The Space in Between: Intercultural Communication in Higher-Level Language Training

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Goal of this Plenary

- To together increase our Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) for higher-level language teaching
- To develop “What we know/What we feel/What we do” in our intercultural (IC) teaching/work
Moving Forward Together

Words Matter/Images Matter

Please choose the 3 words/terms that are for you, the most negative and the most positive.

- Multi-cultural
- Diversity
- Getting rid of the foreignness
- Soft skills
- Authenticity
- Diversity
- Being reduced to a benchmark
- Sounding like you are from just around the corner
- The immigrants
- Inter-cultural
- Poaching
- Discrimination
- Racism
- Openness
- Inclusion
- Cross-cultural
- Flexibility
O’ Canada!

O Canada, Drew Brook-Cormack, 1000-pc jigsaw puzzle
For me

This conference, this topic, this chance to share is about

openness, diversity, inclusion, and survival.
“Why don’t employees hire?”

- Soft skills? What are the assumptions here?
- Who is going to learn these soft skills? Immigrants! Who is going to teach them? Me!?!?
- Let’s think carefully through this agenda.
- NEITHER THE PROBLEM NOR THE ANSWER IS **SOFT SKILLS** FOR NEW IMMIGRANTS!!!!!!!
- This is only a small part of the complex and exciting field of intercultural communication!
- Can we comfortably hope soft skills alone can help?
- Let’s create a framework for synergy and move forward together.
Tip of the Toes Situation in Class or Workplace

Something has disturbed me
Something has disturbed someone
Something has disturbed the environment
Six questions to ask ourselves:

- Is it culture?
- Is it discourse?
- Is it language?
- Is it personality?
- Is it the situation?
- Is it me?

This is a very important slide. Unless this is checked, moving forward is near impossible.
Clarify What’s Going On

- Say, “I feel _______.”
- Ask “How can we clarify what happened here?”
- Use rollovers and brief therapy principles

Rollover: “What does x mean to you?”

Brief Therapy: (1) focus on the specific problem
(2) provide direct intervention
My Definition of Success in Teaching

• Everyone can experience
• Everyone can contribute
• Everyone can learn

Avoid blocks and phobias. Create carefully crafted intercultural episodes nurturing people towards the next level and finally towards integration. (see Milton)
We Need:

• Personnel with intercultural skills
• Intercultural experts
• Research and knowledge in cultural practices
• Curricular internationalization
• Bridging, fast-tracks, and partnerships in higher education for those educated outside NA

(Huisman & van der Wende, 2005)
Internationalization in Canada has not kept pace with Globalization

- **Globalization** is the economic, political, and societal forces pulling us towards international involvement.
- **Internationalization** is the upgrading of international perspectives, skills and resources via inter-cultural training and enhanced language support.

(Altbach & Knight, 2007)
Cultural Boundary Lines

• Culture is not just the traditional national, ethnic, religious, race categories. We also belong to cultures when we have a shared set of values and meanings.

• Cultural boundaries are fluid and our cultures can grow and decrease.
• Communication breakdown in class between a doctor from Iran and a doctor from Ukraine
• Communication breakdown in class between a 40-something Korean pharmacist and a younger Lebanese doctor
The Persian concept of “ta’arof” involves all three issues: L, D, C

- **Central concept** = warm welcoming, praising, politeness and good manners
- **Origins** in the Arabic term for “mutual recognition”
- **Essential ability** for negotiating relationships
- **Involves** offers, compliments, exchange of pleasantries, food, gifts, and invitations
- **Expression of** selflessness and humility - necessary for keeping face - “shaxsiyyaet” and showing sincerity and respect - “ehteram”
- **Can be interpreted** as empty formality or ritual courtesy by NA but runs much deeper - has no equivalent in NA culture
- **Iranians can be dismayed by** a lack of ‘ta’arof’ in our classroom cultures

(Cultural info from Eslami, 2005)
Confucian Heritage Cultures: Face

- Dominant concept in interpreting and regulating social behavior
- Must be maintained and enhanced
- Each person in a social group is responsible for saving his/her own face and the face of others
- The teacher, having a higher social standing, is expected to adhere to a higher standard of ethics and to maintain self-control
- The teacher should not “argue” with the students and vice versa
- The teacher should protect the face of the students, the other teachers, and the institution

“I lost a lot of face by being unable to answer the question. How could he do that to me? I really have no face now.”

