguistic realizations.

- Speech acts (such as *asserting, defining,* or *redefining, modifying, challenging* and/or *supporting* identities)
- Implicature (indirect speech acts)
- Textual organization of speech acts into larger units of discourse (moves, exchanges, and discourse)
- The use of pronouns (*I* vs. *We* cultural identity)

- Modality

Following is an example for illustration (Hoa, 2018: 10-11). The context is after a meal at the White House, President Trump asked all the guests to leave except the FBI Director, Comey (who is now ex-director because he was fired by Trump). Flynn was another ex-security adviser, and early supporter of Trump in the election. He lost his job because he did not tell the truth about his contacts with Russia in the 2016 US presidential elections. The FBI was conducting an investigation into his conduct during the 2016 elections. Following is the interaction between the two men (Hoa, 2017). This was an unequal-power situation, where Trump had more power.

> Trump: *I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go. He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go.*
>
> Comey: *I agree he is a good guy.*

Later at his hearing at the Senate Intelligence Committee, Comey said he took Trump's words "letting Flynn" go as a direction, but Trump's press secretary said that the President was just hoping. This short exchange is very significant in light of the framework suggested above. Trump was being indirect, dropping an implicature that the FBI should drop its investigation on Flynn: *I hope you can let this go*. The use of "can" points to a possibility. (Why wasn't he direct as many of us were led to believe that individualists prefer direct communication styles?). Comey was being very tactful and indirect, aware that he is Trump's subordinate. He couched his "NO answer" in saying "*I agree he is a good guy*". What speech acts did the two men perform in this situation? With conventional wisdom, I will say that Trump was performing an act of directing. At least, this is how Comey constructed his sense of the intention of the President as he testified

– a direction from the President. Comey, on his part, literally says that he agrees, but not with the request of the President, but the fact that "*Flynn is a good guy*". This statement has nothing to do with Trump's intention. The social context that can be activated to make sense of the meanings can shed light on how Trump, with more "power", just offered a hint. Perhaps, he was afraid of being seen as illegally getting involved in an investigation carried out by the FBI. Comey, for his part as an underdog, might not want to hurt the ego of Trump, or displease the President. Based on the language both used, it is possible for us to construe Trump's identity as "an indirect speaker" and Comey's as "indirect and tactful speaker" in their respective roles.

Researching IC is concerned with nonverbal communication as well. The use of nonverbal symbols in intercultural communication has been well-researched and well-documented (Andersen, 2015; Daniel, 2015; Gibson, 2000; Jandt, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). Nonverbal communication refers specifically to actions or attributes of individuals that have socially shared meanings (Jandt, 2016), or "nonlinguistic behaviors (or attributes) that are consciously or unconsciously encoded and decoded via communication channels" (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 115). I want to emphasize that the nonverbal behaviors or actions that individual performs serve to construct our social and personal identities. For example, the way a person typically uses his body language may tell us about who he is (identity). Nonverbal communication is quite subtle, multidimensional, and spontaneous, and can make the interlocutor feel uncomfortable (Andersen, 2015). It serves many purposes including reflecting and managing identities, expressing emotions and attitudes, managing conversations (Ting-Toomey, 1999), or sending uncomfortable messages, making relationships clear, or reinforcing and modifying verbal message (Jandt, 2016). Thus, having an operational knowledge of nonverbal communication is, no doubt, an asset. The literature on nonverbal communication types abound. Jandt (op.cit.) lists proxemics (the use of personal space), kinetics (gestures, body movements, facial expressions, and eye contacts), chronemics (the study of the use of time), paralanguage (use of vocal characteristics, voice qualifiers, and vocal segregates), and silence. Silence means a lot. It can communicate consent, awe, contempt, regrets, etc. Another type of nonverbal communication is haptics (the use of touch). The following example from Hall (1959, adapted in Jandt, 2016: 107) illustrates how important our knowledge of nonverbal communication is. It is proxemics for most people in North America.