(Chan, 2005)
#1 The Punctuation Principle
Other cultures are mirrors in which we can see ourselves – what the anthropologist Margaret Mead (1934) called

“the looking-glass self”
The Mirror for Our Higher-Level Language Training

- Materials
- Topics
- Trivia
- Timing
- Disenfranchisements
Belonging to Cultural Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I belong to:</th>
<th>I don’t belong to:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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## Belonging to Cultural Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I belong to:</th>
<th>I don’t belong to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Childless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Social Drinkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privileged</td>
<td>Free on Weekends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University-educated</td>
<td>Vegetarians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raised in a Religious Family</td>
<td>Musically-gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnered</td>
<td>Disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet Owner</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardener</td>
<td>Contract Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher etc. etc. etc.</td>
<td>Sports-minded etc. etc. etc.</td>
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• **Inter-cultural** as it will involve individuals raised in at least two different cultures.

• **Intra-cultural** because it will impact on how each person sees, knows and interacts with the world.
• POWER AND HISTORY: Intercultural communication takes place within the ever-changing contexts of politics, power, wealth, position, popularity, and the past.

• CULTURAL DIFFERENCES: Intercultural communication takes place within the context of cultural differences.
Doctor, Baker, Taco Maker

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gizFGqKiCsw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gizFGqKiCsw)
- How do you feel when you watch this story?
- List the career-changing moments in Taco Luis’ life and give 5 emotions he likely felt before and after each episode.
- Are you satisfied with the ending? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Give 5 reasons he is not a doctor right now.
- Why do you think he is not an airline mechanic?
- What would need to be different for his original plan to have worked?
- Give 5 adjectives to describe the overall situation.
The “Saris and Samosas” Approach

• Visible cultural differences are interesting and doable. We can accept and try out clothes, foods, dances, arts etc.

• Norms and values are trickier and tend to be prescribed rather than described. We get upset about the wrong distance, handshake, greeting, time orientation etc.

• Core beliefs are left unexamined. We don’t ask, “What is a husband/wife/child? Who taught me to think this? What is the race/power situation? Who holds the cultural imperative? Am I privileged because I am white/female/straight/tall etc?”
The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity by Milton Bennett

**ethnocentric stages**
- denial
- defense
- minimization

**ethnorelative stages**
- acceptance
- adaptation
- integration

**cognitive**

**affective**

**behavioural**

Changes must occur in three areas.
Bloom’s Taxonomy and Intercultural Growth

• Cognitive

• Affective

• Behavioral

How can we encourage growth in all three areas in ourselves and our classes?
# Ethnocentric Stages
(adapted from Milton)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Need to:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Highlight cultural differences (cognitive/affective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>Emphasize common humanity (affective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>Develop cultural self-awareness (cognitive)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethnorelative Stages  (adapted from Milton)

Need to:

**Acceptance**  Refine cultural analysis skills (cognitive)

**Adaptation**  Focus on theories and models (cognitive)

**Integration**  Resolve intercultural identity (affective)
# 2: Invisible sets of rules exist that reflect values

- We operate by rules
- We are unaware of most of them
- We unconsciously reward and punish others for following or not following them
Collecting Stories

Ghada and the coffee.
• What rules are involved?
• What cultural values are displayed?

Aihua and the bank account.
• What rules are involved?
• What cultural values are displayed?
Continuums NOT Stereotypes
“The reason man does not experience his true cultural self is that until he experiences another self as valid he has little basis for validating his own self.”

Edward T. Hall
From Monochronic to Polychronic

(Chronemics)

Monochronic Concepts

• one thing at a time is best - concentrate on the task at hand
• time commitments/deadlines/schedules are serious
• adhere religiously to plans
• try not to disturb others
• follow rules of privacy
• show great respect for ownership/private property even within family
• know how to work within short-term relationships
Polychronic Concepts

- Do many things at once
- Distractions are acceptable/interruptions are acceptable
- Commit to people and relationships not time
- Change plans often and easily
- Be more concerned with associates’ lives than with privacy
- Borrow, lend, share within relationships easily
#3 The non-verbal trumps the verbal
Intercultural Teaching Areas

1. **Intonation**: high-rise, low-rise, flat, rise-fall, fall-fall
2. **Facial Expression**: smile, sneer, frown, pout, grimace, moth twist, eyebrow raise
3. **Gesture**: towards or away from heart
4. **Head Movement/Position**: shake, nod, tilt, raise, lower
5. **Body Orientation**: towards or away from
6. **Vocabulary**: denotation and connotation
7. **Grammar**
Haptics
(the study of touching behaviour)

Seven types of touch:
* **positive affect** (support, appreciation, inclusion)
* **playfulness**
* **control** (compliance, attention wanted, response needed)
* **ritual** (greeting/leave-taking)
* **hybrid** (mix some of above as in a hug good-bye)
* **task-related**
* **accidental**

Jones and Yarbrough (1985)
Proxemics
(the study of distance in interaction)

- **Public** (teacher to class)
- **Social** (classmates chatting)
- **Personal** (student asking teacher after class)
- **Intimate** (friends in class whispering)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7040259.stm
Oculesics
(the study of eye contact)

- attentive focus/challenging stare
- shifty-eyed/respectful looking away
- flirtatious up-look/“adultery of the eyes”
- lustful glance/complimentary notice
- attempt to control fear/bad presentation skills
- attempt to access vocabulary/lack of attentiveness or ability
Emotional Regulation and Discourse Rules

- Overlapping
- Silence
- Place holders
- Fillers
- Number of items
- Amount of enthusiasm
- Control
Clothing and Accruements
Gesture

• The triangle
• The wrist
• The hand to heart
• The 3 per utterance
Head Movement

Teach the tilt and nod.
Posture

Teach the shift and lean.
# 4: Conceptual Fluency is Key

- Objects, metaphors, and experiences are different from one culture to another.
- “Conceptual Fluency” requires learning what a bike, a mother, teacher, a beach, a BBQ mean from one culture to another.
- Denotation and connotation: slim, heavy, chubby, plump, thin, solid, skinny, boney, obese, fat, overweight, big-boned.
- “She’s a bit quiet in class.”
# 5: We must expect challenges and we must nurture empathy

- Communication in a heterogeneous context is tiring and can not take place in the same way as in a homogeneous context.
- We need to be explicit about expectations and responsibilities.
Becoming an Exquisite Intercultural Communicator

You need only three things to be an absolutely exquisite communicator.

1. know the **outcome** that you want  
2. have **flexibility** in your behaviour (generate lots and lots of different behaviours to find the response that you want)  
3. have **sensory awareness** to notice when you get the responses that you want and when you don’t

Adapted from “Frogs Into Princes” (1979) by Richard Bandler and John Grinder
Recommendations

Six questions to ask ourselves:

• Is it culture?
• Is it discourse?
• Is it language?
• Is it personality?
• Is it the situation?
• Is it me?
Recommendations (cont.)

Clarify What’s Going On
- Say, “I feel ______.”
- Ask “How can we clarify what happened here?”

Use rollovers and brief therapy principles

Rollover: “What does x mean to you?”

Brief Therapy: (1) focus on the specific problem
(2) provide direct intervention
Summary

• Huge differences exist in language skills, cultural experiences and discourse expectations.

• We need to determine and exemplify best practices.

• Higher-level language programs need to be at the forefront of Canada’s intercultural support systems!
Thank you!

• To Citizenship and Immigration Canada for the conference
• To Jangles Production’s Mark Jacot and team for the excellent arrangements
• To all the service providers who allowed us to juggle work to be here
• To all of us for our dedication to higher-level language training
Suggested References

(all to be taken with a grain of salt)

1. Centre for Non Verbal Studies - dictionary and research: http://members.aol.com/nonverbal2/center.htm
2. Google “Intercultural Communication”
3. Hall, Edward T. (any of his books or google his name)
6. The Journal of Intercultural Communication
7. UBC’s/Queens Certificate in Intercultural Studies (post-university degree) [http://cic.cstudies.ubc.ca/cis/index.html](http://cic.cstudies.ubc.ca/cis/index.html) - focus on internationalized education and projects
8. Various Certificates in Intercultural Relations (Humber, Ontario Learn) – more power/race relations oriented
The Space in Between

“Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue, a wonderful living side by side can grow, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole against the sky.”

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)
Questions?
Comments?
Suggestions?
Complaints?