	Distance	Description	Voice
Intimate	Touching to 18 inches	Private situations with people who are emotionally close. If others invade this space, we feel threatened	Whisper
Personal	18 inches to 4 feet	The lower end is handshake distance – the distance most couples stand in public	Soft voice
Casual	4 feet to 12 feet	The lower end is the distance between salespeople and customers and between people who work together in business	Full voice
Public	Greater than 12 feet	Situations such as teaching in a classroom or delivering a speech	Loud voice

Hall (1976) was aware of the role of nonverbal symbols in intercultural communication, and was often credited with distinguishing between High Context vs. Low Context communication. This distinction is based on the degree to which communication is explicit and verbal or implicit and nonverbal. Thus, meanings or identities in low-context communication are revealed mostly via the verbal code. By contrast, high-context communication depends to a large extent on the physical context, and via nonverbal symbols.

6. Implications for foreign language education

As mentioned above, foreign language teaching or education is essentially helping learners to develop their ICC. First, we have a choice to make in terms of approaches: an essentialist view or constructionist view of identity. I want to caution that although the essentialist approach can be helpful in certain contexts, but not productive because the construction of identity or meanings is very much situation-specific. In other words, individuals will construct their multiple identities as they see fit for their communicative purposes. Therefore, the constructionist approach will prevail.

There is a myriad of ways in which ICC can be cultivated and developed, but as Spitzberg (2015) commented, as our knowledge and skills increase, our competence increases. I just want to add that if we have the right and suitable attitudes, our competence increases, too. In the same vein, Ahnagari and Zamanian (2014) suggested foreign language education calls for the willingness to engage with the foreign culture, the right attitudes to see from the outside, the ability to see the world through others' lenses, to tolerate uncertainty, to act as a cultural mediator, to evaluate others' points of view, and to consciously use culture learning skills.

Enhancing ICC will entail developing communicative competence, and especially linguistic competence – knowledge of the language systems and rules as a prerequisite. This is a life-long process. Then, we need to acquire knowledge of one's and other's cultures, politics and history. This is important, but our knolwedge should not be limited to this dimension only, but rather it ought include our knowledge of how one's own and others' collective and personal identities operate. We also need to know about our own and others' values, beliefs, the social processes and institutions. Skills that are critically needed include skills of making sense of the interactional process, being able to listen to others, being open-minded, and computing meanings and identities. This can save us from making the wrong assumptions about others' behavior. Other skills are discovery and interaction. Another issue is to acquire the right attitudes and feelings that acknowledge the identities of others, repsect and empathize with others, and tolerate differences and ambiguity. We need to take the right dose of ethnorelativism and be open-minded about otherness. It is crucial to be flexible and sensitive to others' ways of communication and interaction. IC flexibility can be measured by appropriateness, effectiveness, adaptability (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). Appropriateness represents the degree to which the interactions and exchanges are deemed as proper and matching the expectations of the insiders of the culture. Effectiveness refers to the degree to which communicators succeed in communicating their meanings and constructing their desired self-images. Adaptability is equated with the ability to make situation-specific changes. All these three components work together. Finally, there is creativity, seen as the yardstick for evaluating IC flexibility.

The landscape of models for training and developing ICC is quite diverse with a wide range of possibilities. According to Chen and Starosta (2005), they may fall into six categories such as the classroom model, the simulation model, the self-awareness model, the cultural awareness model, the behavioral model, and the interactional model. In spite of this diversity, the common denominator that we find is that the underlying constructionist approach to ICC training framework is the preferred one. This paradigm involves an experiential or learning-by-doing training framework at whatever stage it may be. For example, one of the most effective ways to develop self- and other-knowledge is by direct and thoughtful encounters with other cultures. Individuals interact directly with members from other cultures, and they will work to make sense of the value systems and appropriate behavioral patterns. We can build ICC through experiential learning and reflective practices. In this spirit, Kolb (1984) suggested a sequence of four stages:

- Concrete experience
- Reflective observation
- Abstract conceptualization
- Active experimentation

To illustrate, the following example can be used to expose learners to experience, reflect, conceptualize, and experiment actively when an opportunity presents itself. In an online newspaper, Mr. Truong Gia Binh, Chairman and CEO of FPT – a big IT company in Vietnam related this story about his experience with the Japanese trying to sell his company's software. He was quoted as saying: "câu trả lời ông hay gặp nhất là: *Chúng tôi sẽ mua phần mềm của các bạn nhưng vì chúng tôi chưa nói tiếng Anh nên các bạn hãy chờ chúng tôi học xong tiếng Anh rồi hẵng quay lại – the reply he always got from his Japanese business counterparts is: OK, we will buy your software, but because our*

English is not good enough. So come back when we can speak English". Later he understood that reply as a "NO". This is typically Japanese way of communication, he observed.

One may ask why the Japanese did not call a spade a spade. Their collectivist values will make them not give a direct and straightforward "No". They did not want to hurt the face of their interlocutors. They wanted to be polite and face-saving. This is the identity they wanted to create and to make us understand.

Gibson (2002) offered a deductive package for business (or classroom model), covering the basic concepts of IC, followed by examining natural and authentic interactions. Collier (2015) recommended a ten-step or ten-question inventory to help probe cultural identities in intercultural communication. These ten questions basically concern our beliefs about communication and culture, the relevant cultural identities, the role of power and ideology, the intercultural questions to be asked, the communicative messages to be examined, the context of intercultural problems, the how of studying data, as well as the interpretations and determinations that we can arrive at.

7. Conclusion

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is an attribute we can't do without in a multicultural world. It has become an area of interdisciplinary study drawing on social psychology, communication studies, sociology, and anthropology. ICC research is getting more theoretically and practically relevant in the global village, where identity assumes a great deal of significance. But we are also aware that IC performance is a function of multiple variables; so studying the effect of one factor is a challenge. The ICC framework discussed in this paper includes verbal and

nonverbal competence, cultural knowledge, skills, flexibility, attitudes, motivations, and awareness. We have to cultivate attitudes that motivate us to discover knowledge, to tolerate differences and ambiguity, and to develop skills that enable us. However, a satisfactory model of ICC that translates well into different cultures remains to be developed (Collier, 2015).

An identity construction approach views identity as a crucial factor in IC, but not at the expense of cultural values. This approach recognizes that identity construction process can influence the choice of linguistic and nonlinguistic resources in communication. In this regard, identity operates like a cultural value. Identity and language use are in dialectical relationships. Believing that identity is multiple, emerging, and socially constructed can change our attitudes towards the effect of intercultural communication. An individual can have multiple identities. This can save us from falling into the trap of stereotyping people or put them in cultural boxes. It will help us to make sense of others' conduct and behaviors, and adapt creatively to the new cultural environment. Incorporating identity as a variable in the research equation is crucial, but it is critical to keep in mind that developing ICC is a complex process involving other variables such as cultural values, communicative purposes, and social contexts. There exist immense opportunities for foreign language teachers, trainers and practitioners to make use of this approach in research and develop the ability to communicate appropriately, effectively and satisfactorily in global communities.

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NĂNG LỰC GIAO TIẾP LIÊN VĂN HÓA DỰA TRÊN BẢN CHẤT KIẾN TẠO XÃ HỘI CỦA BẢN SẮC RIÊNG VÀ NHỮNG GỢI Ý CHO GIÁO DỤC NGOẠI NGỮ

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết này xem xét giao tiếp văn hóa (IC) dựa trên bản chất kiến tạo xã hội của bản sắc riêng (identity), và đưa ra khung nghiên cứu mang tính ngôn ngữ học. Đường hướng kiến tạo xã hội quan niệm rằng tri thức và thực tiễn xã hội được tạo ra trong quá trình tương tác xã hội, và rằng giao tiếp nói chung có hai mục đích, không chỉ kiến tạo thế giới xã hội mà còn tạo ra bản sắc. Tuy nhiên, bản sắc không chỉ là một sản phẩm được tạo ra trong quá trình tương tác xã hội, mà nó còn là một phần của mục đích giao tiếp. Bài viết đề xuất một khung nghiên cứu dựa trên lý thuyết dụng học do việc xác định khung nghiên cứu chặt chẽ cho các lĩnh vực nghiên cứu liên ngành như giao tiếp liên văn hóa thực sự là một thách thức. Với quan niệm rằng giáo dục ngoại ngữ về bản chất là phát triển năng lực giao tiếp liên văn hóa (ICC), bài viết đã nêu ra một số gợi ý nhằm phát triển năng lực này.

Từ khóa: bản sắc, hình ảnh bản thân, giao tiếp liên văn hóa, kiến tạo xã hội, hành động ngôn ngữ